FROM SOCIAL MEDIA TO ART MAKING: SYNTHESIZING FILIPINO DIASPORA
DISCOURSE ON TYPHOON YOLANDA

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ABSTRACT

When Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda), the deadliest typhoon in recorded history, struck in 2013 it affected not only the people of the Philippines, but the Filipino diaspora around the world. Yet there was a greater need for understanding the disaster as not merely a singular physical event, but a process with deep cultural, socioeconomic, political, emotional, and spiritual implications. In addition to reviewing and examining the studies of social media conversations that occurred in the Philippines directly after the physical event, this research also involved conducting an arts-based research (ABR) experiment of stenciling and mural-making in order to understand the typhoon-as-process more fully. Depending on the context and audience, these areas of research can be useful for understanding a disaster, though they reveal vastly different experiences. Rapid, vast, and immediate, social media can be useful for situational awareness and first responders, though it can be difficult to sift through, noisy, and overlook affected peoples without access to digital goods and services. Arts-based research, while small, intimate, and capturing only a few perspectives at a time, has the capability for sense-making, community building, and self-healing. The creation of stencils and a mural by five Filipino American participants not only shifted the way these individual artists thought about the disaster, but also offers rich interpretations for the local Washington D.C. Filipino diaspora’s experiences and understanding
of Typhoon Haiyan. Recommendations for future ABR experiments are included, as well as reflections on the workshop as part of the process of disaster.
I am indebted to many people in the writing of this thesis. Many thanks to my work colleagues for first getting me started in the space of social media analysis. Miraming salamat to the faculty and staff of CCT, especially J.R. Osborn and Leticia Bode, for changing the way I think about methodology, data, and what it means to be an artist/academic. My friends and family in the Philippines, the United States, and the blue-orange skies: Tita Bing, Tito Sem, Patty, Marc, Anjo, Faith, Chinx, Gani, Ara, Kristine, Joanne, Janica, Francis, Marie, Luis, Cyd, Mark, Lesley, Josh, Stephanie. To my parents and brothers. To my wonderful, patient, and silly husband, my Colton. Finally, I dedicate this to my chance at mercy, who traveled with me through South America and painted with me in Georgetown, my Alea Mercedes.

Many thanks, miraming salamat,
Amanda
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Introduction

I can only offer belief, mirages that mean water,
long travels leading somewhere. I am reading
old letters, trying to make something
of what’s been said. It might be raining:
some pages are unreadable.

—Joel M. Toledo, “Attachments”

Part of the problem is that disaster is often considered an event rather than a process.

—Anthony Oliver-Smith, “Theorizing Disasters”

This work is borne from a desire to understand more fully.

In October 2013, I began studying mixed language social media usage in the Philippines. Part of this was due to my longstanding academic and personal interests in the Philippines, and part of this was due to my desire to gain expertise in social media analysis, as it was and continues to be a rapidly growing and interdisciplinary research area. For several weeks, I was broadly researching the topic, experimenting with various computational analytics for social media data, brushing up on my Filipino, and considering different social media platforms to study. Then Typhoon Haiyan struck.
When such a monumental event occurs in the beginning of your research, you need to zone in. Immediately, I switched gears to investigating social media usage during the typhoon, focusing on Twitter, since it was publicly available and easy to obtain. I worked with various computer scientists, engineers, social scientists, and analysts in order to explore and monitor Philippine Twittersphere discourse in the aftermath of the typhoon. What emotions, sentiments, and topics were people discussing during the typhoon, and in what languages? Did different languages convey different messages, and if so, how did it differ? We conducted this research in hopes that it would give decision makers additional situational awareness during the disaster management process.

Parallel to the time I was studying Twitter, I saw my own Facebook feed and inbox fill with messages from Filipino friends and family updating their social network with statuses of themselves and their neighbors. My relatives remained safe during the typhoon; I saw friends report that they had lost family. Filipino American friends posted dozens of links on where to donate and how to help. Non-Filipino friends posted articles about the destruction and the “resiliency of the Filipino.” I felt strangely connected yet disconnected from the typhoon, especially when reading and analyzing these disembodied social media posts. Something seemed to be missing from these online conversations. Later on, I realized that some of my feelings stemmed from being part of the Filipino diaspora: I was confronted with images of my family’s homeland (which I imagined in part as my ancestral homeland), yet was not directly impacted by the event. Furthermore, it seemed strange to me to be studying the communication of strangers in real-time without meeting them face-to-face, to read lists of names of the dead that could have
easily been my friends, to see photographs of places that looked so familiar yet I had never traveled to, to donate money and not know how it was being used.

As an anthropologist, I suspect that I feel a significant need to be physically in a place, speak to people face-to-face, and observe the activities and events that make up the local culture in order to feel that I understand the social phenomenon I am studying. In October 2014, approximately one year from the anniversary of the typhoon, I traveled to the Philippines and visited the city of Tacloban, one of the centers of the greatest loss of life. I listened to survivors’ stories of life post-Haiyan, visited mass graves and memorial sites, and experienced Tacloban and surrounding villages firsthand.

I left the Philippines feeling that words could not adequately capture what I had experienced, let alone the survivors’ lives. In Tacloban I had chosen photography as a method of collecting visual field notes and wrote ethnographic poetry to process my observations and feelings. As a playwright, I considered writing or collaboratively devising a play about the typhoon, but now did not feel like the appropriate time to begin such a project. Most of all, I wanted to somehow share this knowledge and these feelings about the typhoon with my local Filipino American community. We donated money and reposted articles on Facebook, but how much of the aftermath of the typhoon did we actually understand or care about? How could I help my local community, my nearby diaspora, understand more?

With guidance from my adviser, J.R. Osborn, I began exploring arts-based research (ABR) practices and reading Tim Ingold’s *Making*. At the same time, I was traveling in Latin America, studying Spanish, and learning more about other peoples that were also subject to Spanish colonialism. In Buenos Aires, Argentina and Valparaiso, Chile, I saw huge, colorful
murals and elaborate street art on walls and building facades. I was captivated and intrigued. I took a stenciling workshop with a renowned Argentinean street artist and reveled in being able to work with my hands. When I returned to Washington D.C. and related my experiences to J.R., he encouraged me to pursue stenciling as a technique and to consider an approach of making (in line with Ingold’s theories) in understanding the typhoon within the Filipino American community. Though my engineering side was wary of such a non-scientific approach, and my anthropological side concerned about the seeming lack of structure and experimental nature of the artwork, my writer and artist side was eager to work with color and texture and shape.

And so the purpose of this thesis is to synthesize all of these different ways of knowing and understanding the Typhoon Haiyan disaster: from the computational analysis of big data to the creation of a stenciled mural. In the first chapter, I review the event of Typhoon Haiyan and its relation to social media research (both data mining and ethnographic) and arts-based research. In the second chapter, I describe the methodology and the conversations of the ABR workshop, particularly the stencil-making. In the third chapter, I go more in depth into the mural-making process and the artists’ interpretations of their pieces. In the fourth chapter, I discuss how artists’ ideas changed before and after the workshop, as well as their reactions and recommendations for future workshops and arts-based research experiments. In the final chapter, I reflect on the different methodologies used to understand discourse within a typhoon, recommendations for further arts-based research, and the workshop and this type of research as a gift.

As Oliver-Smith notes, disaster is a process. Disasters can reach far and wide, affecting our lives long after the physical event itself has passed. In attempting to understand the disaster, I have also come to a greater understanding of the Filipino diaspora and the complex yet fragile
body that we are. I can never claim to understand the disaster fully—only hope to understand it more as time goes on, and to understand it from a multiplicity of angles, lenses, and voices. This is what I can offer; these are my long travels that I hope lead to somewhere.
The island of Leyte seemed quite normal on Thursday, November 7, 2013. There had been announcements on television and the radio of an upcoming typhoon (named Haiyan internationally and Yolanda locally) with warnings of storm surges, but in a country hit by roughly twenty typhoons each year, there did not seem to be so much cause for concern. Furthermore, what was a storm surge? Though the weather announcements used the term, hardly anyone was familiar with it or what it meant. The news continued broadcasting stories on what seemed to be the real trouble: the ongoing pork barrel scam involving members of the Philippine Congress, continued violence and unrest with Moro insurgencies in the southern island of Mindanao (Sidel, 2014). Twitter activity related to the upcoming storm was minimal and mainly from weather organizations disseminating warnings or from individuals discussing a previous storm (Typhoon Vinta) from October, as well as damage from recent earthquakes in Bohol, another Visayan island (Andrei et al. 2015). Chatter was apprehensive and prayerful, but not excessive or outpouring. Still, about 792,000 people had been evacuated from the Visayas region (National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, 2013), particularly from the islands

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“The Typhoon

Kaya anion ako sa L.A. airport ngunyan, pauli sa dae ko pa aram. Sa dae ko nahihiling sa mga baretta: ang samuyang harong, uma, si Pay, si May. I can’t see them, or the impending landfall in my chest. But I see you—you, gasping at this tragedy on TV, in your laptops and iphones as we wait to take off. Please, I beg you. Look closer. It is my father, my mother, and all of twenty fingers holding back this storm.

— Merlinda Bobis, “Sampulong Guramoy”

The island of Leyte seemed quite normal on Thursday, November 7, 2013. There had been announcements on television and the radio of an upcoming typhoon (named Haiyan internationally and Yolanda locally) with warnings of storm surges, but in a country hit by roughly twenty typhoons each year, there did not seem to be so much cause for concern. Furthermore, what was a storm surge? Though the weather announcements used the term, hardly anyone was familiar with it or what it meant. The news continued broadcasting stories on what seemed to be the real trouble: the ongoing pork barrel scam involving members of the Philippine Congress, continued violence and unrest with Moro insurgencies in the southern island of Mindanao (Sidel, 2014). Twitter activity related to the upcoming storm was minimal and mainly from weather organizations disseminating warnings or from individuals discussing a previous storm (Typhoon Vinta) from October, as well as damage from recent earthquakes in Bohol, another Visayan island (Andrei et al. 2015). Chatter was apprehensive and prayerful, but not excessive or outpouring. Still, about 792,000 people had been evacuated from the Visayas region (National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, 2013), particularly from the islands

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*“So now, I’m at the L.A. airport, going home to what I don’t know. To what I can’t see in the news: our house, our farm, my father, my mother.” (translated from Bikol by Merlinda Bobis, “Ten Fingers”)
of Leyte, Samar, and Cebu, but many people remained in their homes. Mothers put their children to bed. Teenagers texted their crushes goodnight. People fortunate enough to have multi-story houses retired for the night on the top floor of their houses, just in case water flooded the downstairs.

They woke to the winds first. Sustained winds, lasting around ten minutes at a time, rushed in at 250 kph, with landfall winds—the ones ripping through ports and houses—reaching 312 kph, the equivalent of a modern-high speed train (Daniell et al. 2013). Gusts—one-minute long winds—sped in at 379 kph, meaning that an object could fly more than six kilometers in one minute. All of this happened early in the morning, first at 4:40 AM local time as Haiyan touched Guiuan on Eastern Samar, then Tolosa, Leyte at 7 AM, then Daanbantayan, Cebu at 9:40 AM. Haiyan continued working its way across the Visayas to hit Iloilo, the Calamian Group of Islands, and Palawan, as it weakened and gradually moved into the West Philippine Sea shortly after 8 PM (National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, 2013). It was the evening of Friday, November 8, and Haiyan had finally left Philippine land, leaving it leveled and broken. It was the strongest and deadliest typhoon in the recorded history of the Philippines, in part due to the storm surges that reached up to two stories (six meters) – a fatal height (Lum and Margesson 2014).

These storm surges drowned people in the upstairs of their houses. Flying debris and blunt trauma from the intense winds added to the death toll (ibid). More than 16 million people (encompassing more than 3 million families) were affected, including official estimates of 6,300 individuals dead, 28,688 injured, and 1,062 missing (National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, 2013), although initial losses estimated over 13,000 dead (Daniell et al. 2013).
Months after, Filipinos remained skeptical of the official number of 6,300, believing it to be much higher (Barrameda 2014). Never before had so many died from any storm.

An estimate of two-thirds to 90 percent of the regional infrastructure was completely destroyed or heavily damaged (Lum and Margesson 2014), which included “national and provincial/local roads and bridges, seaports, airports, flood control as well as utilities like water supply systems, power supply, drainage system and telecommunications. School buildings, health facilities, government buildings and agricultural and irrigation facilities also incurred considerable damage and losses” (National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, 2013). The total damage to the region totaled more than Philippine ₱89 billion, or approximately US $1.8 billion, with estimated losses of over ₱42 billion (approximately $896 million) (ibid). Never before had so much been destroyed by any storm.

Nearly 70 countries, as well as hundreds of other international institutions, organizations, and private individuals contributed over 662 million USD to the United Nations (UN) appeal for funds and other projects outside of the appeal (Lum and Margesson 2014). In late October 2014, nearly a year after the typhoon, the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) released updates on its recovery plans (UNOCHA, 2014). Most of its 45 indicators of recovery were above a 50 percent threshold (their measure of performance), including camp coordination and management, protection, food security and agriculture, nutrition, and health. On the other hand, indicators such as shelter were below the threshold, namely due to a lack of quality construction materials and low funds. Even with the other indicators, there were still challenges in developing permanent resettlement sites, repairing and building adequate health facilities, and rehabilitating a work force of 3.9 million workers in “vulnerable forms of
Clearly disaster recovery takes a long amount of time—although what constitutes enough time is unclear and subjective.

**Social Media**

In 2010, the American Red Cross published a survey study where they discovered that upon tweeting or posting on Facebook, 74 percent of respondents expected emergency responders to help them in less than an hour from the original post (American Red Cross). The following year, when the massive 9.0-magnitude earthquake and tsunami struck Japan, computer science researchers found that while traditional media was unable to transmit information among the damaged cities, platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Google Maps, and Mixi were used to collect and share information among the victims (Utani et al. 2011; Sakaki et al. 2010). Since the early 2010s, and particularly with the high-profile and devastating disaster in Japan, researchers and policymakers have computationally mined social media—especially Twitter—to analyze how it has been used in a variety of emergency situations, both manmade and natural (Landwehr and Carley 2014). With respect to Typhoon Haiyan, mining social media produced a source of information about perceptions, attitudes, emotions, and sentiments of victims and observers during and immediately after the meteorological event.

From a big data and data mining perspective, Alexander (2014) has outlined seven ways in which social media can be used in a disaster from a data mining perspective: (1) as a listening function for the public’s opinions, behaviors, and moods; (2) a monitor for situation awareness; (3) an integration into current emergency planning systems; (4) a crowd-sourcing and collaborative platform for citizen responders; (5) a source of social cohesion and therapeutic
initiatives; (6) a furtherance of causes for donations and fundraising; and (7) an area of research for many disciplines. Indeed, the data mining studies of Typhoon Haiyan discussed later explicitly used social media for these reasons, such as referring to Twitter data as “social sensors,” analyzing the data with topical and emotional lexicons, and using the social media chatter for situational awareness. Many of these uses are most relevant in the immediate aftermath of the meteorological event, ranging from while the event is occurring to approximately a month afterwards. Furthermore, various frameworks and recommendations have been proposed for social media crisis communication management and have highlighted the various challenges in implanting these management systems, including data collection, workflow management, narrative construction, data processing for relevance, geolocation, text analysis, visualization, and broadcasting (Landwehr and Carley 2014, Lindsey 2011, Crowe 2012, Liu et al. 2014, Alexander 2014, Resnyansky 2014). For instance, in the Twitter studies of Typhoon Haiyan, the researchers collected vast amounts of tweets, yet found that only a small percentage was either relevant to the situation, or even able to be analyzed. They also mention issues of geolocating the tweets, either to the affected areas or even within the Philippines itself.

Furthermore, large-scale computational analysis of social media during a disaster has a host of challenges, including rumor propagation, false or misleading information dissemination, credibility of sources, potential for alarmist actions, sifting through the enormous volume of data for relevant posts, physical weaknesses of infrastructure, and a digital divide between victims with access to social media technology and victims without (Alexander 2014, 724-6; Resnyansky 2014, 61-2; Madianou et al. 2015). As Resnyansky notes, social media has an “innovative and ambiguous status as an emergency communication channel” (2014, 61). As such, researchers and
policymakers should take into account the risks of social media when factoring them into disaster communication systems and recovery management. These social sensors are only partially complete, and while they offer a rapid way of gaining data, they are sampling from a segment of the population that has access to digital goods and services, as well as a fair amount of digital literacy. During the typhoon, the fact that the event so heavily damaged and decimated the communications infrastructure suggests that even those with digital capabilities were silenced.

