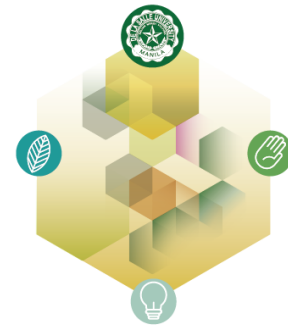


Fostering a Humane and Green Future: Pathways to Inclusive Societies and Sustainable Development



Crippling Filipino Philosophy of Arts and Aesthetics: Navigating the Intersections of Philosophy, Disability, and Feminism

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Abstract: How can Filipino philosophy of arts and aesthetics meaningfully account for both artworks and representations of the marginalized, especially people with disabilities, sick, women, and the Indigenous? Can traditional and dominant Western frameworks do justice in accounting for the lived aesthetic experiences of the Philippine artworld? This paper claims that in establishing a significant “Filipino philosophy of arts and aesthetics,” it must be both inclusive and at the same time responsive. However, since the prevailing theories on art and beauty are exclusivists, ableists, Westernized, and phallogocentric, such endeavor is lost. For this reason, this research merges (1) Siebers’s *disability aesthetics*, a theory that acknowledges different bodies and minds in creating and representing, and (2) Garland-Thomson’s *feminist disability theory*, which in turn recognizes the intersections of race, gender, class, etc. Through this, a more productive and meaningful Filipino philosophy of arts and aesthetics emerge.

Key Words: disability or crip studies; Filipino philosophy; aesthetics and philosophy of art; feminism; intersectionality

1. INTRODUCTION

At present, there is a dearth of research on Filipino philosophy of arts and aesthetics (henceforth FPAA). In establishing a meaningful FPAA, it must be inclusive and at same time responsive to the issues that confront the Philippine artworld. Unfortunately, since philosophizing in the Philippines is largely Westernized, such traditional frameworks are exclusivist, male-defined, and ableist. These theories disregard the overlapping issues and intersecting concerns of women, persons with disabilities¹,

Indigenous people, and sick. Additionally, these accounts fail to consider works and artists that exist outside the limited standards of beauty and art and ignore the aesthetic experiences of different bodies. With this, this research proposes a fusion of two frameworks: *disability aesthetics* and *feminist disability theory*. Said two theories can meaningfully account for FPAA because both are inclusive and consider the intersections of aesthetic experiences of the Othered.

To discuss this, this paper is divided into various parts. *Section 2.1: Philosophy of Arts and*

¹ According to World Health Organization’s (2011,4) *World Report on Disability*, “Disability is the umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions, referring to the negative aspects of the interaction between an individual (with a health condition) and that individual’s contextual factors (environmental and personal factors).” Additionally, WHO (2011, 4) also recognizes that among PWDs, the term “disability” is an “evolving concept” that it is

“not an attribute of the person” but “an interaction.” In the Philippines, according to the National Disability Prevalence Survey (NDPS) of 2016, there is a higher percentage of females than males who experienced severe disability (15% and 9%, respectively). Those who experienced moderate disability level were also higher for females at 49% than for males at 45%.



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Aesthetics elaborates the dominant positions that account for the nature of arts and beauty. From this, it discusses the inherent problems that these theories have if used in constructing FPAA. *Section 2.2 Tobin Siebers and Disability Studies on Art and Artists* discusses Tobin Siebers's "disability aesthetics," Siebers is an American professor and considered one of the pioneers of disability studies. Bridging the previous sections is *Section 2.3 Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's Feminist Disability Theory*. This part highlights Garland-Thomson's four interpenetrating elements of which "feminist disability theory" may address the overlooked intersections that both philosophy of art and aesthetics and disability theories have. Next is a demonstration of viability when FPAA is framed by both disability aesthetics and feminist disability theory. Last part is the summary and conclusion.

2. Crossing the Divide: Philosophy and Disability Studies

2.1 Philosophy of Arts and Aesthetics

According to Monroe Beardsley (1981, 4-6), *philosophical aesthetics* (to be differentiated from psychological aesthetics) or aesthetics is a "metacriticism" or the philosophy of criticism. Meaning, as branches of philosophy, philosophy of arts and aesthetics "consist[s] of those principles that are required for clarifying and confirming critical statements" (Beardsley 1981, 5). Beardsley (1981, 6) adds that philosophy of art and aesthetics are like ethics; the latter examines "moral statements" that are either true or false while the former analyzes "critical statements" about works of art (philosophy of arts) and beauty (aesthetics).² Aesthetics, on the other hand, deals with problems about the nature of taste, beauty, disgust, pleasure, etc. Here, it is noteworthy to add that since issues about "beauty" and "art" can be discussed separately, aesthetics also discusses problems about taste and beauty referring to objects

