



A PROPOSAL FOR THE VISIONS AND MISSIONS FOR SAVVY CONTEMPORARY

By Renan Laru-an

Loob is a Tagalog term whose latitude of meanings covers loose translations, such as “inside”, “interior state”, “inner being”, “heart”, and “will” (Ileto/Hau/Guillermo). Its depth as a Filipino concept is prosaic and mundane that initial attempts in decoding it only approximates loob being a religious and mystical idiom that has culturally and historically defined the foundation of a Philippine ethical system. In a western construction of subjectivity, loob invites nontranslation (Guillermo) and permanent translation (Iveković). Its degrees of translatability and translations offer qualities that abstract, cultivate, extract, and graft existing and new values and worlds. For example, loob always appears as a compound word to describe virtues (*kagandahang-loob*, *lakas-ng-loob*), while it attracts various etymologies (e.g. *kabubut-on* and *kasing-kasing* in Hiligaynon) among other Filipinos whose language does not contain the word “loob”. This multifariousness alone recognizes that loob can conceive, create, and nourish other worlds in words. It is free, and it dances with tongues and bodies, and it cannot be defined by what-is-not-loob: Loob is both direction and reorientation. And within this orbit it might be more inspiring to think about artistic direction to be a freestyle of multiple loobs, the dynamics of dances without genealogy. Let me begin here in order to imagine my loob of artistic leadership and how it contours the dimensions of loob that is always artistically visionary.

In 1997, the Cultural Center of the Philippines organized a conference on the sustainable development of art organizations. Held in the National Art Center at the foot of Mt. Makiling, a site where ancient, millenarian, and state myths converge, the artist and educator Brenda Fajardo delivered a short lecture, less than ten minutes, about the role of artists in sustaining organizations. She opened her speech with an ambiguously honest response to the subject, that the artist’s position is “a biographical thing.” In contrast to technical management, she turned to her “biography” and used

*After Deleuze and Guattari’s n-1 as in “and from which the one is always subtracted” in their discussion of the concept of the rhizome. Throughout the text, I maintain loob without a diacritic (loób).

1 In the interest of brevity and in lieu of proper citation, the text is indebted to the scholarship of Rada Iveković, Ramon Guillermo, Reynaldo Ileto, and Caroline Hau. It also carries the more-than-exhibitionary curatorial intelligence, practice, and passage of Brenda Fajardo, Maise Van Vactor and Mamitua Saber in Marawi, and Francisco Demetrio.

it in outlining the relationship between sustainability and artistic tasks. She “reviewed” her five-decade experience of cultural work, in which she had established and initiated organizations and programs in collaboration with different communities including public and private institutions.

For Brenda, sustenance is tied to the nature of a mission. She mentioned some general characteristics of a politician and a businessman that contribute to the success of a cultural worker, then emphasized that what remains to be “the most important thing is the motivation.” She was quick to decenter the artist in this claim – “Many artists are problematic.”– that shifts the foundation of any mission in the good intentions of artist-initiator, Brenda’s hyphenation that she qualifies to be always more-than.² She believes that “pure and good intentions” make any project possible because resources will come to them. Brenda’s understanding of mission as force connects the materiality of loob in the context of sustainability. In the lecture, she proceeded to advise that failed and unrealized projects should not “*ikasama ng loob*” (disappoint or frustrate loob) because failure proffers an opportunity to reflect on the quality of intentions and the moral relevance of their timing. Brenda, who authored the texts *Aesthetics of Poverty* (1982) and *Decolonization through People’s Art* (1985), was hinting at the transformation of loob, that its desire must also be “qualitative,” which tells us that it is not enough that one wants to create something. One must have a sustainable motivation.

The deliciousness of Brenda’s deliberation of artistic roles in organizational work points to the retraining of loob. Such exercise is not upskilling, retooling, or professionalization; it might be a practice closer to Deleuze and Guattari’s process of “subtraction that multiplies and adds on instead of taking away.” In proposing a program of visions and missions for SAVVY, can I put forward loob-1 to be a system of structures, procedures, and restraints of an art institution? And instead of accumulating content and other capital, how can SAVVY’s loob-1 recruit other loobs across epistemological fractures, affective formations, and debt loads?

One adventure that I can imagine is the labor of RESEARCH. We all experience how deeply implicated we are in the limits of our “traditional” and “universal” analogical structures. The uneven access to opportunities made more difficult by personal circumstances weaken our loob and at times animates

2 She used the acronym ATOR for artists, teachers, organizers, and researchers: “more-than ATOR”.

our loob to be fatalistic in finding replacements and alternatives. But what about softening the fatalism, attuning the *lakas ng loob* (strength of loob) to another cycle of return like Brenda’s review of her biography of tasks and actions? With re-search, we are acquainted to our previous decisions, explanations, references, and romances until we find the fissures of our own self-citation. Self-citation is an intellectual and emotional bunker that is built on preservation and protection, which at one point half-opens diversity of ideas but now runs the risk of conservatism in absence of cross-citation. Towards the end of her lecture, Brenda shared about the planning of a new institution. She paired two pictures of re-search that begins in the midst of achievement and resignation: “We are cooking again with less cooks,” she announces, “...while waiting for ideas to incarnate”. Re-search is revealed consequentially by the artist to be a spiritual and recreational practice that is essentially the patience of knowledge in the coming of forms and for the prospective *damay* (compassion) of another loob.

The social life of institutions like SAVVY supports loob’s tenacity. The reality however is that structural deficiencies and systemic violence can diminish the good and desirable qualities of loob. Any loob can be abusive and neoliberal. When loobs are paralyzed, disillusioned, and exhausted, how do we respect their time to heal and recover? In the interim, what other values can we bind with the convalescing loob or even a chronically-ill loob? I think this public responsibility promotes curatorial equity in relating to the lives of loob. It therefore commits us to celebrating and respecting their outbursts and insufficiencies. No more shame, guilt, and embarrassment. The curatorial gesture can belabor engagements that dilate a method: how can we embrace your loob/when was the last time an exhibition embraced us? At SAVVY, I wanted the PROMISE OF EMBRACE to envelop exhibitionary technology and output. How can SAVVY exhibitions lend radiance to the exhibitionary potential of *lingap* (compassionate care), where we work with and show artistic *lingap* and nourishment in their brilliance, poverty, and weakness?

Loob is powerful. A scholar once theorized loob in the conception of a revolution.³ That association with the “great tradition” can simply be located in a more urgent and passionate demand of living: the fact of respiration. I am astounded by Brenda’s final words in her speech. Describing the new institution’s mission, she converted

3 Reynaldo Clemeña Ileto. *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910*, Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979.

it into a question, “how do you teach [externalize] art creatively as if you’re breathing it naturally?” Brenda transplanted the loob of artistic volition in her artistic leader’s loob as the organ of creation and respiration.

This could be the direction of LOOB-1 that envisions GINAWA, a vernacular term pre-dating western ideas of liberation, that collocates yet restrains paradise, breath/inhalation/exhalation, freedom, and ease of pain/difficulty/sickness in one base word. This is my additional mission with SAVVY.