Several studies—both in data mining and in ethnographic research—emerged on the use of social media during Typhoon Haiyan. Roughly one week after the typhoon’s landfall, the Center for Disaster Management and Risk Reduction Technology (CEDIM) published a status report on the damage and its impact. They included information computationally collected from Twitter data, or as they called it, “social sensors” (Daniell et al. 2013). Between November 4 and 13, they localized 36,751 tweets of which 5,159 were in the Philippines. They found that most of these tweets were private or not relevant; of the relevant tweets, they consisted of messages about damage, and calls or prayers for help or donations for the victims, or evacuation. Of the entire sample of tweets, 10% were “most interesting for rapid hazard estimation.” CEDIM concluded that messages could help with fast and eye-witness information, but also surmised that the low number of tweets suggested that lines of communication in the affected area were severely affected.

Andrei et al. (2015) analyzed a much larger dataset of 1,249,927 tweets geolocated to the Philippines between the dates of November 3 and 18. We examined differences in emotion and topic based on language, finding that topics tended to differ depending on whether the tweet was in Filipino, English, mixed Filipino and English, or Other. English comprised 80% of the sample
and tended to serve as a “broadcast language” containing topics of caution, donation, facts, well wishes, prayers, and emotion, while Filipino (14.5% of the sample) and mixed languages (4.7% of the sample) were more visceral, containing topics of emotion, patriotism, politics, and prayer. We also used a set of emotion and topical lexicons to examine trends within the English language tweets relating to topics such as religion and to linguistic markers such as swears. We found that the use of religion-related words increased sharply prior to the typhoon and decreased during the following days (likely because the volume of total tweets increased sharply) and suggested that these tweets served as a coping mechanism prior to the disaster; post-disaster, they served as a call for more tangible action, such as donations. Swears also demonstrated various strong emotions towards the typhoon. Prior landfall, swears expressed anxious anticipation, fear, and defiance; post-landfall, swears shifted towards anger, disbelief, shock, and remorse. However, many of these tweets originated from the Manila area and were not concentrated in the affected areas, suggesting that these emotional and topical shifts are reactions of Filipino observers of the typhoon, not actual victims.

While these previous studies focused on data mining to determine topics and sentiments during the typhoon, other studies focused on interviewing and ethnography to determine what social media sources were used and how affected peoples used them. Takahasi and Tandoc (2014) conducted fieldwork in Tacloban, interviewing government officials, residents, and local reporters. They found that more individuals used Facebook as opposed to Twitter or Tumblr, accessing it on their mobile phones and evolving it to suit their needs, whether that meant posting updates for their relatives, weather advisories, or monitoring their networks for potential news stories. They included several recommendations, including that governments of affected
areas should develop and coordinate official social media channels, news organizations should establish guidelines for reporting disasters, and that citizens should be educated about social media and alternative communication channels during disasters.

Madianou et al. (2015) conducted a longer ethnographic study lasting ten months in Tacloban and Cebu, interviewing over one hundred individuals affected by the typhoon, as well as nearly forty experts from various government, humanitarian, civil society, telecommunications, and digital platform groups. Their findings problematize the usefulness of social media in disasters, especially in stimulating conversation and altering power dynamics to help those most in need. They report, “much of our participants’ mediated communication resembles an ‘echo chamber’ and not a dialogue. Participants are likely to share their views with their peers but not with representatives from aid or government agencies” (ibid, 2). They also found that mobile phones and Facebook in particular were used by those affected, especially as coping mechanisms and grief rituals. Madianou et al. also documented several areas of learning, such as cultivating a culture of listening beyond feedback mechanisms of social media, investing in digital literacy in order to minimize the distorting effects of technology and prevent second-order disasters, and “slow research in emergency contexts,” i.e., studying a disaster’s aftermath over a long period of time and with empathy in addition to analysis.

Madianou (2015) explores several of these themes more in-depth, particularly digital inequality and second-order disasters. She argues for more ethnography and qualitative research alongside quantitative studies of disasters, and notes the problems of data mining in social media analysis:
The overwhelming popularity of big data approaches in disaster and humanitarian response needs to be weighed against the awareness of the ontological and epistemological limitations of social analytics (Crawford & Finn, 2014), such as the fact that they only represent active users and not necessarily those who are most affected and whose digital footprint may be too small to be even noticed. Basing recovery efforts on big data risks misdirecting resources from those most in need to those who are able to generate most “noise.” (2015, 2)

Madianou found that over one-third of their interviewees have no internet access, while about twenty percent have irregular access to the internet, using it primarily for Facebook. Additionally, most of these individuals were from traditionally marginalized groups: very low- or low-income households and women, resulting in a class and gender divide in digital usage. They found that marginalized individuals were less likely to take advantage of social media, and in actuality, the internet worsened social inequalities by allowing more access and resources for the already better off (who had means to access these technologies) while neglecting those who were not part of the digital echo chamber. These conditions create a second-order disaster, i.e., aftermath of the first disaster that is perpetuated by human activities.

The data mining studies and the ethnographic studies offer perspectives of communication during the typhoon that vary in level of scale, audience, and calls for action. Data mining focuses on a macro-level view based on a large volume of messages, obtaining a big picture; it is also a faster analysis of data, useful in early recovery stages for situational awareness and more timely and useful for decision makers. Ethnographic studies provide micro-level data and reveal complexities that may not have been detected in large patterns of digital data. They are also more useful for professionals and advocates working directly in the affected area. When looking at a disaster, we should be mindful of both of these streams of research, especially when it comes to the data sources. For instance, while the Twitter studies rapidly
provide information about the sentiment of the population, the ethnographic studies reveal that Facebook was used far more than Twitter during the typhoon. Data mining of social media provides a partial view of emotion and sentiment during a disaster, but does so in a fast way for early responders; ethnographic research focuses on the individuals directly affected and provides more context around the disaster as a process, not merely an event. Disaster scholars advocate this combination of methods, calling for researchers “to pair multisite ethnography with quantitative methods capable of accessing greater levels of aggregation” (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman, 2002).

Having engaged with both of these methodologies, I must admit that I still felt a disconnect—that despite studying the typhoon in various ways, some essential part of us (the affected, including those in the diaspora) was left uncovered and hidden. For when Typhoon Haiyan struck the Philippines, it hit not only the people living in the Visayas, but their relatives, friends, and networks around the world. Filipinos and their families in various countries were deeply moved by the destruction and trauma of the typhoon. How can we uncover this depth? How can we understand the complex emotions of these observers, linked by the Philippines?

**Arts-Based Research**

Arts-based research (ABR) offers a different view and context to traditional social science research and large-scale computational analysis of social media. As the effects of the catastrophe swell far beyond physical boundaries into a diasporic network stretched across space and time, an ABR event (such as an art session or workshop) operates on a much smaller, intimate scale and can extend our understanding of disaster as a process, as well as help those
affected make sense of the disaster through symbolism and pattern-making with physical materials. As Hoffman (2002, 44-5) highlights:

Symbols are, in the first place, highly pertinent to a people’s reaction to disaster. Symbols influence shared behavior. Equally important, symbols can be utilized and manipulated by different factions involved in a disaster and thus become political. […] As for individuals facing or experiencing catastrophe, they engage the symbols evoking their predicament in an almost visceral manner.

Therefore, an ABR event can be direct and deliberate way of making symbols, using the spontaneous, subconscious, and material act of art-making to frame and make sense of a community’s disaster—with the additional feature of occurring within a research context. Additionally, the ABR event becomes a link in the chain of other disaster-related events, part of the process in the wake of the actual physical event and destruction. As we see in later chapters, in the stenciling and mural-making workshop, individuals engaged with the art materials and techniques in a visceral way, creating symbols that reflected their deeper selves; the mural itself became a physical example of shared behavior as influenced by individual’s choices of symbols (e.g., stencils of shells, clouds, humans). Both the stencils and mural come to serve as a metaphor for the diasporic body of Filipino Americans and their experience of Typhoon Haiyan.

In the first comprehensive synthesis of ABR practices, Patricia Leavey notes ABR arose in the 1970s, partially from art therapy practices and qualitative practices in the social sciences (2009, 9). Additionally, much ABR has elements of social activism and justice, such as creating critical awareness, raising consciousness, exploring identity, and voicing subjugating perspectives (ibid, 13), concepts that often emerge in a disaster management context. Often a key quality of ABR is the role of researcher and his or her intention behind choosing arts practices
for research: the researcher may feel that something is missing, want to evoke more emotion, promote reflection, or transform current thought (ibid, 255). In addition to all of these reasons, I also felt a need for healing from the typhoon. Many of these intentions are realized in the creating, composing, writing, and making of art. Furthermore, art can be used as the data, the method, and the tool for analysis. Stenciling was a method for creating one type of data, as well as a facilitator for conversation. Data was created when these stencils were used in the mural. The mural-making was a method of collaboration and a tool for analyzing and outpouring one’s emotions and memories. When viewing the mural as the “final product,” we see it is rich in meaning and interpretation, and that the act of making is crucial in ABR.

We often think of making as a project, or think of making in terms of finished artifacts, end goals, or bounded products, instead of as a process—especially a process for growth where we grow into and with knowledge (Ingold 2013, 20-21). Making is also a way to understand and to learn, rather than to simply acquire “approved knowledge of society” (ibid, 12). An individual could then learn about a subject or an event by making—physically working with materials in a tactile and sensory way. Ingold relates an example of two types of learning, one transformational and one documentary: playing cello and honing craft with a master cellist, and studying cellists and cello-playing (ibid, 3). In the first type of learning, a student works with the kinesthetic materials of cello-playing, such as tuning strings, touching wood, wiping rosin, and dealing with the physical factors of weight, mass, temperature, humidity. Through this process, the student is transformed, becoming a more skilled musician. In the second type of learning, a student observes (and perhaps even participates) with cellists, interacting with their culture, recording
their impressions, and watching their activities. Through this process, the student had acquired a body of information about cellists and how they interact with their instruments.

Many of the local events around the typhoon offered the second type of learning: one that imparted information about the disaster to the audience. ABR and the act of making offer a context for the first type of learning: a transformational one that allows its practitioners to grow as human beings, learning about a subject and allowing it to change them as human beings. For making does not mean merely interacting with materials, but corresponding with them: “[i]n the act of making the artisan couples his own movements and gestures – indeed his very life – with the becoming of his materials, joining with and following the forces and flows that bring his work to fruition” (ibid, 31). By making, an individual reflects on what is being made and why. The individual reacts to the movement of paint transferring to canvas and adjusts herself in accordance to the next movement of paint. By bending and flowing with the substance, the individual reframes her question and purpose in each gesture and movement of human body and material substance. In this way, the artist and the paint communicate and cooperate with each other, thereby being able to “enter the grain of the world’s becoming and bend it to an evolving purpose” (ibid, 25). In this research, making stencils and a mural served as a transformational process of growth by which workshop participants could enter a microcosm of the grain of the world’s becoming (the typhoon) and bend it to the same evolving purpose that the donors, fundraisers, and diasporic Filipinos want: relief, healing, and stability for friends, family, and kababayan\(^b\) in the Philippines.

\(^b\) Fellow countryman
In short, while social media and ethnographic studies can provide us with important information about a disaster, there is also space for a transformational process, one that both creates and heals. This process is needed not only for those directly impacted, but for the others around the world who may feel the reverberations of community pain. When we address this need, we can recover more fully from the storm.
The Workshop

Hurry. Hurry you there
with a camera.
Take a picture of me please
before I completely disappear.

-- Ramon C. Sunico, “Diptych, Not a Selfie”

One year after Typhoon Haiyan struck the Philippines, there was graffiti in the city of Tacloban on the island of Leyte.

11.08.13 NEVER FORGOTTEN emblazoned on a metal store shutter (Figure 1).

SAVE US, in black, faded yet stark against the teal wall of a bridge.

US TROOPS OUT NOW JUNK EDCA – which I was told is a reference to the recent murder of a Filipina transwoman by a U.S. Marine, and not related to the typhoon. To its left is a black and gray graffiti bomb and the scrawl “We’re UP ALL Night To Get Lucky”, a lyrical snippet from the Pharrell and Daft Punk pop song.

In the gutted first level of an anonymous building, amidst the sharp debris and stinking dirt piles, more street art: another bomb, a large white painting of what looks to be a chicken, a heavy-lidded face with thick lips and a cap. Accompanying graffiti includes messages about marijuana: “#Legalizeit”, “Huff!!”, “#420”; and the possibly unrelated and more ominous, “THE FOUR HORSEMEN ARE COMIN’”.

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c For additional images, see Appendix A: Visual Diary
d At the time I visited in late October, U.S. Marine Scott Pemberton was accused of killing transwoman Jennifer Laude (Death of Jennifer Laude, 2015).
e Daft Punk – Get Lucky (Full Video): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h5EofwRzit0
The graffiti from Tacloban was elemental, urgent, survivalist—signs of life from survivors, their pleas to higher powers, their promises to remember, their denunciations of injustice and oppression—sacraments written in public in order to challenge and disrupt. I photographed these public expressions as part of my visual field notes of Typhoon Haiyan when I visited Tacloban in October 2014 (see Appendix B: Visual Diaries). I thought of them again when I was in Buenos Aires, Argentina, learning about street art and taking a stenciling workshop with a renowned Argentinean stenciling street artist. My first stencil was a hybrid of two other stencil images—the head of a panda on the body of a man (who I promptly named, “Pandaman”). I wondered why this form of street expression hadn’t found its way to the
Philippines and if the street expression I had seen in Tacloban would grow into more intricate artworks. And besides, what kind of connection exists between spray painting a blue Pandaman on a Porteño brick wall and seeing the black aerosol plea SAVE US on a Tacloban bridge?

I was captivated by the street art I saw in Latin America: its range from massive to miniature, the seemingly random with the irreverently political, the cryptically personal juxtaposed against the city-commissioned. In all of it, street art seemed to fiercely declare, Here I am! – while any person could respond in kind, painting next to or over another person’s piece, starting a dialogue that was (somewhat) anonymous, public, and often beautiful to view in its tangled layers of pigment and texture. “Street art,” notes Irvine (2012, 242), “is a response to this concentrated infrastructure with its unequal distribution of resources, property and visibility. Street art reflects globalization while resisting being absorbed into its convenient categories.” As Irvine argues, street art stems precisely from the convergence of the digital and material in a globalized urban space, an inherent clash between government authority and an artist’s role and work (2012). Furthermore, street work is “a mark of presence […] to exist is to be seen” (ibid, 252). Seeing the beginnings of street expression and art on the old and new walls of Tacloban declares life, presence, existence, and could indicate the beginnings of the city as a new urban space, international and digital in scope in the post-disaster wake.\footnote{Irvine’s excellent chapter on street art and visual culture discuss more in-depth the rich history and connotations of street work and expression, especially their growing presence on and tension between public city walls, private art galleries, and social media.}

In part because of this stenciling workshop and experience in Argentina, and the rich connotations of street expression (everything from graffiti to stencils to murals), I decided to develop a street art-inspired ABR experiment with local Filipino Americans about the typhoon.
The artist I worked with had told me that young Argentineans and Chileans learned stenciling when traveling to Europe and the United States, emphasizing that stenciling was meant to be portable, or as Irvine relates, “fundamentally nomadic” (ibid, 242). I decided that I would bring this technique to my local community. I wanted to see if the act of creating stencils and applying them to a collaborative mural could reveal deeper thoughts, emotions, and perceptions of the typhoon among a small group of Filipino Americans, thereby connecting the Filipino diaspora through means of actively creating, making, and remixing. It turns out that there could be a connection between a hybrid animal-man in Buenos Aires, a plea to higher powers in Tacloban, and a collaborative mural in Washington D.C.—the nomadic art technique and desire to understand, as rendered possible through diaspora.

When I returned to the United States, the first part of setting up the ABR workshop was to investigate the space and materials available. In Buenos Aires, I worked in an art studio’s open air courtyard where the spray painted vestiges of past artists blended into the brick—but no such luck in the historic campus of Georgetown. Where would I find a wall? What would be our canvas? Unsurprisingly, I couldn’t find a wall (outside or inside) of campus where we could freely spray paint on our stencils. I wanted something in the spirit of street art—urgent, scrappy, bricolaged, and adaptable to the environment. I decided we could spread a drop cloth on the ground for our canvas. For the discussion and stenciling portions of the workshop, finding a location was easy. Housed in the Car Barn building, the Communication, Culture, and Technology (CCT) studio was open and had spacious tables where we could use X-acto knives freely. It also served as a storage space for the materials. Additionally, the Car Barn had an outdoor private patio, where we could work with the paint in fresh air.
In keeping with how most amateur street artists acquire their art supplies, I shopped at Home Depot and Office Depot to obtain the canvas, drop cloths, spray paint, Sharpies, and whiteout markers. The plastic sheets for the stencils were purchased online through Blick Materials. Other materials such as sheets of blank paper, a large sticky pad for post-workshop activities, and cardboard for cutting on and testing paint I already had from past projects. In order to find images, I searched Google Images with general search terms related to the environment, the Philippines, and art, such as stencil, Philippines, Filipinos, Pinoy, typhoon, tree, cloud, bird, fish, sun. I found a total of 34 discrete image files which I printed in various sizes for the workshop participants to use either for their actual stencil or as inspiration for a remixed or hand-drawn stencil.

