

NATURATA, NATURANS

JULIAN TAPALES

The figure on screen is a Bulul, an artifact from a living society in the Cordilleras, Northern Philippines. 3D scanned and rendered in real time, its texture and form are continuously generated and transformed by deep neural networks that were trained on materials from the region. The artifact's purpose in its original context is to receive the negative energies channeled during rituals to protect the rice stored in granaries. In its original material form, it is a powerful symbol whose existence orbits along the cycles of life, rhythm and ritual. Digitally, its presence is contingent on a series of numerical operations, through which an object is transformed first into its own numerical representation, then into an image that is continuously re-presented.

This work questions the ontology of analogue and digital materials, asking to what extent symbolic figures and objects are able to create a meaning beyond themselves and to have effects on their material context. Is the digital representation inseparable from its material counterpart, or has it "learned" enough to acquire an agency of its own?

This work celebrates the life of a symbol, as it is upheld by a group of people in a specific time and place, and explores how its meaning changes when it is deconstructed, synthesized and represented digitally. Placing itself in an ancient tradition of art theory, this work revisits the vexed question: whether the task of art is to represent nature as it is, or to replicate the generative activity that constitutes the essence of nature itself.

In memory of Charlie Crabtree.

The Sound Design and Composition is by Alex Gruz.

This book was made with the generous help of Amy Haigh and Ed Cornish.

Many thanks to Mark & Wendy Watan (Musician and Ethnographic Advisor), Jamie Oakes (Instruments, Ethnographic Advisor), Piotr Migdal (Machine Learning), Federico Campagna and Kevin in the woodwork studio.

All images were taken by the author.

Contents

- 9** **Images and Symbols**
Mircea Eliade
- 10** **Technic and Magic**
Federico Campagna 2018
- 13** **Dawak as a System of
Rites in Igorot Living**
Fiar-od 2005
- 16** **The Ethics**
Benedict De Spinoza, 1677
- 17** **Non-Stationary Texture
Synthesis by Adversarial
Expansion**
Yang Zhou et al., 2018
- 18** **The Nature and the Art
of Workmanship**
David Pye 1968

Images and Symbols

Studies in Religious Symbolism

Mircea Eliade, 1952

Symbolic thinking is not the exclusive privilege of the child, of the poet or of the unbalanced mind: it is consubstantial with human existence, it comes before language and discursive reason. The symbol reveals certain aspects of reality—the deepest aspects—which defy any other means of knowledge. Images, symbols and myths are not irresponsible creations of the psyche; they respond to a need and fulfil a function, that of bringing to light the most hidden modalities of being. Consequently, the study of them enables us to reach a better understanding of man—of man “as he is”, before he has come to terms with the conditions of History[...]

This non-historical part of the human being wears, like a medal, the imprinted memory of a richer, a more complete and almost beatific existence. When a historically conditioned being—for instance, an Occidental of our own days—allows himself to be invaded by the non historical part of himself (which happens to him much oftener and more completely than he imagines), this is not necessarily a retrogression towards the animal stage of humanity or a redescend towards the deepest sources of organic life. Often he is re-entering, by means of the images and the symbols that then come into play, a paradisiac stage of primordial humanity (whatever its concrete existence may then have been; for this “primordial man” is admittedly an archetype never fully “realisable” in any human existence at all). In escaping from his historicity, man does not abdicate his status as a human being or abandon himself to “animality”: he recovers the language, and sometimes the experience, of a “lost paradise”. Dreams, waking dreams, the images of his nostalgias and of his enthusiasms, etc., are so many forces that may project the historically-conditioned human being into a spiritual world that is infinitely richer than the closed world of his own “historic moment”.

Technic and Magic

Federico Campagna, 2018

We have to set the ground over which we can place our meaningful construction of a world that we can inhabit. These axiomatics, I call “reality-settings”: the historically specific decision (witting or unwitting) over what criteria we use to understand the baffling experience of existing somewhere, somewhen[...]

These axioms combine together in an overall system, which is the reality-system of our age. A reality-system shapes the world in a certain way, and endows it with a particular destiny: it is the cosmological form that defines a historical age. At the same time, however, it is also a cosmogonic force: its metaphysical settings and parameters actually create the world — if for ‘world’, as in Greek *cosmos* or Latin *mundos* we understand precisely the product of an act of ordering chaos. It is possible, narratively at least, to present this cosmogonic force as almost a thing, whose world-making activity is revealed by its internal structure. I choose to call the cosmogonic form of our age, ‘Technic’.





