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ARCHAEOLOGIES



Lyz Soto

Archaeologies

A catalogue lives there.
Off Downing Street
under old world arches
passed avaritia symptoms
—find marked deposits pre-
to post-contact, where
all things are namded names
they write in textbooks, read
in Agatha Christie novels, where
archaeologists are good guys illuminating
the gifts of civilization.
Data collection, they call it.
Preservation, they christen it.

52
135
1012
32000
1452601

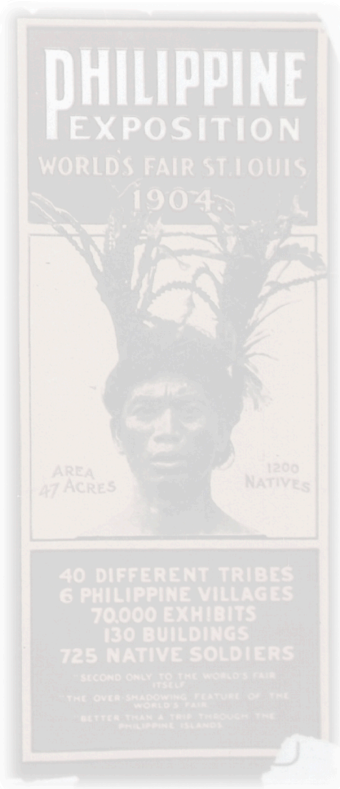
adze
adze
partial arrowheads
pottery shards
bone fragments

obsidian
basalt
chert
clay
human

Listed between breaks
for tea. Fascinating
they called it crammed
in fortresses
bloated with specimens
surveyed as conquered bounty.
That's when it
became clear. They
consume and I longed
to feast too, so it
became hoarded treasures

digestible
in bite size
shavings.

I devoured
my own
exotics as my
young. Still
too shapeless
for defense.



This article articulates
every structural fracture

where I on abandoned
yellowed cards

wrote descriptions

of healed breaks
of worn veneers

of the last wound
that killed.

We appear less scary
in these pieces.
Translated
into handheld aliens.

47 phalanges
1 patella
6 thoracic
my sacrum

in a glass case

observe
my left iliac.

Interpretation:

a makeshift platter
or a scoop
with just enough curvature
to fill a mouthful
while gnawing dismembered spirits
for peer-reviewed journals.

Taxonomical Tales

Once upon a time, when I was a little girl, drawn into a table with all my curious dermis dissected:

Decorative boxes:
 Nomenclature:
 Taxonomy:
 Category:
 Boundary:
 Border:
 Limit:
 Margin:

I have stories of sugar to tell you. If you segregate all these racial bits, imagine the nubile dollops of authentic saccharine you might cull from this wreck.¹ But puzzle your face, as I laugh until my hands cup full of bile, and let go. So much history in a box. So much monster telling. But flirt with me. Speak to me of evidence, of reason, of orgasmic empiricism, while I draw you a box: the knife-fine border around all my graded flesh.³

Each tender sinew massaged into a box.
 — Careful delicate time was spent on each label.
 Someone made me a picture.
 — They drew arrows to frightful pieces. Gave them containable names.

Beautiful sharp corners
 clear lines
 black ≠ white
 so comforting
 so 101101001²
 so easy
 so other
 so odd.

caucasian
 oriental
 indian
 white
 yellow
 brown
 red
 courage
 coward
 savage
 normal
 easy
 exotic
 extinct