In parallel with scoping spaces and acquiring art supplies, I created survey instruments and prepared other paperwork for the participants. Each participant received a packet of materials containing a Visual Agenda (see Appendix A: Workshop Materials), a pre-workshop survey, a post-workshop survey, and consent/waiver forms. The Visual Agenda in particular was created to set the tone of the workshop; it “implies that the day might be interesting; it sends a signal to the group that the meeting matters” (Gray, et al., 2010). Having a zine-like paper agenda atop other forms and surveys frames the workshop for participants: while we are discussing significant topics and responding to surveys, our purpose is to make.

Recruiting participants happened in the midst of all of this logistic planning. Many months in advance I had already mentioned the workshop to some Filipino American friends and colleagues and had some individuals who were interested. When the consent forms and call for participation was finalized, I emailed the call to local Filipino American college groups and
community leaders and asked them to forward the information. I heard back from a few potential participants, but as the workshop was taking place over the summer, many college associations did not respond. Several participants also dropped out at the last minute, leaving four Filipino Americans who had agreed to participate in the workshop.

That hot Saturday in July, I arrived early at the CCT studio to set up the materials and lay out breakfast. I had my audio recorder, camera, a first aid kit, all of the art supplies, and the paperwork. I was happily nervous and hopeful to see how the day would play out. We had Cyd, a teacher and the creator of A Letter for You, a project collecting anonymous handwritten letters of encouragement for survivors of all sorts of trauma; Marie, an activist and advocate for social justice issues; Lucy, an engineering student; and Luis, a hospitality consultant. We ranged in age from mid-20s to early 50s, were educated (we all had bachelors degrees), and all of us had informal experience with art, such as writing poetry or doing amateur photography. Three of us were part of the 1.5 generation, born in the Philippines and immigrated to the United States as children, while the other two of us were second generation. All but one of us had some involvement with the typhoon, whether we donated money, attended informational sessions (such as seminars or vigils), or visited the disaster site. We represent a small segment of the Filipino American diaspora local to Washington D.C., and though we do not and cannot represent a majority of the diaspora, we offer multiple interpretations, perspectives, and experiences of the typhoon—ones that we have critically thought about with respect to our and others’ lived experiences.

The first activity we completed was a pre-workshop survey. I read aloud a word related to the day’s activities, and the participants wrote down the first three words or phrases that came to
mind. After completing the surveys, we began the focus group portion of the workshop, where the five of us discussed our experiences with the Filipino and Filipino American communities after the typhoon. From the focus group, we segued into a brief stenciling lesson and demonstration, where I showed the participants how to cut into the acetate sheets with their X-acto knives. I passed out the different stenciling images, although to my pleasant surprise, only one participant chose to cut a printed image. I had assumed that folks would want something simple and easy to work with for a new art form, something with bold lines and sharp angles, making it easy to cut—yet here they were challenging themselves by drawing new figures and dexterously slicing small round shapes from the thin acetate.

Luis chose an image of clouds from the stencil library. Marie had a digital copy of a seashell stencil which she drew on a piece of paper, and Lucy and Cyd drew their own designs based on concepts they wanted to convey. In keeping with my Buenos Aires stencil of Pandaman, the hybrid animal-man, I decided to cut up two separate printed images to make a hybrid picture of a tree trunk and a pair of dice, which I dubbed “Dice Tree.”

While we made our stencils—drawing with pencils on white paper, trimming the plastic sheets with X-acto knives, dabbing at mistakes with scotch tape and white-out—we talked. For the next hour or so, we created templates with our hands and discussed not only our experiences with the typhoon, but our connections to the Philippines, our current projects and work, our hopes for how to help the Filipino community here and abroad. Many different topics and themes emerged from the group discussion—I have captured several of the topics that we discussed explicitly, as well as included observed behaviors and actions in the group.
Emotion, Sensation, and Fact

Despite the fact that there was more than a year and a half between the typhoon destruction and when the workshop was held, individuals became emotional when discussing the typhoon and frequently recalled memories of their emotional and passionate responses to the typhoon. The emotion induced by the typhoon was so powerful that it often took precedence over “the facts.” Indeed, the emotional reaction from participants called into question what was fact, reality, or sensationalism. For instance, in the beginning of the workshop, we had this exchange:

LUCY: Can we go back to the basics? As far as what happened, what, how many people died, where, what was the region, what caused it? Like, what the response, the disaster response was like… can we go over that?
AMANDA: Do any of you guys want to address that? Because I can also.
CYD: I mean I—I’m so removed from the factual parts of the what, when, how, and why—what I do remember very distinctly was the helplessness when it was all happening, of being over here having so much privilege and then hearing months down the line that people—I distinctly remember that people—the airport—there were certain places holding what people had donated because someone couldn’t pay the taxes to release these goods given from the world to the Philippines, and that rice was rotting, and food was rotting, and I was livid. I just couldn’t wrap my head around, that.

In this exchange, facts took on different semantics—Lucy was looking for statistical and geographical facts, as well as an official response to the typhoon. On the other hand, Cyd, who had conducted relief work in the disaster zones, had a different conception of facts. It was a fact that there was human suffering, that there was economic hardship, and that there was a lack of distribution and waste of aid. These facts ignited emotions within her that felt more real and high priority than the “what, when, how, and why.” What Cyd knew was this: at the height of their vulnerability, people were not being helped. These reactions are in keeping with the observation that “[a] single disaster can fragment into different and conflicting sets of circumstances and
interpretations according to the experience and identity of those affected” (Oliver-Smith 2002, 25). In Lucy’s experience and identity as a diasporic Filipino American, she had more mental and emotional distance from the typhoon, in part because she was temporarily living in Mongolia at the time of the typhoon. Without many other Filipino Americans around, less exposure to English-language traditional media, and only Internet and social media feeds as sources of information, she did not obtain as many facts (or experience as many emotions) about the typhoon. On the other hand, Cyd was awash in a sea of information, not only from the United States media, but also from her friends and family in the United States, the Philippines, and online. Traveling to the disaster site six months after the typhoon, Cyd further interpreted the disaster in the emotional and political behaviors of the people around her—the direct survivors of Haiyan. The difference in location, community, and information sources rendered their interpretations of the typhoon vastly diverse, a common occurrence when people try to make sense of life post-disaster (ibid, 38).

Later on in the focus group, Luis offered another different and conflicting interpretation in a discussion of “the facts”:

I think that the Filipino community especially here, loves to hear sensationalistic news from the Philippines, and they, we, we put such a spin on all these stories, either such a good spin or a bad spin, and when we talk about and when we talk about the distribution system and how all of those things happened in the aftermath of the storm, we, we want to think that if we give food, it’s gonna go to somebody’s mouth like tomorrow, right? But that’s not the case. There’s so much infrastructure that you have to go through. […] You cannot have lawlessness, even if you are so aching to have things move.

Luis works from a business perspective with a variety of Filipino American individuals and groups. He also has a perspective that is more pragmatic than emotional, advocating caution when donating and distributing goods. Indeed, the giving and distribution of donations can be a
challenging system to handle. McEntire points out that in many disasters there is an excess of in-kind donations (2007, 76). At times, the quality of donations is not good or harmful for the survivors (such as expired medicine), not appropriate for the disaster environment, or culturally inappropriate. Donations must be transported, stored, sorted, and distributed, which can take a significant labor force and much time (ibid, 188-9). Cash donations are often best for the affected peoples, as they are flexible and can help the local economy (ibid, 196). Luis pointed out many of these “facts”:

LUIS: And so for us to send food and clothing and money, none of those help, you know in a disaster like that, you have a time period of all you can really do is go through international aid agencies who know how to do it. They know how, they know all of the infrastructure and the mechanics of going to a devastated area. So you know, you may want to send food, but what if you send rice, how are they going to cook it? where are they going to get clean water? It’s not going to do anyone any good, right? So at that point maybe what you need to send is water, or a way to clean water, or you know, a food that are pellets

Marie replied, “I hear what you were saying earlier about sensationalizing stories and being careful not to jump on them.” She paused. “But those things happened.” She told us about her experience in Tacloban and Tanuan, how she had been planning a trip to the Philippines with another Filipino American friend (whose family hailed from Leyte) before the typhoon hit. She decided to redirect her plans with her friend to visit the area, in part because “I wanted to go because of all the things that were going on in the news, I didn’t know what was real. I wanted to go see for myself and form my own opinions.” In this way, “facts” take on yet another meaning—the perceptions and experiences of the survivors as told by the survivors themselves. In Marie’s interpretation, only then would it be possible to judge the reality of the situation. Later on, she returned to her experience:
MARIE: I mentioned that I wanted to go see for myself because there were like so many different angles, and to hear what happened from the mouths of survivors was also very interesting because you know there were stories about the looting and like people fighting with each other for resources, and you’re like all right, you get that, you get that much from the media, but when you hear why people were fighting or why people were willing to loot for survival, it put a different perspective or another layer of it for me, cuz one of the stories that I heard, she was like yeah, people were out there stealing food if you wanna call it that, but it’s like, when the typhoon hit, people knew it was bad, but people were also expecting government officials or some kind of relief aid to come immediately because it was that bad. But after the first day when nothing comes, you’re like okay. And then the second day, people were starving, people were hungry, people were injured, nothing happens still. And on the third day, you’re like all right, you’re desperate, you want something to happen, and when you have like a truck load of food and medical supplies pass you by, are you just gonna let it pass, or are you gonna go out there and do what you can to let the people in your house survive.

CYD: Right
MARIE: I was like okay… that’s the story that needs to be

These conversations raise a variety of difficult questions surrounding the role of emotion and fact during a disaster. Who makes truth in a disaster? What happens when emotion and facts become entangled? Who takes ownership of reality post-disaster? How can emotions and intent be channeled to best help the victims in the wake of such a catastrophe? Oliver-Smith and Hoffman address these very questions (2002, 11):

“Ownership” of a disaster, that is, the right to claim that it occurred, who its victims were, and the “true account” of events, origin, consequences, and responsibilities, often erupts as a very contested form of discourse in all stages of a disaster. […] In negotiation of these, disasters lay bare ideological unity or tensions within the community and its constituents, and between the community and outside entities.

For Marie and Cyd, the truth of the disaster lies in the stories of the survivors, the eyewitnesses, the ones who had homes and lived in the affected areas. Their interpretation of the disaster is more emotional and spiritual, and therefore part of their individual motivations to go to the Visayas. For Luis, there is an implied sense that is more broad and abstract sense of who owns
the disaster—it is also shared with government, aid agencies, and to some extent, the media (although not the sensationalistic media). For him, it is important to separate emotions and facts to the extent that they do not interfere with getting physical aid to the victims. My interpretation of the disaster lies somewhere in-between, having worked with both intangible social media and then actually visiting the disaster site. With social media contexts, I saw that ownership of the disaster became relegated to those with digital access; in Tacloban, I felt that primary ownership of the disaster belonged to the survivors, but that the Filipino diaspora and non-Filipino aid workers also held stakes in organizing and interpreting the facts of the typhoon.

Lucy, however, differed from the rest of us, in the sense that we—Cyd, Marie, Luis, and I—were actively making truth and facts for her. Having relatively little information about the disaster, she listened to us and absorbed our stories and experiences, contrasting them against her own experiences as a second generation Filipino American. The workshop became not only a frame for discussing and understanding our current thoughts about the typhoon, but in Lucy’s case, for actively creating a new discourse about the disaster and the diaspora. These questions of facts, emotion, and ownership problematize the reaction from the Filipino community, especially the Filipino American community. Much of the emotion from the typhoon is related to diasporic dynamics, including concepts of family and histories of (dis)empowerment. Additionally, this sort of discourse and emotion sharing is either not present or often lost in traditional social media analysis—yet is also important to our understanding of the typhoon and its overarching effects.
Diaspora Dynamics

In my experience, when I meet another Filipino or Filipino American, we go through a similar series of introductory questions:

“Do you speak Tagalog?”

“What’s your mother’s maiden name?”

“So, you like adobo?”

These are the casual and everyday questions that we dance through, delighting in our shared culture, united by threads of language, family, and food, mostly stemming from the Filipino cultural value of *kapwa* (“fellow human being” or “neighbor”), the interpersonal, emotional, and spiritual connectedness between Filipinos (see Nadal 2009, 42). Yet during Typhoon Haiyan, I found that suddenly, we became united through disaster—both internally and externally. In addition to internally produced events and calls for donation, I noticed that externally, non-Filipino friends and co-workers asked me if my family was okay and expressed their sympathies for me. I felt confused—typhoons happened all the time, and my family was nowhere near the affected area—it was as if tornadoes hit Kansas and people asked if my family in Virginia was okay. Only until I began researching the typhoon more, reading the names of the dead and missing and seeing photographs of the destruction, did I begin to feel a powerful connection to my community.

Marie exemplified this shared experience of disasters uniting the Filipino community and how her memories of childhood events in the Philippines colored her reactions and emotions for the victims of the current typhoon:

I’m from Baguio, the Cordillera, and then we got hit with natural disasters before, and so to know that, that was happening, or something similar was happening to another
community in a much larger scale where I knew that the help wouldn’t reach them as quickly as they needed… it was… it was hard.

Baguio City in the region of Luzon is very different from Tacloban in the Visayas—linguistically, geographically, culturally. Yet in the context of Typhoon Haiyan, the political boundaries of the nation transcended those of the region. Disaster makes Marie empathize as a Filipino, not merely as someone from Baguio or the Cordillera. Disaster has a way of changing meaning and identity within the Filipino diaspora. For instance, San Juan (2001) argues that Filipino identity is more dependent on smaller locales such as villages and towns, or networks of kinship or language (255), and that “alienation in the host country is what unites Filipinos” (262). Perhaps this is true of first generation Filipinos and immigrants, but begins to shift and change for those of the 1.5 generation or second generation. While being the Other in a country like the United States may help unite Filipinos, the extreme event of the typhoon appears to unite them as well. Both alienation and disaster produce vulnerability and have a powerful impact on one’s existence, though disaster often arrives in a more lethal and swift way. And as discussed earlier, disaster has often been framed as an event, when in fact is more useful to conceptualize as a process. Both alienation and disaster can be seen as processes that can destroy and unite the identity of “the Filipino.”

Cyd related similar sentiments and memories as Marie, especially when remembering storms from her childhood in Cebu:

I got dark really fast about the fact that like, this disaster looked like me. Like it had, you know, like they all had my face. So yeah. […] …and then I saw the news, and then I saw… um… I, I just… I saw, me being a little kid, and thinking like… you know, and that [memories of storms from her childhood] was a controlled storm in the middle of Cebu, that wasn’t—it was just water that would happen
periodically all the time, but to get what they [the Haiyan victims] got, and I tried so hard to separate myself from it, that would have been a really convenient time to be numb, and I just couldn’t do it. So it felt very, um… [long pause] it just felt like I had a, like I lived a completely different world that I didn’t earn. The only thing my parents did was like they picked me up and they put me down someplace else.

Despite never having met or seen the victims of the typhoon, Marie and Cyd’s hearts went out to these people because of their own memories of disaster when they lived in the Philippines. They empathized with the victims because they remembered what it was like to be in terrifying and unstable positions caused by environmental changes. Furthermore, Cyd saw herself in the victims. What separated her from the typhoon was the Filipino diaspora—her parents’ choice to move to America yet maintain ties with family back home. It seemed that if not for the diaspora, all of us could have been victims.

Both Marie and Cyd demonstrate the re-imagining of the homeland, blending their memories with the current conditions and infusing it with empathy for these people who were so close to them in face and in past locations, yet so far from them in real space and time. When disasters occur, “the linkages between concrete material circumstances and ideological structures may be directly observed as people attempt to come to terms, to construct meanings and logics that enable individuals and groups to understand what has happened to them and to develop strategies to gain some degree of control over what is transpiring” (Oliver-Smith 2002, 38). In the case of the Philippines, many of these linkages are diasporic in nature, as many of the individuals and groups creating meanings and logics live across oceans and attempt to develop strategies to help their loved ones, friends, or friends of friends.