Dawak as a System of Rites in Igorot Living

Fiar-od, 2005

Man related with nature in many ways. One way by which ethnic tribes relate to nature is shown in their system of rituals with punctilious observance of customary formalities and protocols. Among the ethnic tribes in the Philippines are the Igorots whose customs and traditions are still alive today. The Igorots are known for their philosophical system of wisdom of indigenous knowledge (IK) that deals with spirituality leading to ultimate reality. Rituals are performed to address the most general causes and principles behind certain phenomenon or human conduct defined in the aspects of people's customs and traditions. Like any other tribe, the Igorots too have responded to the revelation of the numinous deity in their folklore and rituals. The unseen being in sacred places was believed to have safeguarded the tribal people from cataclysm[...]

The quintessential trait of the Besao and Sagada folks to communicate with the dead is evidenced in the episode where the elders communicated through their dirge or baya-o (chant to communicate to the dead) and an answer was manifested in their daily lives. This to them is divine justice. As former Mountain Province Governor Alfredo Lamén said, "I am always a winner in politics because I perform rituals and I learned to communicate with the spirits of the living and the dead to help me campaign." As his neighbour Marceline Kingat says, "Igorot rituals were always performed because of Lamén's belief that ritual is a way of bringing back good fortune and a way of preserving life."



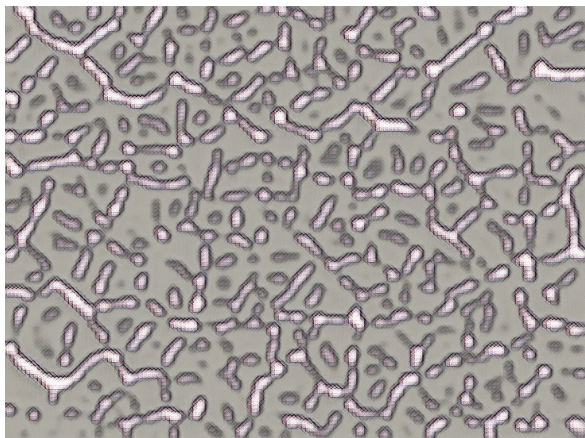


The Ethics

Benedict De Spinoza, 1677

Note.—Before going any further, I wish here to explain, what we should understand by nature viewed as active (*natura naturans*), and nature viewed as passive (*natura naturata*). I say to explain, or rather call attention to it, for I think that, from what has been said, it is sufficiently clear, that by nature viewed as active we should understand that which is in itself, and is conceived through itself, or those attributes of substance, which express eternal and infinite essence, in other words (Prop. xiv., Coroll. i., and Prop. xvii., Coroll. ii) God, in so far as he is considered as a free cause.

By nature viewed as passive I understand all that which follows from the necessity of the nature of God, or of any of the attributes of God, that is, all the modes of the attributes of God, in so far as they are considered as things which are in God, and which without God cannot exist or be conceived.

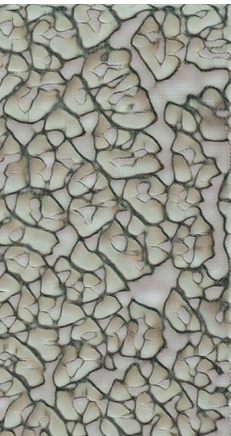


Non-Stationary Texture Synthesis by Adversarial Expansion

Yang Zhou et al., 2018

The fundamental goal of example-based texture synthesis is to generate a texture, usually larger than the input, that faithfully captures all the visual characteristics of the exemplar, yet is neither identical to it, nor exhibits obvious unnatural looking artifacts[...]

The discriminator is trained (in parallel to the generator) to distinguish between actual larger blocks from the exemplar and those produced by the generator. This self-supervised adversarial training takes place for each specific texture exemplar. Once trained, the fully convolutional generator may be used to generate extended textures up to double the original exemplar's size, that visually closely resemble the exemplar. Even larger textures may be synthesized by feeding the generator with its own output.



The Nature and the Art of Workmanship

David Pye, 1968

If I must ascribe a meaning to the word craftsmanship because, I shall say as a first approximation that it means simply workmanship using any kind of technique or apparatus, in which the quality of the result is not predetermined, but depends of the judgement, dexterity and care which the maker exercises as he works. The essential idea is that the quality of the result is continually at risk during the process of making; and so I shall call this kind of workmanship “The workmanship of risk”: an uncouth phrase, but at least descriptive.

It may be mentioned in passing that in workmanship the care counts for more than the judgement and dexterity; though care may well become habitual and unconscious.

With the workmanship of risk we may contrast the workmanship of certainty, always to be found in quantity production, and found in its pure state in full automation. In workmanship of this sort the quality of the result is exactly predetermined before a single saleable thing is made. In less developed forms of it the result of each operation done during production is predetermined.