that are non-art, such as sunsets, beauty pageants, fashion, etc.³

Since its inception, aesthetic judgments and discussions on art all rest on how the body perceives the beautiful. "Taste" is the metaphor for aesthetic judgment because it relates to the bodily appetite not rational judgment. For instance, on whether taste is subjective or not, David Hume (1757), a British empiricist, first separates *sentiments* from *determination*. The former refers to all emotions in general: "all emotions are impressions, not ideas" (Hume 1975; Gracyk 2021). The sentiments associated with aesthetic judgments - beauty and ugliness - are reflective impressions; they are not "impressions of the senses." Instead, they are responses to sensory impressions (Hume 1757, 276). With this, Hume concludes that beauty is not the property of objects or the outside world; our value judgments when it comes to beauty or ugliness are anchored on sentiments that are subjective. Immanuel Kant (1790), on the other hand, acknowledges that taste is based on subjective feelings of the pleasurable. However, he argues that taste is universal since everybody can generate aesthetic judgments. Kant and Hume are just examples of how the dominant traditions in philosophy account for aesthetic experiences and works of art. But if we use this to frame our FPAA, what could possibly be their limitations?

There are three most glaring problems that these dominant theories have. First, the account of the genius and taste are established on the assumption that all sensing human bodies are one and the same – they are healthy bodies. Next, the artworld (museums, artists, patrons, etc.) recognizes the contribution of disabled artists and the value of disabled subject matters but Western philosophy of art and aesthetics are both silent about this. For instance, in the Dutch post-impressionist Vincent van Gogh's *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear* (1889) both the (1) maker, an artist who is struggling with mental illness, and (2) subject matter, a person with severed ear, are duly recognized in the artworld. However, in philosophy, specifically for Kant, the artist is a genius who is

² In 1917, the famous French artist Marcel Duchamp shocked the artworld with his *Fountain* (1917), an overturned urinal with the signature of "RMutt 1917), which is a pseudonym. Hereafter, Arthur Danto, the postmodern critic and philosopher, announced the "end of art" when artists do are not only creating art but also asking philosophical questions, such as "What is 'art'?"

³ Currently, "aesthetics" or "aesthetic" is being used synonymously with "Instagrammable" or "Instagram-worthy" to refer to anything visually appealing to the virtual world. This paper does not discuss whether said usage incorrect but to clarify, this research uses "aesthetics" or "aesthetic" as a branch of philosophy that may ask the questions, "Is 'Instagrammable' beautiful?" or "Can an 'Instagram-worthy' be beautiful even if it is immoral?"



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disinterested in her creation. Lastly, they fail to incorporate other forms of art that are non-European and not masculine.

With this, this paper puts forward two frameworks that can provide an inclusive and responsive FPAA: Siebers's disability aesthetics and Garland-Thomson's feminist disability theory.

2.2 Tobin Siebers and Disability Studies

Siebers is one of the pioneers of disability theory and disability aesthetics. The predominant Western theories are anchored on the principle that aesthetic judgments and experiences are perceived by the ideal body – a healthy body, physiologically, intellectually, and mentally. With this, Siebers (2005, 543) reacts:

But all bodies are not created equal when it comes to aesthetic response. Taste and disgust are volatile reactions that reveal the ease or disease with which one body might incorporate the other.

Siebers (2005, 543) recognizes this loophole committed by the traditional theories accounting for art and taste and so launches what he coins as “disability aesthetics.” Disability aesthetics separates itself from the predominant aesthetic theories because it “seeks to emphasize the presence of different bodies and minds in the tradition of aesthetic representation” and so it “refuses to recognize the representation of the healthy body and this body's definition of harmony, integrity, and beauty as the sole determination of the aesthetic” (Siebers 2005, 543).

It is noteworthy to add that in the discussion of the beautiful, Siebers (2005, 543) recognizes that disability has always been present. However, the aim of disability aesthetics is two-fold: “To establish disability as a critical framework that questions the presuppositions underlying definitions of aesthetic production and appreciation; and to establish disability as a significant value in itself, worthy of future development.” Siebers emphasizes that through disability aesthetics, the disabled mind and body are both important in the evolution of art and it should also be rightly recognized by a philosophical theory on beauty and art. Disability aesthetics also

embraces beauty that seems by traditional standards to be broken, and yet it is not less beautiful, but more so as a result. For example, the French visual artist Henri Matisse's *The Snail* (1953). *The Snail* (1953) is one of his final works when he was confined in bed due to abdominal cancer. Since his mobility was limited to his wheelchair, this condition allowed him to create murals of cut outs. In turn, *The Snail* (1953) carved Matisse in the hallmarks of art history.⁴

Now, Siebers disability aesthetics takes care of the intersections relating to disability politics and aesthetics. But how about the intersections of gender, race, sexuality, and class?

2.3 Rosemary Garland-Thomson and Feminist Disability Theory

Garland-Thomson is a feminist educator, bioethicist, and advocate of disability justice. Her (Garland-Thomson 2002, 6) feminist disability theory legitimizes the lived experiences and intersections of disabled people and a woman:

A feminist disability theory denaturalizes disability by unseating the dominant assumption that disability is something that is wrong with someone. By this I mean, of course, that it mobilizes feminism's highly developed and complex critique of gender, class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality as exclusionary and oppressive systems rather than as a natural and appropriate order of things.