One definition of diaspora is that it is “not merely a dispersal of people or a dispersed people in a given host society, but [it] consists of the transnational relations that link people in
overseas communities with their homeland or cultural center” (Okamura 1998, 14). There are two key characteristics of diaspora that render it differently from other concepts of community, ethnicity, migration, or nationality: the diaspora is transnational and socially constructed. By being transnational, the diasporic people are peripherally scattered across the globe away from the homeland (whether a real physical place or imagined), and by being socially constructed, the scattered people create and maintain relationships “that link them culturally, economically and politically with their homeland” and that there are other aspects that contribute to these socially constructed transnational relations (ibid). Furthermore, diaspora depends heavily on the power of imagination, memory, and mythology, particularly in returning to an imagined homeland and past (San Juan, 2001; Espiritu 2003, 10). In the stories of Marie and Cyd, this homeland is not merely an imagined or romanticized view of the Philippines, but rather a conjuring of memories, a placement of one’s self into the past, and a projection of one’s self into the present, leading to the eventual act of physically returning—not to a home, but to the land. Diaspora for them carries a sense of obligation, of *utang na loob* (often translated as ‘debt of gratitude,’ but more literally meaning ‘debt inside’) (see Nadal 2009, 43-44). As Cyd related, “I didn’t feel settled in myself if I didn’t do anything, to pay homage to a place that gave me all the reasons why I’m who I am.”

I propose considering post-disaster trauma as an aspect of diaspora that contributes to socially constructed transnational relations, encompassing cultural, economic, and political

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\(^{a}\) See Safran for a model of diaspora based on the original term as applied to the Jewish community and additional criteria of what constitutes a diaspora.

\(^{b}\) For example, consider the performative aspects of Philippine Culture Nights (Gonzalves, 2010) by Filipino college student associations, and the virtual forums and discussion groups of online Filipino communities (Ignacio, 2005).
relationships while also encompassing a spiritual relationship with the homeland. Considering that the Philippines is one of the most natural disaster-prone nations in the world, facing not only an average of twenty typhoons a year, but also floods, mudslides, and volcanic eruptions, Filipinos have adapted to a culture of disaster (Bankoff 2002). In this way, disaster as a process can be used as a lens with which to view and assess the relationships of the Filipino diaspora. When the typhoon hit the Philippines, it was part of a complex web of pre-existing agents and relationships, encompassing everything and everyone from the people who lived in the affected areas, their relatives living nearby and overseas, the local government policies that dictated where and how they lived, the architecture of houses and their placement on the coasts, the national government and their (lack of) disaster plan, the American humanitarians working nearby, the telecommunications and online infrastructure of the region, the linguistic diversity and discrepancy in languages between official communications and local understanding, to name a few. Furthermore, the disaster revealed the relationships of the global Filipino community, as they acted on political, economic, spiritual, and emotional relationships by rallying to host events, secure donations, hold vigils, and travel to the affected areas themselves. In the months after the typhoon, documentaries were filmed, photography and essays were compiled, poetry was anthologized, an arts-based workshop was created. The typhoon manages to “offer a context in which to pursue these more synthetic understandings of the mental and the material” (Oliver-Smith, 2002, 39). As members of the Filipino diaspora, disaster unites us. Disaster pulls on the links within the diaspora in a dramatic and all-encompassing way. Additionally, while my casual

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1 Less than one month before, on October 15, 2013, there was a 7.2-magnitude earthquake in Bohol, a nearby Visayan island, which is one of the reasons the American aid workers were able to respond to Haiyan so quickly. See Lagmay, et al. 2013 for more information.
interactions with other Filipino and Filipino Americans in America touch on linguistic, geographic, and familial ties, post-disaster trauma touches a deep part, a spiritual and existential part, of Filipino Americans, especially the ones gathered in this art workshop.

If anything, the typhoon had the effect of strengthening transnational ties by reducing the physical distance between these two Filipino Americans and the Filipino victims, as both Marie and Cyd decided to visit the disaster sites, live with the survivors, and help their kababayan—these people who looked like them. In a way, Marie and Cyd were breaking down the common metaphor of the diaspora as a “scattering” and “dispersion,” since they were scattered, only to return to the source, only to leave the source again. These actions are bidirectional and the network of actors is constantly in flux as they travel and communicate along these relations, complicating the notion of diasporic links and identities. Whereas “identities are often not contingent upon a physical return (as many diasporic members cannot afford to go home), but on an imaginary return” (Ignacio 2005, 45), Cyd, Marie, and myself are able to physically travel back and forth to the Philippines and communicate in real-time, in part through globalization, increasingly connected infrastructure, and digital technologies. Perhaps the traditional model of diaspora breaks down here, and we need a new metaphor.

Let us consider the global Filipino community as a body. Each part of the body has its own function, form, and necessity, yet are unified as a living being. When one part of the body is wounded, the rest of the body reacts in pain. The wound undergoes a process of recovery, where other parts of the body work together in order to repair, strengthen, and uphold the damaged tissue. As the wound scars over, the body returns to a homeostasis that has new knowledge of the wounding experience and has (hopefully) adapted for the future. We might think of Marie and
Cyd playing a role akin to blood, traveling back and forth between different spaces in order to directly bring nutrients and vitality to the wounded people. The analogy can be extended to other Filipino groups—the local Filipino American media outlets serving as eyes and ears, the artists and vigil organizers as a heart, the humanitarian workers as hands and regenerating tissues. The metaphor of the body is not meant to perfectly map each Filipino organization or individual to an anatomical part, but rather to offer a new way to conceptualize and humanize the movement and behavior of diasporic agents among these transnational links. As we shall see, the artists in the workshop felt that the need to humanize the disaster is crucial to providing relief and understanding the typhoon.

**Gift-Giving**

We tend to think of donations as gifts: the More Fortunate giving to the Less Fortunate out of a spirit of generosity or charity. We are thanked for our “charitable donation” and our “generous gift” to a support or cause. The etymology of the word itself comes from the Latin *donare*, “to give as a gift” (Online Etymology Dictionary). The Less Fortunate do not have to buy or barter for our donations, they receive it freely to continue their lives. Yet I propose that donations actually seem to lie somewhere between gifts and commodities. As Lethem defines the two, “The cardinal difference between gift and commodity exchange is that a gift establishes a feeling-bond between two people, whereas the sale of a commodity leaves no necessary connection” (2007, 66). A donation establishes a sort of vague, fuzzy connection between the donor and the recipients. The donor often does not know the individual person to whom her
money goes, yet at the same time, may feel a connection to an imagined group of people (e.g., “the Filipinos”).

When the Filipino Americans in our community sent money, food, clothing, supplies, they were acting within the diasporic network to send donations and sometimes gifts. However, this model is not as simple and linear as individuals donating to a national organization or wiring cash to loved ones who then distribute the money fairly among survivors. The Filipino American community in the DC hosted vigils, happy hours, and raffles; restaurants donated percentages of profit; concerts, spoken word performances, and even a hackathon were held in order to benefit relief efforts (Pilipino American Unity for Progress (UniPro), 2013). Other individuals (such as Marie and Cyd) traveled directly to the Philippines to conduct relief work and asked for donations from their personal networks. These individuals often already had connections on the ground of the disaster sites, whether through family or friends, but not necessarily an official organization. The process of donating was more like gift-giving: interconnected and highly personal.

However, a gift is not simply the physical material object. Encompassed in the gift is also the performance, the act of giving, and the spirit of giving. The following exchange between the workshop participants provides examples of this:

LUIS: The feeding programs that a lot of community groups here do, they’ll go to the Philippines and just do a feeding. I’ve been involved in a couple of them and basically what we do is they go to the grocery store, buy fifteen sacks of rice, thirty cases of sardines, put them in a plastic bag, like five cups of rice, two cans of sardines, like you know what, that doesn’t do anything really in the whole scheme of things. And then it makes people think that they’re doing something so that if somebody asks them for another project, oh you know I already gave to the feeding project.

CYD: you know what was interesting for me

MARIE: The bandaid solution…
CYD: when I saw people do that, right, because you see people, they really enjoy those kind of things but they don’t look at the longevity, I realized ’cause I went there and my mother’s batchmates raised a little bit of money to feed some place in the north of Cebu, so I said okay great, I think that’s wonderful that ya’ll are doing that, and even though they were feeding them and maybe that was their love language, they were going to do this active service and serve, they didn’t… smile. …and I told them about that. It’s like… you know… ’cause they saw me with people and I was, you know rolling around in the dirt with them, playing with their children, singing songs with them, just doing whatever connected thing you can do with the people to give them their… I dunno, existence back. And to them it was like, no, we’re just going to give them these things. And my mother, what was really interesting for my mom to see was, you’re teaching them something they’ve never seen before, and I said what’s that and it’s like, unconditional love. It’s almost like giving them a sense of worth past a can of food can plant a seed deeper than a can of food.

Luis and Cyd bring up separate examples of people going through the motions of giving material aid, yet neglecting or forgetting to infuse it with spiritual and emotional aid. I have found cura personalis, the Jesuit concept of “care of the whole person,” in which “the attention and respect given to the care of an individual person and that person’s soul” (Randall, 2011) to be useful in understanding how to help those affected. Even within a secular context, cura personalis calls for treating the individual holistically, taking into account their physical, mental, emotional, and social health, as well as giving the individual respect and human dignity. As Cyd said, you “give them their existence back.”

Luis’s example also hints at a darker motive for donating, that perhaps the people administering the “feeding” (a problematic and dehumanizing term in itself) are doing so merely to visit the Philippines or to fulfill an implicit cultural expectation to serve members of the homeland. Cyd’s story also alludes to an obligation for charitable help; unfortunately, the help was conducted without the spirit of charity. In both of these stories, the physical needs of the survivors are addressed, but there is a need for more—a need for “existence.” Donating goods or
services, in the context of a disaster, helps with the biological and physical necessities of the process. Giving a gift, on the other hand, is restoring a semblance of humanity.

Unlike the unidirectional model of donations as originating from a source and ending upon receiving the donation, gift giving develops a reciprocal relationship between giver and receiver. Gift-giving is not merely a one-way transaction, but rather benefits the receiver and the giver (Lethem 2007, 66. This idea emerged as we were talking about Cyd’s project to collect handwritten letters for survivors of trauma (not only typhoon survivors, but anyone affected by a traumatic experience):

CYD: It [the letters project] is quantifiable proof that there is good and kindness for no reason, and I think that’s important, to restore something inside.
LUIS: The reason I’m asking that [who benefits] is because I also see the one writing that as the beneficiary.
CYD: Oh absolutely.
LUIS: For you to be able to… [pause] be listened to, is a gift. So the fact that somebody can benefit from your words… that is a big gift already. So both of them really are such beneficiaries.

Cyd and Luis touch on a crucial aspect of restoring humanity after a disaster: being able to listen and be listened to. I found this idea to resonate with my time in Tacloban with survivors: many of them shared their stories in hopes that the world would know what had happened to them and their families. That the survivors were still human. Being able to share their stories meant that they were not invisible, nor had they lost their voices. They could articulate their pain and know that another person was receiving it and empathizing with them.

Cyd also raises the idea of “quantifiable proof [of] good and kindness.” Why is it necessary that a trauma survivor should have something discrete and countable to remember their humanity? What does it mean for goodness and kindness be counted? The narrative of
having evidence of goodness that can be counted implies two different counter-narratives. In one case, goodness and kindness are often unquantifiable: qualitative, ephemeral, ineffable, unbounded. By bounding these qualities in discrete objects, they give the survivor a piece from the past, a memory encapsulated in an object. The survivor can recall memories and emotions, feeling solace and connection with someone who cares. This is *kapwa* stretched across space and time, made effable and perpetual so that grace might endure. The object exists so that the process can continue.

In the second counter-narrative, quantifiable proof from the typhoon may exist, but not focused on goodness and kindness. This kind of quantifiable proof may exist as dollar amounts and statistics about resources (numbers of houses, medical supplies, hospitalizations)—which in its own way, can be interpreted as a form of kindness and charity—but at times seems to lack heart and empathy. Money and resources—the quantifiable parts of disaster relief—are good and helpful, but are not the entire picture. By providing bounded evidence of goodness, the process becomes more balanced. The body has a heart again.

Additionally, the quantifiable proof in this case is both tangible and virtual, existing as a physical letter and as a scanned image on a website. The letters project is an act of making: by handwriting on pen and paper, the letter writer imparts her gesture and movement into the pen and ink, where “the pen picks up and converts into the inflexions of the handwritten line,” thereby not merely allowing the writer to correspond with the materials, but allowing the reader to feel the presence and being of the writer (Ingold 2013, 122). Goodness and kindness need to exist in tangible forms, not simply as emotions or goodwill. By taking on a material presence, they can ground a trauma survivor in the knowledge that people care.
What happens if a trauma survivor never learns (or loses) the knowledge that people care? Cyd brought up traumatized young men as an example: “Our boys are surviving hell as well, and when they don’t get to process it, dehumanizing others gets to be easy. And so there’s actually a cost to not addressing trauma.” In this interpretation, one demographic of trauma survivors (young men) are unable to deal with what has happened to them. Because of this lack of internal awareness of their own humanity, they are unable to have an external awareness of other people’s humanity, thereby dehumanizing other people and continuing a cycle of trauma. Ignoring trauma or not addressing people’s psychological and spiritual issues—skipping the healing process—worsens the overall recovery of a population.

These ideas of gift giving and the cost of ignoring trauma suggest a model of the economy of trauma. In the case of a natural disaster, human actions and the environment collide in a dramatic and holistic way that traumatizes an entire population. The population then needs both donations and gifts: donated commodities (in-kind goods, money, volunteer services) as well as psychological gifts (listening, empathy, material tokens of kindness). Providing solely the former ignores the essence of the person and their collective experiences, thoughts, emotions, and perceptions; providing only the latter ignores the corporal and mortal nature of the human being. Both donations and gifts are inseparable and work in flux—perhaps more physical goods, services, and money are necessary in the beginning of the disaster1, in order to preserve lives, and more emotional healing is needed as the physical needs are fulfilled. When this economy is

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1 Though as mentioned earlier by McEntire (2007), the volume of physical goods and volunteer services can inhibit disaster responders from staging the most effective recovery.
deprived of gifts, the cost is life. When deprived of psychological gifts, the cost is humanity. One leads to the extinction of a population; the other leads to pain that echoes through generations.

Returning to the analogy of the global Filipino as a body, the idea of a gift becomes more poignant. Within the context of a disaster, this gift can take the form of healing. The process of healing, while closely entwined with the process of curing, differs in that curing aims at eliminating specific conditions or harm, healing seeks to reestablish harmony and provide relief physically, emotionally, mentally, and socially, but it may mean living through illness or living with illness, even when a cure may not be achievable. Healing aims to restore wellness or balance to the person as whole, including the social fabric unraveled by loss, conflict or distress, not just the individual body or part afflicted with misfortune or disease (Ross 2012, 20).

Curing may involve the type of service of a “feeding,” a very practical way to ensure people’s physical needs are met, but do they not create connections between those serving and those served. On the other hand, forms of healing as a gift can take forms such as smiling, playing, writing letters, listening, and being with people in a selfless way that—despite the freely giving of one’s self—creates a feeling-bond between two people. Of course, a sick or injured body is also treated by other bodies (we can think of the foreign humanitarian workers and organizations as other doctors, nurses, and medics—quite literally, in fact), but the body also needs to heal through its own cells, tissues, organs, and limbs. A body resistant to healing within itself will fracture and fail, but a body strong enough in its own parts can eventually be restored to wellness or balance. In the global Filipino community, this form of restoration comes through giving these gifts of existence and humanity to those who suffer.
**Time and Memory**

Disasters affect populations long after the actual event has passed. Individuals remember the event long after it has passed, reminding their children and grandchildren; communities (hopefully) rebuild stronger spaces and adapt their architecture to future catastrophes; governments pass policies and form more committees, agencies, and bureaus; artists and storytellers absorb and weave the experiences into their mythologies and materials. The survivor and the nation are caught in a tension of forgetting and remembering, erasing and evoking. In short: disasters linger.

As mentioned earlier, Cyd recalled her childhood in Cebu and how terrible the storms there could be, evidence of how potent memories in empathizing during a disaster and spurring an individual to action. Marie also brought up the effects of another disaster and how it connected to her current activism work:

**MARIE**: My project right now is Mankayan, because they experienced the, they went through a major sink hole due to the minings in 2009, but people are not gonna say it’s the mines that caused it, because the mines are what feeds the people in the area, it’s also the same thing that restricts them to only that type of work. So yeah they’re experiencing the sinkholes and the school, the elementary school just got eaten up, so I’m working on the children’s library, signing them with the stories.