When do I become keeper of my ancestors' sins? Am I absolved in a shit-storm of pain?
 ~~~~~  
 UNSTABLE: SLIPPAGE  
 ~~~~~  
 Am I absolved in a shit-storm of pain?⁴ When did this become 0000001111 1111000001 11?
 ~~~~~

Check mark an easy comfortable box.

*Notes to the Machine*

1. When do we become keeper of our ancestors' sins? If I am not accountable to my great great grandfather's actions...if my great great granddaughter is not accountable for my actions...then I can do anything...call me eater of worlds/swallower of skies. None of your words can touch me.<sup>1</sup>
2. Do numbers make it better? If we are countable, are we less human or more?<sup>2</sup> How much does she need to matter? Imagine my eye as a digit as a measure of my grey matter.
3. Imagine all the darkness between her legs. Assign decimals and count. Watch her divinity snap shut.
4. Am I absolved in a shit-storm of pain? One common thread in my diasporic genealogical heritage is escape. Everyone was running {Notice the progressive past. See how this action was uncompleted. Remember this action could begin again}. And we all ran into someone else's home. If [When] my home was taken from me, so I might take your home from you...is it still stealing? Is it wrong when I hand you a fistful of suffering<sup>3</sup>...if that lessens my burden of beasts...should you shun me?

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<sup>1</sup> Colonized peoples created the conditions for liberal humanism, despite the disavowal of these conditions in the European political philosophy on which it is largely based. Racial classifications and an international division of labor emerged coterminously as parts of a genealogy that were not exceptional to, but were constitutive of, that humanism.  
—Lisa Lowe

*The Intimacies of Four Continents*

<sup>2</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century, the racialized sexual differentiation of Africans and East and South Asians emerged as a normative taxonomy that managed and spatially distanced these groups from the spheres within which “freedom” was established for European subjects.

—Lisa Lowe

*The Intimacies of Four Continents*

<sup>3</sup> All of the Western nations have been caught in a lie: a lie of their pretended humanism. History has no moral justification and the west has no moral authority. For a very long time America prospered; this prosperity cost millions of people their lives. Now, not even those who are the most spectacular beneficiaries of this prosperity, are able to endure these benefits. They can neither enjoy, nor do without these benefits. Above all, imagine the price paid the victims or subjects for this way of life and so they cannot afford to know why the victims are revolting.

—James Baldwin

*I Am Not Your Negro*

*Aberrations*

When I was nine years old my father took a trip to South Africa.  
He went with a government delegation  
all from Hawai'i  
all a racket of racial mixing  
all Asian  
all Pacific  
all Brown.  
They talked with mostly Whites  
    stayed with mostly Whites  
        dined with      mostly Whites      said

Don't worry, you are our guests.  
You are Honorary Whites.

Don't worry, you are our guests.  
Today, you are Honorary Whites.

Don't worry, today you are not Black.  
Imagine you are Honorary Whites.

Don't worry, today you are our guests.  
For today, you are Honorary Whites.

Don't worry today, when bodies become borders

Don't worry about that skin you can't  
remember. Say pantao: Do you know  
pantao? Say karapatang pantao: Do you  
remember? Don't worry if you can't  
remember. For today, you are

... when all our migration

honorary Whites.

of history becomes a White picket fence . . .

*Visayas as islands as a Distance*

You should be more familiar, cousin.  
We should know the scent  
of each other's houses.

I will tell you now.  
My house smells of fried onion  
of dish soap of dog of red dirt  
of olive oil of chili and always  
of coffee.

How is it across the way?

Tell me  
does your house smell of  
garlic or patis? Does a wind run  
through louvered windows  
—bring Frangipani, Ylang ylang,  
or Sampaguita in its wake?

Is there always cooked rice in a pot?

Do you pray  
to ancestors  
do you keep your ruins  
standing do you visit  
with arms filled with food  
do you bring inday-inday  
or leche flan to the table?

Cousin, tomorrow I would grow  
bitter melon and malunggay  
in a garden filled  
with parsley, sage, rosemary,  
and thyme.

*Remember Ilocos Norte, Grandpa?*

I don't.  
But sometimes I think I see  
pictures haunting an oil slick  
surface of random puddles.

More than thirty years later  
I still find shame creeping  
from beneath my collar.  
I didn't

understand most of you.  
Your words in brisk pidgin shuffled  
by a stiff eardrum unused/unwilling to hear.  
I wasn't

able to pause until your whole face grinned  
and you offered twenty dollars for me  
to stop running and face you and  
I did.

When I was eight years old I did not  
have to look up to meet your eyes  
as you called me granddaughter.  
I can

imagine your sparse grey hair your dry brown  
skin your calloused thick hands your rounded  
boxer's back while I read for a living.  
I can

almost hear you ask where are the vegetables  
in my garden? Where is the work in my hands?  
When will I remember . . .  
I have

tapped a tattoo of you. More than thirty years  
later, you, your son, my son are wayfinding  
ink in my skin—a persistent compass—directed to lands  
that will always        and never        be home.



*Ask Me About Maui*

I grew up where breaching humpbacks  
burst water skins.  
Their long moans  
a bass line  
for my dust laden toes to travel

before the sand filled with people  
before bodies displaced the water  
before whale watching was a thing

we walked a road to Keawakapu

after ducks and chickens were fed  
after weeds were pulled  
after water poured on dry land

we walked a road to Keawakapu  
prayed our heads full of salt  
our hands full of air  
our bodies full of sand.

Ask me about Maui  
and I become a body below the surface  
suspended where water is shadow  
the sun a ripple of sound  
and I am still that child waiting  
for light to catch me.

Ask me about Maui  
and I will tell you about a father  
building lace across the sky  
growing 'uala and 'awapuhi in hardpan.

Ask me about Maui  
and I will tell you about a mother  
growing tomatoes and sunflowers  
in a desert among brush fire and thorns.

Ask me about Maui  
and I will tell you about race  
about lessons in whiteness  
about learning in local  
about black dogs and bok bok

about the plausibility of denial  
in school yards with nunchakus  
and noses bleeding histories  
of resentment  
about truck beds and oversize tires  
filled with the sour  
leftovers of bagasse.

Ask me about Maui  
and I will tell you  
about a daughter's bedroom window  
and a mother growing pakalana  
so her child's sleeping  
might always smell sweet.

Ask me about Maui  
and I might tell you about the bombs  
about the shaking glass  
about the specter-ed legends of forgotten goats  
split by shrapnel and a vagina  
cracked to her womb, so  
only dust could fill her.

Ask me about Maui  
and I will ask you  
Have you seen the ocean hollow to a drum?  
Have you seen the sea, a mass of atoms, shaking apart?  
Have you seen how we would strip  
ourselves to scaffold?

I grew up dreaming of Haleakalā  
and fishhooks and nets  
of weeping whales and target practice  
of maps and fingers drawing  
among the ruins of ancient coral shoots.

Ask me about Maui  
and I will tell you  
Translate yourself into a cartographer  
into a reader of atlases  
and in a drop of salted water discover  
fear as a mountain  
love as a river's mouth  
laugh as a crag  
rage as an ocean trench  
and drink.