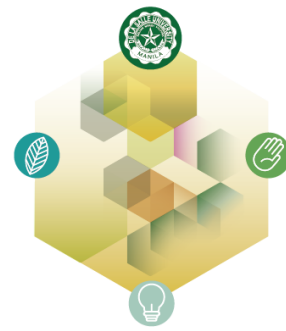
To elaborate, she provides four fundamental and interpenetrating domains of feminist theory of disability:

Representation. At present, there is a lack of proper and enough representation for the Filipina disabled body. In the Philippines, most of the time, *mestizas* are the ones casted as lead while the dark ones are the villains. If they cast a disabled and brown actress, the show's intention is to elicit pity like in ABS-CBN's *Kampanerang Kuba* (2005) or to the extent of ridiculing disability in the case of GMA 7's *Kara Mia* (2019).

⁴ Siebers (2005, 545-6) further cites Judith Scott, an American fiber sculptor who was born with Down Syndrome and deaf, “warehoused at age seven in the Ohio Asylum for the Education of Idiotic and Imbecile Youth and spent the next 35 years of her life as a ward of the

state.” Scott never had a formal training, has not visited any museum or read a single art book, has an IQ of 30. Siebers adds that disability aesthetics does not just recognize the disabled artist, but it makes the influence of disability obvious.

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Body. A feminist disability theory calls out debilitating standards of beauty. Recently, a scientific article entitled “Use of Straighteners and Other Hair Products and Incident Uterine Cancer” (2002) concludes that a vast majority of cancers – breast, uterine, endometrial, and ovarian – are attributed to the use of hair straightening products. The study also adds that, about 60% of the women who reported using straighteners in the previous year self-identified as being Black. This proves that such Eurocentric standards of beauty harm women, especially those of color.

Identity. Garland-Thomson (2002, 17) claims that “feminism increasingly recognizes that no woman is ever only a woman.” Steph Pallalos is a Filipina artist diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. As someone whose works center on her personal narrative as a disabled woman artist, she says that in her “attempt to reconstruct and fabricate a new identity,” she “tried to build on pieces of her [my] body” (Pallalos n.d.). She adds, “The years have changed my narrative, but some themes remain. My pieces are still self-portraits. They center on my embodied identity with missing pieces and fragile, incongruous parts” (Pallalos n.d.).

Activism. Garland-Thomson (2002, 17) suggests feminist disability activism like marches and protests. She even mentions disabled fashion modeling and the other is academic tolerance. The idea here is to normalize disabled bodies and experiences of pain and trauma. On the other hand, academic activism aims to integrate disability analysis in education: “The academy is no ivory tower but rather it is the grassroots of the educational enterprise” (Garland-Thomson 2002, 27).

3. Merging and Navigating

In constructing an inclusive and meaningful FPAA, we need frameworks that will help us account for the overlapping issues and intersecting elements that confront the Philippine artworld while recognizing the Othered. The predominant theories of aesthetics and philosophy of arts cannot sufficiently account for the Philippine experience because they are notoriously exclusivist, Eurocentric, male-defined, and ableist. To add, works of disabled and sick artists are disregarded. Some of the limitations of these theories are indigenous works, such as weaving, tattoo, and their symbolic representations. Siebers’s disability aesthetics accounts for works and

representations of disabled people and sick. For instance, Jef Carnay is a Filipino visual and performance artist who incorporates his struggles with diabetes and mental health concerns in most of his works. In his *Vicious Cycle* (2002), he delves into the struggle for control and focus on the middle of an anxiety attack.

Although Siebers can account for disabled bodies and representation, it cannot make sense of the intersections of gender, race, sexuality, and class. Since the dominant Western theories are patriarchal, the system refuses to recognize the genius could be a woman and/or who is ill. Now, it needs Garland-Thomson’s feminist disability theory. To illustrate further, this paper cites artists Pacita Abad and Pin Callalac. Abad is an Ivatan who exhibited her works in more than 70 different countries. While she was undergoing chemotherapy for lung cancer, she worked on Singapore’s Alkaff Bridge at Robertson Quay (Board 2018). On the other hand, Callalac has *myasthenia gravis*, an autoimmune disease characterized by muscle weakness and fatigue. To manage, Callalac takes medications. However, in her exhibit entitled, *Sick Drawings* (Vintana 2021), which are “experimental drawings of branches and plant tendrils melded with disembodied arms and hands, psychological imagery of immobilized or possessed limbs that seems to match the drawing process,” she timed herself off medication. This creative process then resulted in “involuntary drawing movements exerted by the body’s carefully controlled trauma” (Vintana 2021).

4. CONCLUSION

In establishing an inclusive and responsive FPAA, the two theories that help us achieve this goal are (1) Siebers’s disability aesthetics, which recognizes the importance of disability of artists and subject matter and (2) Garland-Thomson, on the other hand, provides important framework in considering the intersections of sex, gender, race, ethnicity, and class.

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