The Mankayan sink holes are a somewhat different disaster than Typhoon Haiyan, much smaller in scale, both with respect to area and population affected. Furthermore, it has a clearer “historically produced pattern of ‘vulnerability’” (Oliver-Smith & Hoffman 2002, 3), as its causes are directly traceable to human actions of mining. In fact, the sink hole hazards continue to recent history, with another report of one surfacing and being disseminated across social
media in 2015 (“Caught on Video”, 2015). Yet it adds to the idea of Filipinos being united through disaster and the Philippines as a country with producing contexts and patterns of vulnerability over time.

Marie is engaging with a community six years after the original disaster occurred. She is part of the disaster recovery for the long haul, helping to obtain books for the school library and bringing awareness to the issue. Furthermore, she is adapting to a culture of disaster over time, through a span of many years. For how long, and to what extent, will members of the Filipino diaspora engage with the affected peoples of Typhoon Haiyan? After the initial burst of events in the local Washington D.C. community within the month of landfall, there were only a few other events in the following months. Around the one-year anniversary, several events—mostly lectures and official updates—were held in the D.C. area. Perhaps there will be more events in the future, and perhaps there are individuals or groups still quietly and continuously donating to the affected areas, but for the most part, the community has settled back to their other plans and events.

This issue of time and the tension between forgetting and remembering arose again during the workshop:

LUIS: As much as we think it's finished and done with, it's not going to be for the next ten, you know, ten, fifteen years. So we really cannot forget it yet, and at the same time we cannot dwell upon it and think that we have to help Yolanda victims, you know? Because it's now gotten out of Tacloban and it's now spread out, all the problems associated with it have now spread throughout the Philippines.

In reminding us that the typhoon will linger for the remaining ten or fifteen years, Luis reminds us that disaster is a process, and that a disaster is never truly “finished” and “done.” Madianou also noted this in her call for disaster researchers to engage in “slow research” and take time with
their communities. Luis also brings up the notion that we cannot forget, yet cannot dwell upon it. Returning to our earlier metaphor, Typhoon Haiyan is a scar on the body of the Filipino community. A scar cannot and should not obsessively preoccupy a healthy body, yet the body may encounter it again from time to time. Furthermore, Luis’s conceptualizing the disaster as having “gotten out” of the local area and “spread out” into the Philippines conjure up images of a disease or epidemic. The physical event of the typhoon has the effect of revealing the other unhealthy and damaged parts of the body. Cognizant of these tumors and other wounds, the body must make the cognizant effort to repair itself and become healthy once more. Such a process takes time and effort—it is not over once the original scar heals.

Later on, a more specific example of the aftermath of the typhoon was brought up, that of pregnancy. After the disaster, the media applied the label “typhoon babies” to babies that were born when the Haiyan hit, due to mothers going into premature labor from the trauma (“Typhoon babies”, 2013). We discussed the consequences of this social phenomenon:

LUIS: And the effects are like so far-reaching and you think, like I never thought pregnancy would be an issue, but that’s a direct result. And then for the next 50 years, those children of these victims, or whatever…
AMANDA: Like typhoon babies…
LUIS: Yeah, they have a very different set of thinking, because, and who knows also what kind of health problems that they’ll have because where they’re growing up and the kind of health conditions they now have are really, really, be… subpar.

Luis also remarked later, “We really need to make policies of this and really institutionalize this, because disasters are always going to keep on happening, they’re always going to keep on getting worse.” This conversation and his comment also resonate with experiences I heard from the survivors and aid workers in Leyte—that as devastating as the typhoon was, it uncovered issues and problems that were already present in the area but were ignored, such as land disputes
(particularly from informal/illega settlements on the coast), poorly built and planned infrastructure, miscommunication of weather warnings due to language, and government corruption (all of these tumors and wounds). It would not be a stretch to say these problems plague other parts of the Philippines as well, and that in bringing attention to one of these issues in Tacloban would form a chain reaction where other populations in the Philippines would speak out about similar issues occurring in their regions. It is precisely through this interaction between humans and nature, humans’ responses to disaster, that can either produce or subvert the patterns of vulnerability.

The discussion about pregnancy during the typhoon occurred during the stenciling portion of the workshop and arose spontaneously. This conversation serves as a concrete example for the need to factor time into the understanding of the typhoon and the recovery of survivors. Many of the babies were born with names to remind the parents of the typhoon (Yolando, Jolanda), bearing the mark of the disaster for their entire lives. In addition to health problems, what other kinds of healing might they need? How might the typhoon affect their behaviors, their outlooks on life? Will this generation stay in their disaster-prone island, or become part of the diaspora? The ever rapidly changing landscape of globalization, physical and digital infrastructure, and technology makes it difficult to predict the future of this demographic.

**Technology**

One of the most obvious discussions of technology and the typhoon occurs in light of the social media analysis studies mentioned earlier. Yet in this ABR workshop, we discussed social media very little. It had not seemed to play a significant role in our understanding and experience
of the typhoon. In one of the few instances that social media came up, it was in the context of how Lucy had learned about the typhoon:

LUCY: And I don’t know if it was because, like I said, self-selecting, or selecting what I was seeing, cuz I kinda just decided to check out at that point. And also I guess it was maybe… I think I was reading articles, I wasn’t looking at…

CYD: pictures

LUCY: pictures. So I wasn’t seeing pictures, I read like a couple articles and didn’t really go past that. And I had… whereas it sounds like here, it was hard not to be… present in those…

AMANDA: I think for me, probably I got a lot of my information from Facebook, and I think it’s also because I have some friends that were in the areas that were hit

LUCY: Yeah and I mean, Facebook was my avenues to learn about what was happening outside Mongolia, but also I think the way that Facebook works too, the people that you visit the most are the ones that come up on your newsfeed, so I wasn’t having—even on Facebook—the impact was minimal.

Lucy’s experience of social media and the typhoon recalls the claims of social media as an “echo chamber” (Madianou et al. 2015) and the vast amounts of data to sift through (Alexander 2014), even on a personal news feed. Many of her Facebook friends were simply not discussing the typhoon, and those that were posted articles which Lucy skimmed because the issue was not relevant to her. Cyd’s interjecting comment about “pictures” also brings to mind the significance of visuals in evoking reactions within an individual. Even though social media platforms (Facebook, in this case) can showcase a variety of text, links, images, and videos, Lucy would have needed to 1) see articles with emotion-evoking content to be posted by her friends and 2) take the extra step of clicking on those articles and scrolling to see the images. Lucy brings an important perspective to this workshop: the part of the diaspora that was not united through disaster, the part of the body that was aware of the wound but did not necessarily need to react
deeply to the pain. It was through social media that she was made aware; it was through this ABR workshop that she was able to learn, understand, and emotionally react to the typhoon.

As discussed earlier, when it comes to studying social media output related to the typhoon, there is a digital divide within social media users. However, it is important to also remember other forms of technology that exist within the disaster context. In the workshop, we discussed the divide between Filipino Americans and Filipinos when it came to photography and the use and types of cameras. Several stories about taking pictures during the typhoon were shared:

MARIE: But being there, I was also very mindful, right, like cuz I was fundraising and I was asking friends to send money, and you know when you fundraise you wanna send people photos of where their money goes to, and I had brought my camera, like my big fancy camera, but then I also realized, these people have had their whole lives on camera for the past three months, and so I just used my iPhone, and I made it a point to take only photos of happy moments, because I thought there were enough out there that looked like they were helpless and devastated, and I also didn’t want to be another American coming in and saying hi, I’m here to help, let me take a photo of you, so I was just there when I was asked, and allowed to.

This theme was echoed through a similar experience of Cyd’s when attempting to photograph survivors:

CYD: But when I went, it was… I didn’t want to take pictures of the sadness. They, I got that, there was one young lady that I went to take a picture of, because she was just stunning, and hopeless, and she wouldn’t let me take a picture, and I got that wow, this is such an intrusion—pain is such a vulnerable thing, and I do get that we play on sympathies when we should just have real compassion and actual empathy, which doesn’t need to be spurred by desperation

Both Marie and Cyd are touching on the act of photography and the use of cameras in understanding and capturing images of the disaster. Marie’s example highlights the disparity between documenting and experiencing the typhoon. Cameras can serve as tools of compassion or exploitation, giving or taking away ownership of one’s image. The use of a “big fancy
camera” is intrusive not because it is a camera, but because of the point in time it is being used and because of its “bigness” and “fanciness.” As Marie mentioned, survivors’ faces and conditions had been broadcasted around the world for the past three months—at that point in time, they did not need her broadcasting their image yet again, even to a small audience. Doing so would make her “be another American” and in some ways negate her Filipinoness in the situation. Her description of the “another American” also brings to mind disaster tourism and voluntourism, where the tourist is more intent on seeing the space instead of helping the victims (as also mentioned in Luis’s story about the “feeding”).

The physical appearance of the camera is also crucial, as it separates her as “another American” who can afford an expensive camera, contributing to the technological divide between her and the survivors. An iPhone is more camouflaged and appropriate for taking photos, since many of the Philippine residents also had cell phones. Even when using an iPhone, Marie notes that she only took photos when asked and allowed to do so, thereby empowering the survivors by giving them control over the capturing of their images. Having borrowed a camera from Georgetown’s Gelardin Media Center to document my own visual field notes in Tacloban, I was also aware of the perceptions of my “big fancy camera.” I took photographs either in the very early morning when few people were around, or otherwise quickly snapped a photo and hid the camera so as not to emphasize my foreignness and privilege. In the few portraits I took, it was only after a long conversation with the individual and after asking their permission to take a photograph.

Additionally, Marie and Cyd both mention taking pictures of “happy moments” and not of sadness in order to stop perpetuating the stereotype of all survivors as “helpless and
devastated.” They also recognized that taking pictures of people in states of hopelessness was an intrusion into the vulnerability and their grief, and potentially dehumanizing and depriving the people their human dignity. Cyd distinguishes the need to have “real compassion and actual empathy” instead of using photographs and images to “play on sympathies.” In effect, taking a picture with a camera—and taking a picture that propagates hopelessness—is serving a different audience, an audience of non-survivors. Taking a picture that focuses on happiness—or not taking a picture at all, but rather serving and helping the survivors—restores their humanity and helps them rebuild their lives. The latter acts allow for a disruption in the technological divide and healing—or at the very least, problematize and complicate the archetype of disaster survivor as victimized and helpless.

**Other Observations**

The act of making the stencils triggered memories and emotions the artists, inducing them to endow greater symbolism onto these thin sheets of plastic. Corresponding with the physical material involved cutting, taping, and marking, a transformative process where the artists encoded their memories and emotions into the plastic, a now recognizable image. For example, this conversation between Marie and Cyd occurred while Marie was tracing the image of a shell:

CYD: It’s interesting, when I was in the Philippines, I kept picking up incredibly broken shells and I kept bringing it back here and giving it to people and I was like this is what you fixed
MARIE: That’s great
CYD: So I have a lot of like broken beautiful conch shells and I gave them to people and I was like this is literally from where we were and this is literally what I dealt with and so
I gave them to certain friends of mine who actually have imperfect shells in their home now. [sigh] Symbolic…

MARIE: That’s awesome

CYD: it’s kind of a…

MARIE: This is a shell that Isa and I picked up too, when we went, cuz it was you know when we went because the ocean came to land, all of a sudden these shells that were broken or whole were accessible

CYD: Right there on the street

The image of a conch shell reminded Cyd of her time in the Philippines, and dealing with brokenness, physical but also emblematic of mental and spiritual brokenness. The physical nature of the shell is also twofold: its structure and form is “imperfect” and broken, and it also comes from a physical geographic location—an artifact made by the disaster. Marie also recalls that the shell is when “the ocean came to land” and is a physical reminder of the power of the typhoon. As we shall see in the next chapter, the conch shell found its way onto the mural in ways that tied into this intent and symbolism. By manipulating and shaping the plastic, Marie was able to manipulate and shape herself in relation to the materials.

Corresponding with materials made this workshop more than a focus group and affected the participants on a deeper emotional and creative level than conversation alone. We joked. We ate. We admired each other’s work. By the time we were ready to begin making our mural, we had built up a new level of intimacy and friendship in only a few hours by allowing ourselves to be vulnerable both in how we discussed the typhoon and how we made our art. When we segued from discussing only the typhoon to working with our hands, we discussed sensitive topics such as homosexuality, pregnancy, domestic violence, and assault. These topics emerged spontaneously and naturally: people did not grow uncomfortable at the mention of them, but rather engaged in them thoughtfully and easily. The process of conversation mirrored the process
of mural-making: without notions of pre-set design and without imposing form onto the content. Rather, these processes generated form, and even though artists may have had form in mind while making their stencils and the mural, “it is not the form that creates the work. It is the engagement with materials” (Ingold 2013, 22). Whether through the engagement of language or the engagement of plastic and paint, the conversations, stencils, and murals were shaped and developed (they ‘grew,’ we might say) through our gestures, movements, and lives—while at the same time, the words, sheets of plastic, spray paint, canvas cloth were shaping, developing, and growing our bodies and lives. In this way, working with materials—and knowing that we would later collaboratively create art—created a safer, braver space for people. We came to the workshop with expectations to learn and understand, and by binding our gestures and movements with the materials, both our bodies and the physical art substances engaged in a process of understanding and healing.

Linguistic cues arose which signaled greater intimacy. People told more stories, whether about themselves or other people, and often switched to second person, perhaps with the psychological impact of having the listener be the protagonist of the story. We also began completing each other’s sentences, as if we were on the same wavelength of thought and understood each other in a collective way. We felt comfortable enough to ask each other personal questions that might not have come up if we were simply a focus group. For instance, towards the middle of the workshop, one participant asked another about the tattoos on their arm and their meaning, a topic of conversation that seemed quite natural as much of our earlier conversation had involved heritage and symbolism. By taking ourselves away from the everyday
dealings of the world in order to meet in this studio on campus for several hours, we bound ourselves within time and space and were able to generate a safe space for ourselves.

Luis also noted towards the end of the stenciling part of the workshop, “Filipinos to some extent, we are very verbal, but we don’t really say what we feel.” Added Marie, “Yeah, we go around…” Luis is referring to the Filipino conception of hiya (sense of face, shame), where an individual must preserve their true feelings in order to keep stability in the collective. (see Nadal 2009, 43) Luis and Marie’s exchange reminded me of survivor I spoke to in Tacloban who told me, “You know Filipinos… they smile on the outside, but it’s World War Three inside.” Perhaps making art can be a powerful way for Filipinos to express themselves, since they are free from language and can allow images to convey their meanings. Because this workshop was a safe space, we were able to emotionally react and share in ways that might be embarrassing in other settings and with other participants.

The act of making, it turns out, is quite vulnerable. Art-making facilitated the development of this space and its safety precisely because we opened ourselves up to the vulnerability of the creative process: we helped each other, complimented each other’s works, bounced around ideas, and listened to each other. In the process of understanding the typhoon-as-process more deeply, we were also able to understand, grow, and transform ourselves on a more symbolic and spiritual level.
The Mural

We walked out to the patio to set up the painting space. Within the shade of the Car Barn, we dragged away furniture, duct-taped down plastic drop cloths, and then taped the cloth canvas on top of the plastic. I demonstrated and explained several stenciling techniques on a cardboard box: how to create colorful double outlines, how to make a negative image of the stencil, how to make different colors on the same stencil.

“Wow,” Marie said. “I have so many ideas now!”

Everyone took off their shoes and walked around the canvas. Standing on the plastic, arms crossed or akimbo, they squinted at the canvas in silent contemplation.

Luis broke the concentration. “We could compose a story,” he suggested. “Or make it haphazard.”

“Ooh.”

“That’s interesting.”

They looked at the beige cloth quietly.

“We could also work with chaos… like the essence of chaos,” Cyd added.

“You know, I like the idea of playing with ‘the essence of chaos.’”

“I think chaos is a good way to go!”

The group continued moving in silent contemplation. Picking out different colors of spray paint, each person gravitated to a different direction of the canvas. Luis moved to the top and began filling it with clouds: dark blue, light blue, yellow. Cyd filled the bottom right corner with green, pushing the aerosol cans to their limits as she layered the paint on darker and darker.
Lucy and Marie both moved to the left, with Marie taking the bottom corner and Lucy working around the middle. Marie experimented with painting different colors in her shell stencil—blue, green, yellow. She tested spraying yellow on the edge of the cardboard boxes to create sharp lines on the canvas. Lucy clustered her stencil in a tight circle, painting it red, blue, orange, green, flipping the stencil over to create negative images. The center remained blank and untouched.

“I think I found a new hobby!” Marie laughed.

The stencils are drenched in paint and sticking together, gooey strings of blue and orange clinging to the cut plastic. Luis has covered the frothy blue sky with a light mist of orange. Cyd has taken the hot pink paint and saturated the edges of the canvas into a hyperbolic curve. Dosing pink and orange onto her glove hand, she pressed it into the sides of the curve to create foliage on a bright tree. Beneath the tree and along the trunk are orange outlines of her hand-drawn stencil of a woman seeking shelter beneath a coconut tree. Marie has experimented with color on her shell stencil, dying it blue, violet, and magenta, and replicated this shell five times in a circle, creating the effect of a flower. Lucy is contemplating the empty center.

I decide to join in, much to the group’s delight. “I was wondering when you were going to join in!” they chimed. In the bottom left corner I experimented with coloring the trunk of my Dice Tree black, and the boughs blue. I clustered several trunks and dice together, to create the effect of a taller tree fractaling into the space. As people slowed down on their own pieces, we began to congregate around the center. I suggested that they could put anything in the middle—an amalgamation of all the stencils, perhaps even a word, graffiti-style.
“I feel like there should be a word in the middle,” Lucy mused. “But then, is ‘community’ too long?”

Luis stood back and observed the entire canvas. “What’s the story? What’s the story you see evolving?” he asked. “It seems like this is the sea, and this is the sand… What’s really missing in the story is…” he trailed off.

“Seabird?” Lucy said.

“We’re missing birds!” Luis exclaimed.

The group looked at the center again, slowly shaking the spray paint cans. They decided on a bird for the center, each person making one part of it. One person painted its yellow body. Another person streaked in the bright colors of the tail. Another person created an olive branch. It is biblical—the bird of peace, the dove after the flood. They asked me to include the eye and suggested I use my dice stencil because it has small round holes.

“Why does it need an eye?” I asked.

“It needs an eye so it can see!” Cyd said.

“Because we want you to be part of the bird!” Marie laughed.

I squatted down next to the bird and sprayed a black eye onto it. Everyone stood around and looked at it.

“It’s like that bird…” Marie started.

“The sarimanok?" Luis replied.

“Yeah, the sarimanok!”

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k Mythical bird of the Philippines, see Our Sarimanok for more details
The whole painting session has taken approximately an hour—less time than I expected. It has also occurred mostly in silence, despite a few comments here and there. We passed around the recorder and each person spoke about their piece.

Marie’s Shells

MARIE: I chose the seashell stencil specifically this type of seashell because this is one of the shells that [my friend] and I had picked up when we first visited the sea since Yolanda, and that was the first time her mother had returned to the sea too, because, for obvious reasons, it was very triggering. But this one shell I took back with me, and I have it with me here. It’s just like, a reminder… of like beauty, and all the chaos that happened, because I was sharing with Cyd, it’s like all of these broken shells, but also the really great preserved ones that you would never find on the shore or in the street, because the ocean came to the land, they were accessible everywhere. So that was a reminder, and I turned one of them into a flower because I saw that that was possible, and also because flowers is something of a thing of beauty, and new life and new growth, after death. So… and I love how the process of how at first folks were just doing their own sections, but it came together.

As Marie mentioned earlier in the conversational part of the workshop, the shell is a reminder and symbol of the power of the typhoon, especially to bring the ocean to the land—but she also explains that it is a reminder of beauty and of chaos. Beauty was in the form, the shape of the shells as whole versus broken, while chaos was in the setting, the ocean on land. Chaos became an environment, a place where certain things should not be where they are. Both of these concepts, seemingly conflicting, can be present in one image. The image also represents personal memories of friendship, family, geography, preservation, and growth, echoing the dynamics of diaspora and the concept of the imagined homeland.

Marie also turned the shells into another image that can contain the concepts of beauty and the chaos of life and death: that of a flower. She used the potential inherent in the stencil—the idea that the image should be easily and rapidly replicable—to replicate the shells in a flower
formation, “because [she] saw that that was possible.” By playing with the stencils, it was her “desire to see what the material can do” (Ingold 2013, 31). Marie did not act as a designer with a pre-conceived plan to make a flower, she bent her mind and body in harmony with the materials, creating something in the moment which was dependent on the very type of materials and tools she was using. She also observed that the whole group eventually did this—the mural-making was a process, not an event; as people painted the physical space of the canvas, they converged to create together.

Figure 2: Marie creates her shells on the canvas
Luis’s Sky

LUIS: My stencil reminded me of clouds. It was a very free-form, kind of, very Asian-inspired cloud formation, and I chose that because… I wanted to keep the heavens as a focus of this whole process. The heavens as a spiritual guidance, the heavens as the unknowing and the one that oversees us and go beyond, and at the same time when I was laying out the cloud formation, it was also very ordered. Because no matter how we think there is no order, there really is an order. And I also put in the different colors, instead of just blue clouds they’re yellow, light blue and ties in with the other colors that were used in the rest of the mural which depicted the earth. Because the heaven is really the reflection of what’s going on earth.

Luis chose his stencil from the collection of printed images. During the workshop, Luis had spoken frequently about religion, faith, and Christianity and its role in Filipino culture and typhoon recovery. In keeping with earlier conversations about religion, Luis’s cloud images
symbolized “spiritual guidance,” the heavens as authority, and order amidst chaos. Just as the rotation of shells in a circle turned into a flower, the replication of clouds across the top of the canvas turned the space into a sky. Luis notes that he painted different colors “that were used in the rest of the mural” – at some point, his art-making transformed from an individual process into a community process, where he witnessed what the other artists were doing and reflected them. As a result, the sky has more texture and depth.

Figure 4: The participants collaborate on their pieces of the canvas
Figure 5: Luis’s clouds as a sky and heaven

Though Luis mentions that his method is very ordered, he also acknowledges that sometimes life appears to have no order, that the image itself is “free-form.” Despite their order, the heavens and spiritual authority are also inherently a mystery, a supernatural truth, that we as humans cannot know. We are reminded that in the context of the typhoon, we cannot know it fully, and that there is still a limitation to our materials. At some point, we must put down the spray paint can. At some point, the canvas ends. We must move to new or different materials to create and grow.

A spiritual/artistic duality has occurred in the making of the sky. In the Christian story of the creation of the world, God separated water into below and above, thus creating the sky as
separate from the earth. God spiritually guided the materials into place as the heavens, creating order where there was none before. In the creation of the mural, Luis artistically guided the materials into place as an imitation of the heavens and created order (and meaning) where there was none before. In the making of stencils and the mural, Luis takes on an artistic role that parallels a spiritual role as he guides the materials into place within the canvas. Similarities between artists and spiritual leaders (e.g., shamans) have been noted (McNiff 1978):

> The artist, the shaman and the person suffering from emotional unrest are open to and struggle with the disequilibrium of existence. Rather than attempting “to treat” the eruptions of psychological tension with external forces of tranquilization, the artist and the shaman go to the heart of the inner storm and enact its furies in a way which is of value to the individual and the community. The end result is not just emotional catharsis but deepened insight into the nature of human emotion. Where the general tendency of society is to walk a continuously straight and balanced line of behavior, the artist and the shaman maximize the social value of imbalance. They see that struggle gives significance to existence. Life is perceived as a dynamic which proceeds to a natural order and expands if allowed to do so (Arnhein, 1971).

All of the participants took on this spiritual/artistic role, traveling to “the heart of the inner storm.” In this way, the workshop was more than a safe space for participants—it was a sacred space that allowed the disequilibrium, the chaos of existence, to be given significance and meaning. While individuals after a disaster create metaphors and engage in sense-making in order to regain order and control in their lives (Hoffman 2002), having an event and a structured process with other individuals allows for a ritual that imparts transformation and growth.

**Lucy’s Wave and Bubble**

> LUCY: My stencil has two parts, the first part is kind of this chaotic… wave…. Pieces of buildings and furniture all over it, and the other part, kinda represents me, and my disconnection with the typhoon, so, um, in one representation of the stencil, I put it in blue my section in blue because I was very… not involved, so I felt very, not very
emotional about the typhoon, and I also put it in blue because Mongolia is known as the land of the blue sky, so I felt that was kind of related. And in the representation of me, there’s like, I’m like in a chair, I think it kinda represents how I felt with the situation, it’s just like my world was my room, I guess, and technology, so that’s why I have a little Facebook thumb, thumbs up, and so in that part of the stencil, there’s like me thinking of the thumbs up and then the people in my hand are supposed to represent like my family and then they’re also thumbs up, so in my world I was fine, I was cool and blue, and then on the other side, there’s chaos happening, and I kinda put a globe, and all the chaos was the thought bubble of the globe, so I felt like, in that sense I was kinda isolated from the world, partly by choice and partly from what I was doing at the time. So that is my stencil, and another part of the mural where I put my stencil was, I have like, me being upside down and then right-side up, just because it seems like a very… mmm… I dunno… upside down thing for me to do and react to as far as the typhoon, so that was my stencil. And I just really liked that we chose putting a bird in the middle, because there was a big void, and I feel like that’s a really good representation and a hopeful representation to put in the middle of the mural.

Lucy was more reticent during the workshop, preferring to listen to the other participants and express herself more through her art than through her speech. Prior to the workshop, she also had little community involvement with the typhoon, in part because she was living in Mongolia for a year when the disaster struck. She is still part of the diaspora, the body of Filipinos living around the world, though diaspora in her case is not defined by current location, but rather by origin. Due to her distance during the typhoon, much of the workshop was a learning experience for her. Her stenciled images on the mural—in shape, design, placement, and color—reflects much of this feeling of distance and disconnect.
Lucy drew her own stencil freely, imbuing it with ideas and stories from the workshop. Her stencil, both in design and placement on the mural, also focused on contrasting chaos and order. While her stencil was in two parts, one of a chaotic wave of buildings and furniture, the other is a safe bubble to represent her and the effects of social media on her experience with the typhoon. She only made one copy of the bubble part on the mural, making it blue to symbolize her ties to her time in Mongolia as well as uninvolvment or apathy. Her feelings of the situation take on a visual component, as she describes her past experience as “cool and blue.”

In contrast, the chaotic wave part of her stencil encircles the cool blue bubble, debris and wreckage tumbling in red and orange. Fragments of green images are speckled between the red
copies. Lucy wanted this effect to look like a globe, with the chaos as “the thought bubble of the
globe,” nesting her personal bubble within this global sphere. Lucy’s placement of her stencils
exists between the sky and ground portions of the mural, occupying a more abstract space in the
air. While the other stencils seem logical in their placement on the canvas—trees, shells, flowers
springing from the ground, sky hovering above, bird soaring in between, Lucy’s images float.
They represent her feelings of a space further away from the other objects and stories of the
typhoon. her image is not so much about the transition or struggle between life and death, but a
desire and a quest to understand life and death more, her placement in the world and what it all
means. Incidentally, the rotation and placement of the stencils is the same as the shell-flower, an
imitation of gesture that created a wave/bubble-flower, a symbol of growth and a living
organism. Lucy’s flower emerges, sprouting out of any confusion, isolation, or distance to bloom
and float in the air.

**Cyd’s Family Grove**

Cyd: With my stencil, the stencil I had was of a mother and a father wrapped around a
tree. Just trying to hang on for dear life, it’s actually a way that I’m honoring a story that
I actually heard while I was over there, and my chaos, um… intentionally… was
designed to be cluttered and messy, I have one clear image of the family and this tree and
I did that in red or in orange, a really bright color so it can be seen, and then there’s little
messier versions of the same imprint on the grass or on the land, basically symbolizing
that you have something you want to preserve but through trauma, things just kind of
echo, and it’s not exactly—it doesn’t take the shape that you intend. And then I tinkered
with the idea of having hands in different colors, and the first hand was actually red, just
because there was a lot of blood over there, there was a lot of pain and suffering, and then
all of a sudden I just turned that into a tree and roots and I wanted it to be bright pink
because, uh… because it’s probably going to be unorthodox, the things that will keep us
grounded and will keep us rooted, and who we are and the things that we want. But that,
he says mano a mano right, without hands holding us up, holding out, or reaching out,
we… don’t have that sense of community that’s very unique to our people. Um… yeah.
They are survivors because even in chaos they can hang onto something deep and be a
unit, and then what’s nice about that is that we have, it’s almost like, this island that
we’re on, there’s a little bit of blue and a little bit of the divide between the two worlds, you know we’ve got the bird with all its different colors and the array of who it is coming back with something bountiful, but bridging the gap. And I love that this seashell flower is in the middle because I, especially the older that I am, I’m really getting that art and beauty is one of the only things we have left, it might be the only thing that can save us, is that preserving of beauty to me is like preserving of dignity and the integrity of something, and it can always be restored or found even in the middle of all of this stuff. So yeah.

Cyd’s stencil recalls a story of a family in the Philippines, of the mother and father wrapped around a tree. An image of the family is highlighted in bright orange on the canvas with fainter images replicated around the ground of the family. For Cyd, this represents how trauma can twist and reshape memories and stories. Her use of her own hand as a stamp is also reminiscent of some of the earliest art painted within caves, which can be considered the predecessor of the stencil. When the plastic stencil gave way, Cyd resorted to working with the paint in other creative ways, using her own hand as a material. Like Marie, she was interested in what the materials could do (Ingold 2013, 31) and pushed them to their physical limits. Later on she proudly showed off and laughed about the colorful paint on her hands and feet, evidence that her body, gestures, movement, and the paint and canvas have merged together. Just as the swaths of color are left on Cyd’s body, the imprints of her hands and feet are molded into the paint. Through the process of printing and painting, Cyd was “sewing the line into the mind and the mind into the line in a suturing action that grows ever tighter as the drawing proceeds” (ibid, 128). When Cyd first started out, she began with large sweeps of the green paint, and as the process continued, she began detailing the elements even more—it was in the continuous reframing and reshaping of materials that she and the materials began to become more closely “sewn” together.
Figure 7: Cyd squats next to the canvas while corresponding with the spray paint
Colors are crucial to the symbolism of Cyd’s pieces. Orange for emphasis, red for blood, bright pink for unorthodoxy, blue to divide worlds, all to contrast against the traditional green of the ground and the beige of the canvas. The “echoes” of the couple are evident in a negative image as well as yellow prints, both complementary to the original orange image but disembodied and backwards. One is reminded of ghosts or a fragmented history. An orange shell above them (unclear if made by Cyd, Marie, or even another participant) seems out of place because of its shape and position, yet fused with the colors of other elements—like the ocean coming to land. All of these images are under the shadow of the magenta tree, conjuring up images of rootedness, but also hybridity and humanity. In using hand stamps as the boughs, Cyd
had anthropomorphized the tree (or perhaps “plantified” human hands), recalling the folk tales
and magic surrounding trees in Philippine mythology—trees as houses of spirits or having spirits
themselves. Cyd’s art is more than a collection of images or experiments in a stencil: it is a
scene, a smaller story about survival within the greater story of the canvas.

Amanda’s Dice Tree

AMANDA: I have the dice coconut tree, um, I like this because I’m into hybrid things,
like obviously my first stencil was a person with an animal head, so like a plant with this
artificial manmade thing on it, and as Marie noticed, like the connotations of chance, you
know would you live or die if this coconut tree like fell over or stayed up. I thought
was… really intriguing, and just the whole… concept of chance and fate and luck that
goes into a disaster, like if the storm had been, you know, a couple miles off, it would
have completely wiped out something else, or maybe it wouldn’t have hit anything, and
how a disaster isn’t really a disaster until there are people involved, otherwise it’s just
like a natural occurrence, the chance that’s involved with, like who lives and who dies,
hearing these stories about mothers who had their kids swept away from them and were
like, well why did I stay behind? And vice versa, children who saw their parents swept
away, so… all of the good and bad that comes in that and having it like in a tree form,
because I think also trees are a really big thing in Filipino mythology too and just in our
consciousness, how we think of these structures and how we think about rootedness and
things like that. I think that the bird is really interesting, I think it’s interesting cuz we
thought about putting a word in there, and then we decided on an image, and we also
wanted to make it a collaborative image, so it is really cool how we were doing our own
thing and then converged all in the middle to make something really colorful and happy.

Amanda was fascinated both by hybrid images and the role of trees in Philippine mythology, and
influenced by the talks in the workshop and memories of her conversations with survivors in
Tacloban, she wanted to work with the idea of chance and destiny. Hybrid images are simple to
make, involving the swapping of one part for another, yet the resulting image can be uncanny,
unsettling, hilarious, strange, and mysterious. They are one of the simplest forms of remix, yet
have profound connotations. By attaching a pair of dice to a tree trunk, Amanda has created both
an artificial tree and an organic set of dice. The image becomes one of a tree that bears fruit of destiny, chance, fate, and luck. Such a tree is reminiscent of fables, fairy tales, and even the Bible, with its tree of Good and Evil and tree of Life. The effect is one of an organism that as a whole does not necessarily belong to this plane of consciousness or existence, even though we recognize its components.
Figure 9: Amanda’s hybrid dice tree
Creating the trees on the mural also reminded Amanda visually of coconut trees and comparisons of coconut trees to humans (such as a comment in the workshop that trees were “decapitated”). In a Philippine origin myth of coconut trees, a little boy is born with the head of a coconut (see Eugenio 2001). When he later falls to the ground, in his place sprouts a coconut tree. Amanda used this as inspiration when creating her image, tying the dice tree to indigenous myths of hybridity. The nature of the dice tree image also allowed her to play with stacking and clustering the trees, creating a contrast across the canvas with Cyd’s magenta non-stenciled tree. Compared to the other artists, Amanda did not use as much color in her pieces—only black and blue paint. The effect is almost harsh: sharp, silhouetted, angular, trees climbing linearly to the sky, straight and tall amidst curving shells, waves, and flowers. There is a strength and a fragility about the tree, its roots not as deep as the painted magenta tree and its trunk slender and long. Perhaps it could topple in a strong wind—or perhaps it would bend and sway with the gusts. What are the chances?

**Our Sarimanok**

The bird in the middle of the canvas had various interpretations from the participants. Lucy mentioned that the bird filled a void in the center, one that was physical but potentially also emotional and spiritual. She also noted that it was “hopeful” and appropriate to be in the middle of the canvas. Cyd reflected that the bird was “the array of who it is coming back with something bountiful, but bridging the gap,” a diasporic description of the image and its action. I mentioned the beauty of the bird as a collaborative effort, as well as symbolizing something happy with all of its colors.
We also noted that the bird reminded us of a sarimanok, a mythical creature of the Philippines, specifically the Maranao people of the southern region of Mindanao (Madale, 1976). Its name literally translates to “artificial rooster,” where the rooster is a symbol of a “silence breaker” when it crows at dawn. Because of its function of announcing dawn, the rooster becomes an intermediary between night and day, darkness and light, the visible and invisible, the spiritual world and the physical world. The sarimanok often carries a fish in its beak as a symbol of food in offering to spirits. Eventually, this creature became a symbol of power, prestige, and honor. For some time, there was also a movement to make the sarimanok the national symbol of the Philippines, underscoring the search and construction of a cohesive Filipino identity. We may
have carried the image of the sarimanok inside us, and something like it emerged in the center of the canvas amidst the chaos.

Alternatively, our sarimanok also carries biblical connotations, especially since it carries a branch of greenery instead of a fish. It is reminiscent of the dove from Noah’s ark returning with good news after the flood—the ultimate disaster in early Judeo-Christian religious tradition. “The dove came to [Noah] in the evening, and lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf pluckt off: so Noah knew that the waters were abated from the earth,” (Genesis 8:11, King James Bible).

Biblical scholars have interpreted the dove as a “gracious soul,” a minister of the Good News, characterized by “simplicity, harmlessness, meekness, and humility”; the olive branch is a symbol of peace, reconciliation with God, and a sign that “the waters of divine wrath are assuaged” (Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary; Gill’s Exposition). This image may also reside in us as the artists, making meaning from the predominant religion of the homeland. We blend the indigenous myths as well as the Christianity we practice—if not religiously, then at least culturally.

While we did not unpack the full connotations of either sarimanok or dove in our conversations, we interpreted the bird, our sarimanok, as symbolizing not only order, but hope, fulfillment, bounty, diversity, bridge-building, collaboration, and happiness in the midst of the symbols and images in the mural exploring the meaning of chaos and order. Despite the chaos of the typhoon—the judgments from heaven, the broken shells from ocean to land, the communication bubbles, the families split apart, the precarious chance of life and death—the artists chose hope. The artists chose to create a symbol of life, abundance, and healing.
**Other Observations**

Each artist’s piece reflected a deep, contemplative part of themselves that they materialized through the act of stenciling and mural-making. Art is rich with interpretation: often when presented with an art piece, we can only analyze the final product, the discrete object, but with this experiment, we can analyze the process. We can see ourselves in the images, and the images in ourselves. The process of corresponding with materials allowed us to cooperate on this art piece and within this sacred space. We grew in our understanding of the typhoon, the disaster as a process. We experienced healing. Transformation. Care of the whole person—emotionally, physically, spiritually, mentally—is seen on this canvas and held within our persons.
After we finished painting the mural, we returned to the CCT studio to wrap up the day. A post-workshop survey was conducted to assess artists’ thoughts as the workshop came to a close. We discussed our impressions and thoughts, and as each person offered a comment, I recorded it on a large sheet of paper where I had created a “Plus/Delta” chart—a list of positives and suggested changes for the workshop and future events. Several themes arose from our discussion, as well as recommendations for future workshops. This chapter will review the survey results and analysis, the reactions and recommendations of the artists, and observations and commentary on the use of stenciling and mural-making as artistic techniques in this ABR setting.

Survey Results and Analysis
At the beginning of the workshop, the participants filled out a quick word association survey. The goal of the survey was to compare how individuals conceptualized ideas of Filipino American culture, disaster, and art before and after the typhoon, thereby attempting to examine how participants’ views changed prior to and after the workshop. Eight randomized terms were recited aloud and participants wrote down the first three words or phrases that came to mind. At the end of the workshop, the same process was repeated, but with the words re-randomized. In addition to a comparison of how individuals’ ideas changed before and after the workshop, the words can be as an insight into the mental maps of an individual or as a sampling of ideas of a cross-section of the Filipino American diaspora. However, I focus on the macro-level comparison of ideas changing, so as to evaluate the impact of the arts-based workshop at the
group level. Analysis of each individual or a single concept would benefit from additional in-depth interviews with the participants.

The participants’ concepts of Filipino American culture, disaster, and art appeared to change after the workshop, most noticeably in a greater understanding of the specific art technique and a more nuanced view of art (see Table 1 for word associations with the term “Art”; see Appendix for the seven remaining terms and their word associations). At the beginning of the workshop, many of the participants associated art with the concept of freedom, other values (e.g., truth, peace, creative), and the quality of color. Stencils were also associated with their material qualities (e.g., sponge, paint), the concept of fun, and more negative concepts (e.g., skeleton, mass production). By the end of the workshop, art was conceptualized in terms of the participants’ experience creating, with ideas that it was still free and involved values, but was also imbued with the sense of process: messy, energetic, fun, expressive, thoughtless (in the sense that it did not require intellectualism), natural, and “perfectly imperfect.” Participants now also conceptualized the stencils in much more technical and material terms (e.g., acetate, negative space, canvas), as well as the features of the process (e.g., improvisation, imprecise, repeatable, multiples), which gave way to larger ideas such as “forever,” “everywhere,” and “community.” Because of the experience of working with the materials, stencils became more concrete and multidimensional.

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<th>Table 1: Pre- and Post-Workshop Survey results for each participant for the term “Art”</th>
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<td><strong>Pre-Workshop</strong></td>
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<td>Marie</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
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<td>Luis</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
With respect to Filipino American culture, initial feelings towards the concept of “Filipino American” included words related to the self and family (e.g., me, brother), as well as a disconnect between the concept and the participant’s lived experience (e.g., ache, privilege, issues). The concept of the Philippines was more positive (e.g., joy, salt of the earth, food, adobo), included words about family (e.g., family, mom, home), and included geographic ties (e.g., island, country, map). Terms surrounding the concept of America were mainly visual and symbolic (e.g., flag, bald eagle, lady liberty, red white blue), but also problematic (e.g., indifference, callous, contradiction). The idea of Community was also associated with positive and unifying terms (e.g., thriving, one organism, life (soul), love, ideal, organization, neighborhood). After the workshop, the concept of Filipino American focused less on the self and seemed more reflective, thoughtful, and problematized (e.g., curious, home-different-home, spectrum, bending, misunderstands). The concept of the Philippines still connoted positive values (e.g., warmth, story, humility, love), ideas of family and home, and geographic ties. The idea of America was also more nuanced and problematized, focusing less on symbols (although “flag” and “flags” were still mentioned), and more on conflicting qualities (e.g., worldly, reluctance, opportunity, abundance, distance, alone, beautiful). One participant even associated the word “me” with America, whereas before the workshop she had associated the word with Filipino American. The ideas of Filipino American and America had become more nuanced, while the idea of the Philippines remained fairly constant: positive, family-oriented, and geographically situated. This finding of a constant notion of the Philippines as positive and family-oriented is fascinating, considering that during our conversations we discussed the

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1 Culturally, Filipinos have very positive connotations towards food.
corruption and mismanagement of disaster relief in Tacloban, as well as Filipino mentalities of being disempowered to “think outside of the box.” Perhaps the Philippines has been romanticized in this context, as it was seen mostly in a sympathetic light during the workshop. The idea of Community also stayed constant, associated with positive and unifying terms (e.g., life, build, family, support, strength, group).

Words in the beginning of the workshop related to disaster and the typhoon focused mainly on the loss and distress of the event, as well as physical and environmental elements. For disaster, people associated words such as damage, destruction, sad, helplessness, divisive, as well as images such as trash, buildings, and “windblown trees.” There were also hints of recovery, such as mentioning humanity and Red Cross. For typhoon, people wrote similar concepts of damage, such as chaos, disaster, fear, distress, loss, and destruction. They also wrote down words related to the physical features of the typhoon, such as rain, wind, and water and words related to the topic at hand (e.g., Philippines, Yolanda). At the end of the workshop, while participants still associated the disaster with damage (e.g., loss, destruction, pain, destruction on the road, crying), they also had more positive connotations of recovery (e.g., opportunity for change, relief, importance of caring, management, community). They also had less negative (arguably more neutral or positive) and nuanced connotations of typhoon (e.g., people, resilience, unification, power, neutralizer). For the concept of typhoon, while there were still associations of physical elements (e.g., rain, wind, waves), there were also more vivid images, such as “bending coconut tree” and “drowning.”

\[\text{The phrase of “bending coconut tree” is especially poignant when compared to another participant who associated the word “bending” with the concept of Filipino American.}\]
These word association surveys provide insight to evaluating how the workshop may have changed participants’ attitudes, perceptions, and mental maps. After the workshop, the participants wrote down words that were more nuanced, positive, problematized, multidimensional, and vivid. By conversing with each other and working with materials with their own hands and bodies, the participants experienced a process that transformed them into artists—individuals who can bring order to chaos, chaos to order, and allow other people to see. Or rather, the physical process tapped into an innate quality of creativity that each person already holds. In manipulating and working with artistic techniques and substances, the participants were also manipulating and working with their notions of Filipino American culture, disaster, and art.

Reactions and Recommendations

The first reaction of the group was simple yet powerful: they had fun. Lucy and Marie both stated that they thought the workshop was fun, and Marie noted that “I wasn’t really sure what to expect […] the explanation was very academic, so all right, art, and typhoon, and community, but this is… a really… fun process.” Cyd also added, “I lost track of time, actually, I had no idea we’d been in here so long.” Despite nearly an entire day discussing a natural disaster, having conversations where tears came to their eyes and their voices choked, the group had fun. The idea of understanding and experiencing a disaster while having fun seems almost inappropriate, yet it was part of the process of healing and restoring humanity. There were activities and conversations that allowed them to channel their emotions, embrace the complexities of the typhoon, and create a physical work of art. Intended to be an event where we
could understand the typhoon more, the workshop also became an event where we could experience healing as a cathartic yet also pleasurable process.

Another initial reaction of the participants was that there was a sense of release from trauma during the workshop. Luis told a story about an art therapist specializing in disaster relief who traveled to Tacloban to work with the typhoon survivors and his desire to bring this woman to the local Filipino American community:

Luis: Their spin on this is that when a disaster, well, when a trauma occurs, you have to go in very quickly and do some kind of therapy so that trauma does not become set. And so a way of reducing the setting-ness, the setting in of the trauma, is to express themselves. And not necessarily as a counseling, but just, even for them to express themselves is already a very real and viable way of releasing their fears, their anxiety, you know whatever they’re thinking of. But at the same time they have to be very careful that when you release a trauma, you need to be able to close the wound again. So you cannot ask them to relieve their stories of what it was like to be in the typhoon and say, okay next! So it has to be a whole process and you have to open just enough that you know that you can close it back up. So one of the things that I wanted to do after I met with this woman like three times was to see how I could bring her here to the states and just let her talk with the Filipino communities so she can tell them her firsthand experience of what it is to talk to the survivors, not necessarily about what they went through, but what they’re feeling afterwards, and how, what they need to do to get them grounded, to get them back into reality, into life, into accepting the death and whatever happened because you cannot let all of those things float away, you have to ground them, accept them, do something about it. And so I thought that was one of the things that our community here is lacking, is that understanding of what trauma is, of what disaster is, and in that disaster, I mean, you had a typhoon, a typhoon does not necessarily mean it’s going to be a disaster, a disaster is when we cannot rebound from it.

Luis remarked that the arts-based workshop was like a stepping stone within the community towards resiliency, and he used the story of the art therapist to compare the importance of expressing one’s self after experiencing trauma. This workshop differed from other post-typhoon events in that it offered the participants this ineffable sense of release and healing, considering the _cura personalis_ for each artist. Even though the participants did not experience the typhoon...
firsthand, they absorbed trauma from those who had, or from media outlets (news reports as well as social media). This trauma lived inside them, until this workshop, where they were able to “open just enough” and allow these feelings to come out of them. Furthermore, being an artist in the workshop provided an opportunity for intimacy, closeness, and empathy that seemed possible only through creative work with materials. The artists also related gratitude and the ineffability of their feelings and experiences:

CYD: Thank you for this opportunity to process things that we, I haven’t had words for in a while, I’m grateful for the opportunity to not have to use words to express things I don’t have words for, and today I get a chance to be around people who had similar feelings, or feelings at all, and I think that was really helpful for me, because it’s been hard to think that the world doesn’t care, until you’re around people who care, and whether, wherever they are in it, they’re aware of it, and there are enough people in this room to make a canvas, it could have just been one of us, so that was important for me to see.

[...]

MARIE: And like talking about, I didn’t realize that I still had things to release from being there, it’s been like how long, and I wasn’t impacted directly, although I went, but after doing this, like I feel really good about myself, and somehow let things out.

The act of making allows for vulnerability, for community. The participants also noted that in addition to releasing trauma from their individual selves, they also built intimacy as a group:

LUIS: I don’t know if this was the intention but sometimes the purpose of an event, of doing something, is the opportunity for people to gather around, regardless of if it’s eating, like in a dinner dance, or a stenciling workshop, it’s the fact that you can preoccupy yourself doing something while talking and thinking about something important. [...] Because it just gives them a chance to do something with their hands and not to focus on other people, and they could just air what they’re thinking and ask questions and it’s less intrusive, it’s like, what do you think? So, you form kind of like an anonymity and a comfort level [...]

CYD: It’s true, it’s an interesting place. Intimacy builds when people are actually not face to face, that’s why all those intense conversations happen in the car

[laughter]
Luis highlights the fact that *doing* something while talking and thinking about a sensitive topic is less intrusive, allows for a degree of anonymity, and adjusts the comfort level of the group. It is as if the act of making can speed up the creation of a safe space and the intimacy of a group.

The participants also commented on the materials of the workshop and potential modifications that could be made for future workshops. I mentioned that we should use thicker acetate sheets in future workshops, as the sheets for this session were thin enough that they ripped easily during creation and curled quickly under the weight of spray paint. Lucy and Cyd mentioned that they would have liked test sheets for their stencils before actual sheets, which would also allow them to have a stencil to take home. As it were, many of the stencils were so thick and sticky with paint that they stuck together and were no longer reusable. Cyd also joked, “Wear gloves! Cuz now we need to buy paint thinner. Just because you know, it really does get into everything. Like this arm, for example.” The group laughed.

On the subject of messiness, the artists found that they liked the canvas on the floor for the possibilities that it opened up:

LUCY: I actually like the horizontal because I felt like we could access more of this space  
MARIE: Mmm  
AMANDA: Mmm  
LUCY: And it felt more like visceral, like I could take off my shoes,  
CYD: That was awesome  
LUCY: and get my hands messy, and like, so I liked that actually  
CYD: I am really happy about my feet, I don’t know why  
[laughter]  
CYD: they look like I have walked the earth, I can’t show them to grown-ups, but I’m totally going to  
[laughter]
This exchange exemplifies the difference in using physical materials than simply talking about the typhoon. In the cutting of plastic and spraying of paint, the flow of the body is converted into the flow of the paint. There is a connection that forms not only with the mind and the spirit, but with the body (Ingold 2013). During the workshop, the artists happily and proudly showed each other their blue and green dusted feet. Taking off shoes in an outside environment allowed them to literally ground themselves in the art. They engaged their bodies to work with physical substances that imbued a space with color, texture, and shape—which ultimately had the effect of allowing them to release the non-physical substances inside them.

Figure 11: Cyd proudly shows off the blue-green paint on her feet.
The group had several recommendations for future workshops. Cyd and Marie both noticed that originally the phrasing of the call for participants: Marie mentioned that “the explanation was very academic” and Cyd found that “the wording [...] was so sterile, like, this COULD not be fun.” As such, organizers of future art-based research activities should take into account how they can best communicate to their intended audience while still meeting institutional requirements. Other recommendations included hosting the workshop at a metro accessible location and discussing the pre- and post-workshop surveys during the wrap-up.

They also had suggestions for tweaking the workshop content itself, depending on the audience and other experiments with simulating the street art experience. Cyd and Marie mentioned the appeal this could have for younger audiences by using sponges rather than paint, or pre-cut stencils and shapes. Cyd also suggested adding some music during the workshop, though also noted that silence could serve its own purpose:

CYD: Cuz it’s also very intimate, not to have music
LUIS: and if you were doing it in the essence of graffiti, that’s done in the still of the night, in hush-hush tones
CYD: Only if you want to get caught
AMANDA: I should have had sirens in the background
[laughter]
LUIS: I Mean that could also be something we could look at, is there a time limit? You know you have like fifteen minutes to make this real before the cops come, does that bring out a different sense of urgency
CYD: Actually timing it would be interesting because we would have collaborated sooner, so I don’t know if that would have been a good or bad thing, because we had, it came together very nicely, actually, but, you know, it’d be interesting to see, if you have 20 minutes to be friends, let’s go.

The presence or absence of music or sound effects, the limitations of time, even adding fictionalized drama (“You have fifteen minutes before the cops come”) could radically affect a
participant’s moods, thoughts, attitudes, and perceptions, therefore altering their overall artwork
and experiences. These suggestions all demonstrate that there is an immense space in which to
make small adjustments which could turn out drastically different pieces of artwork and
experiences. A group of artists may not necessarily need intensely different ideas to jumpstart
their work, but rather small fine-tuning of the materials at hand.

Stenciling and Mural-Making

Part of this arts-based experiment was choosing an appropriate artistic technique for the
workshop. I mentioned to the participants that I had originally considered working with writing,
playwriting, or drama, and they explained that they were glad I had chosen something visual, as
it was more easily accessible to people who had minimal experience with creative arts.

Stenciling proved to be an excellent choice of artistic technique for this workshop for
several reasons:

1. Easy to learn
2. Fast
3. Portable
4. Inexpensive

My original workshop in Buenos Aires was approximately four hours, with one hour devoted to
learning the technique and the majority of time to creating an original stencil and spray painting
it on the walls. Since stenciling at its simplest involves an image, a sheet of thin material
(typically plastic), and a sharp cutting tool, it is fairly intuitive and easy for people to understand.
Additional techniques, such as using whiteout to create bridges, repairing cut edges with tape, or
creating using other sheets of paper to create different colors on the same stencil are slightly
more advanced but also easy to learn. Because of its ease, stenciling can also be learned very quickly. Depending on the intricacy of the image, cutting the stencil itself can also be a fast process. As beginners, the participants chose or draw images that they were able to cut over the course of an hour while still conversing with each other.

Another advantage of stencils is that they are portable. I carried my original Buenos Aires stencil in a thick cardboard tube across South and Central America before returning home to North America. These stencils do not require heavy equipment or electricity as in other forms of printmaking. Once they are made, they are lightweight and easily stored in a tube or in a folder, a nomadic product made by a nomadic technique (Irvine 2012). Additionally, stencils are relatively cheap compared to other printing techniques. Most of the materials can be purchased at home improvement stores, office supply stores, and art stores.

These factors go beyond the workshop, as the artists now had the knowledge to create stencils (or workshops) on their own if they wished. They also commented that the mural was something that could be exhibited later, either at Georgetown or in another archive, and that it would be interesting to see it in the context of public community events like a Filipino/Filipino American festival or parade.
The next day after the workshop, I was pleasantly surprised to see on Facebook that Lucy had tweeted and posted images from our workshop on her personal page. I was also happy that the artists had all friended each other.⁶ At the same time, I felt a strangeness to this. A year and a half ago, when the typhoon struck, I felt disconnected from the typhoon and many of the social media posts I saw about it on my Facebook feed. Now I was seeing a post that I knew intimately beyond its digitized content—I had been on that patio, I stepped on that canvas, I rubbed that paint from my fingers. Instead of a strange disconnect, I felt a strange re-connect. Here was social media related to the typhoon that would be labeled “noise” in the other big data analysis I was accustomed to conducting—if even considered at all, since it was more than a month from the actual physical event. Yet it was still part of the typhoon as a process, not just an event. It was part of the call for slow research and a more empathetic and nuanced understanding of the disaster. Even more, it was a transformative, healing flow and movement of growth for each of the five Filipino Americans, rendering them not merely participants, but artists.

Data mining, ethnographic research, and arts-based research all have their place in understanding and analyzing a disaster, depending on the audience and time frame for the research. Data mining, often used to gain rapid situational awareness shortly after the physical catastrophe occurs, would not be a sufficient method for intimacy and healing. Computer scientists and policymakers would likely be uninterested in social media posts such as Lucy’s tweets or our Facebook friending of each other, simply because it does not achieve their purpose

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⁶ It’s possible that they also connected on other social media platforms, although I did not see this.
as a rapid tool dealing with large volumes of computationally structured data within a certain geographic space. Data mining would also be hard pressed to obtain the same results that ethnographic research can, since data such as Facebook posts are both more private and less structured than data on platforms like Twitter or Instagram. Furthermore, it would not be a stretch to assume that what disaster survivors post on Facebook does not necessarily reflect their other thoughts and actions, a type of data that is often best collected through participant observation and in-depth/in-person interviewing.

Ethnographic research allows for a slower look at a disaster while reaching traditionally marginalized groups within a society. While data miners are concerned with the immediate present post-meteorological event, even attempting to predict the future based on analyzing the mood and emotion of social media posts, ethnographic researchers are concerned with understanding the present in a more lived way and longer way as the disaster unfolds. Data miners are concerned with time on the scale of minutes, hours, days, and weeks that posts are generated; ethnographers seek to understand the days, weeks, months, and years of the people they live with and learn from. Their research can also be helpful for policymakers, non-governmental organizations, and humanitarians who are interested in the long-term effects of the disaster and how to prevent future disasters. Ethnography certainly humanizes their subjects of study, quoting and naming people, though ultimately their goal is still to gain knowledge and make recommendations for a large community of people as a whole.

Arts-based research has its own time and place within the process of a disaster as well. It would be completely inappropriate and disrespectful to land in Tacloban several days after a disaster and hand people spray paint and acetate sheets and ask them to understand the typhoon.
While these people need psychological and spiritual healing, they also need food, water, medicine, and other supplies to nourish their bodies as their minds and psyches process what has happened to them. While the survivors need to make sense of their new world, they are not in an internal or external state to output or create something new—they are in a state of absorption and survival. Furthermore, while one could consider that several months or a year after the disaster would be an appropriate time to hold an arts-based workshop or event, I would say it is only appropriate to consider hosting such an event if the arts-based researcher has lived a considerable amount of time in the area where they want people to participate and knows his or her audience well enough to propose such a project. As a native of the D.C. metropolitan area, I felt that I had a fairly reasonable understanding of who might be interested in such a project, although I also admit that the project could have been made more accessible to other Filipino demographics, such as immigrants or elderly folks, though the project would have been needed to be tailored even more (e.g., to accommodate different languages, physical abilities, etc.). My hope is that should there be future arts-based research workshops in the Filipino diaspora, they can be broad in scope yet also tailored to specific audiences.

What are the limits of arts-based research? In theory, we could have had nearly any audience, discussed almost any topic, used any type of artistic material or technique. In practice, this sort of research is limited by materials, the researcher’s own expertise, time, technique, money, and scale. Depending on the audience one wants to reach, certain materials are more suitable than others. When I mentioned to the artists that I had considered hosting this workshop as if we were devising a theatrical play (since that is my area of expertise), they all agreed that working with visual materials was more accessible, and that dramatic writing as a craft was too
intimidating to amateur artists. Furthermore, a different visual artistic technique such as screen printing would have been too cumbersome, requiring specialized equipment and space. Stenciling and mural-making was also a fast technique that we completed within hours—something like choreographing a dance, rehearsing and staging a play, or sculpting with metal or clay would have taken us much longer. As with any artistic project (or research project, for that matter) the type of technique and materials also depend on the funding available to the researcher. Sometimes it is simply not possible to buy all the materials you want, or have the highest quality of materials at your fingertips. This reality made it helpful to conduct this particular experiment “in the spirit of street art.” As an ABR researcher, one might want to conduct his or her study or experiment as inspired by or in the spirit of another art movement, a specific artist, or a particular art piece. Finally, the scale the event matters. We had only five people in our workshop, yet one artist commented that an additional person would have felt like too many people. The technique, materials, and time frame influence how many people are involved, especially if an ABR researcher wants to build intimacy. On the other hand, it would be an interesting experiment to have a sort of “arts-based research festival” with different techniques being taught throughout the day and spread across a wide space in order to reach a much wider audience. However, that may not hold participants’ interests long enough, and they might leave the event oversaturated. At that point, we might even question if research is actually being conducted, though of course this depends entirely on the research questions.

Making meaning and symbols from a disaster “provides a compass of orientation” (Hoffman 2002, 114) for those affected, whether they witnessed the typhoon firsthand or experience the pain across time and space in a different homeland. My original intention and
hope was that some members of the Filipino American diaspora could achieve this orientation, could understand the typhoon through the act of making physical and visual meanings. In the process of making, I found that conducting this workshop was essentially creating and giving a gift. In the midst of the other local Filipino American events, rooted in commodity and donation economies, this event of making art to engage in correspondence with the disaster only makes sense within a non-commercial gift economy:

“Art that matters to us—which moves the heart, or revives the soul, or delights the senses, or offers courage for living, however we choose to describe the experience—is received as a gift is received. Even if we’ve paid a fee at the door of the museum or concert hall, when we are touched by a work of art something comes to us that has nothing to do with the price. The daily commerce of our lives proceeds at its own constant level, but a gift conveys an uncommodifiable surplus of inspiration” (Lethem 2007, 66).

The types of relief aid and donations that were collected by the Filipino American community are also types of gifts, but commodities with prices attached. These gifts may serve a useful and functional purpose, although sometimes the overabundance of these goods causes problems “because it has to be disposed of or sorted and distributed” (McEntire, 2007). For instance, reports of aid being withheld for political reasons or decaying due to safety regulations fueled further anger and distress among Filipinos around the world post-typhoon. The making of art is a different kind of gift: it offers healing, understanding, and a different way to grieve—and not necessarily to the typhoon victims, but to the members of the Filipino diaspora, this worldwide body that needs healing. In understanding a disaster as a process, and doing so slowly and with empathy for all—especially marginalized peoples—we need a gift. We need a gift of making.

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See also Hyde 2007, xvii.
Bibliography


Hoffman, S. (2002). The monster and the mother: The symbolism of disaster. In S. M. Hoffman, & A. Oliver-Smith (Eds.), *Catastrophe and culture: The anthropology of disaster* (pp. 113-142)


Appendix A: Workshop Materials

This research was approved by the Georgetown IRB (#2015-0426).

Survey Results

Table 2: Pre- and Post-Workshop Survey results for each participant for the term “Philippines”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-Workshop</th>
<th>Post-Workshop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cyd</td>
<td>community, joy, salt of the earth</td>
<td>warmth, humility, love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>Home, family, food</td>
<td>Home, land, resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>adobo, mom, island</td>
<td>story, far away, family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis</td>
<td>country, map, people</td>
<td>Filipino, islands, map</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Pre- and Post-Workshop Survey results for each participant for the term “Typhoon”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-Workshop</th>
<th>Post-Workshop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cyd</td>
<td>chaos, loss, destruction</td>
<td>neutralizer, drowning, survive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>disaster, fear, help</td>
<td>Yolanda, People, Resilience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>water, distress, Philippines</td>
<td>waves, unification, power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis</td>
<td>rain, Yolanda, wind</td>
<td>rain, bending coconut tree, wind</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Pre- and Post-Workshop Survey results for each participant for the term “Filipino American”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-Workshop</th>
<th>Post-Workshop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cyd</td>
<td>distance, privilege, ache</td>
<td>misunderstands, curious, bending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>brother, me, different</td>
<td>my brother, home-different-homes, line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>me!, identity, issues</td>
<td>spectrum, everywhere, community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis</td>
<td>association, kid, face</td>
<td>youth, face, hip hop</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Pre- and Post-Workshop Survey results for each participant for the term “Disaster”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-Workshop</th>
<th>Post-Workshop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cyd</td>
<td>divisive, damage, helplessness</td>
<td>opportunity for change, loss, destruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>typhoon, humanity, buildings</td>
<td>relief, help, importance of caring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>sad, weather, destruction</td>
<td>management, sink or swim, community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis</td>
<td>trash, red cross, windblown trees</td>
<td>pain, destruction on the road, crying</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Pre- and Post-Workshop Survey results for each participant for the term “Community”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-Workshop</th>
<th>Post-Workshop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cyd</td>
<td>surviving, thriving, one organism</td>
<td>life, pulse, build</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>love, life (soul), support</td>
<td>support, family, friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Pre-Workshop</td>
<td>Post-Workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>Philippines, light, ideal</td>
<td>Philippines, people, strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis</td>
<td>development, organization, neighborhood</td>
<td>group, activity, people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Pre- and Post-Workshop Survey results for each participant for the term “America”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Pre-Workshop</th>
<th>Post-Workshop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cyd</td>
<td>choice, indifference, callous</td>
<td>abundance, distance, alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>lady liberty, light, contradiction</td>
<td>flags, opportunity, reluctance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>freedom, bald eagle, flag</td>
<td>me, media, worldly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis</td>
<td>map of America, flag, red white blue</td>
<td>flag, patriotism, beautiful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Pre- and Post-Workshop Survey results for each participant for the term “Stencil”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Pre-Workshop</th>
<th>Post-Workshop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cyd</td>
<td>skeleton, color, mass production</td>
<td>multiples, forever, everywhere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>art, fun, paint</td>
<td>paint, canvas, community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>fun, new, spray paint</td>
<td>imprecise, improvisation, negative space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis</td>
<td>painting, sponge, paper</td>
<td>acetate, repeatable, decoration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Schedule and Visual Agenda**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Start</th>
<th>End</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Materials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:00 AM</td>
<td>9:00 AM</td>
<td>Set-up</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00 AM</td>
<td>10:00 AM</td>
<td>Arrivals, breakfast, photo waiver, lunch orders, schedule interviews</td>
<td>Breakfast food, surveys, writing utensils, informed consent/waiver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00 AM</td>
<td>10:20 AM</td>
<td>Introductions, workshop goals, logistics, agenda, pre-workshop survey</td>
<td>Copies of agenda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:20 AM</td>
<td>11:00 AM</td>
<td>Discussion of Typhoon Haiyan</td>
<td>Audio recorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00 AM</td>
<td>11:10 AM</td>
<td>Break</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:10 AM</td>
<td>12:30 PM</td>
<td>Demonstration of stenciling and practice (outside)</td>
<td>Stenciling materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30 PM</td>
<td>1:30 PM</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Lunch food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:30 PM</td>
<td>3:30 PM</td>
<td>Creative time for workshop participants (inside/outside)</td>
<td>Stenciling materials; camera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:30 PM</td>
<td>4:00 PM</td>
<td>Wrap-up with Button Activity, post-workshop survey, and Plus/Delta</td>
<td>Large sticky pad and marker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:00 PM</td>
<td>6:00 PM</td>
<td>Interviews (optional)</td>
<td>Audio recorder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
AGENDA

ARTS-BASED WORKSHOP on Typhoon HAIYAN/ yolanda 18 July 2015

9 - 10 AM: Arrivals, adminstration, breakfast!
10 - 10:20 AM: Introductions, goals, survey
10:20 - 11 AM: Discussion of Haiyan/Yolanda
11 AM - 12:30 PM: Demonstration of stenciling + PRACTICE → outside!
12:30 - 1:30 PM: LUNCH
1:30 - 3:30 PM: Creative Time [inside + outside]
3:30 - 4 PM: Wrap up, survey
4 - 6 PM: Interviews (optional)

THANK YOU for your participation!
### List of Materials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
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<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X-Acto knife</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acetate sheets</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Pad of 25 sheets</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spray paint (color)</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spray paint (black)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop cloth - canvas</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop cloth - plastic</td>
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<td>Pack of 3</td>
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<td>Cardboard</td>
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<tr>
<td>sharpies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Masks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gloves</td>
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<td>Pack of 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Duct tape</td>
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<tr>
<td>Whiteout pen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Large paper for other paint</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large sticky pad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Visual Diaries
Photography from Tacloban
Photography from Arts-Based Workshop