

ACT I: Prologue, The Disclaimer

VOICE OVER (VO):

This talk was written in a manner true to its subject and true to the manner in which I often find myself working, on planes and trains and in hotel rooms, while circulating, in transit and in collaboration. With thanks to Ming Lin, Sami Hammana, Sugata Ray, Florian Cramer, Renan Laru-an, and Simon Kentgens for listening, contributing, agreeing, disagreeing, and providing further readings.

A few disclaimers, as I have registered offense at my use of words like West and East and center and periphery. These are contested non-sites. Sometimes, those who dwell in (or have assimilated to?) centers of capital believe (or perhaps misunderstand?) that these concepts are invoked as static places rather than ideological spaces/concepts, and assert that West, East, center, and periphery do not exist. Similar to those who assert that race does not exist, and they are only half-right: These are not static places empirically identifiable with a GPS coordinate on a map but they do exist in a hyperreal state. By West, I mean the Hyperreal West—a term I heard from Indian art historian Sugata Ray at a conference panel in Hong Kong—a concept that was shoved down my post-colonial throat for most of my formative years in the Philippines. The Hyperreal West is a mythical dreamland, the only place where civilization can allegedly be found and that I, as its colonial post-property, should bow down to in awe-full respect. Anyone who has grown up in a post-colony might recognize the shiny oppression of this place and understand the weight of it. The Hyperreal West may not exist as the land promised, but it most certainly manifests noxious side-effects. By periphery, I mean a mode of functioning. Not a fixed site, but rather a condition determined by one's access to (cultural) capital and delineated by precarity. In his essay, *An Impossible Profession*, Filipino researcher and curator Renan Laru-an, thus describes the peripheral condition in the shadow of ever more prevalent politics of emergency/precarity/disaster/rescue/aid: “The assignment of the peripheral to a site is an unfulfilled death-wish... It takes place with expediency from the staging of threat towards the dramaturgical lines of safety... No one should be left behind *here*, and everyone must leave for *elsewhere*. In this [lies] a clear picture of the periphery as a space of constant alertness. Its only knowable time is emergency.” By center, I mean one of many nodes of dominance that amass, even monopolize, resources as well as the legitimacy that the volume of those resources provide. By center, I also refer to the subjects that benefit from being in closest proximity to that capital. These subjects tend to be heard the loudest, and make no mistake: now living in Europe, half-Spanish, and having grown up as a member of the Philippine upper class, I count myself amongst them. The hyperreal places and states and phenomena exist, just like privilege, on a moving scale. Their meaning and borders change depending on where and by whom the measuring is done.

If my use of these words offends you, I apologize. Also, if you're thinking it, please don't tell me to stop apologizing. (Yes, this is a thing, I am asked in Europe and the United States to stop apologizing often enough that it starts to require a disclaimer on my end.) It's how I was raised, a mark of provenance. Where I'm from, we apologize in small talk and in public settings as a form of politeness and deference. “I'm sorry” does not mean I think myself less than you. It means I honor your point of view, though we may disagree. It means I accept that I may be proven wrong. It is an allowance that both speaker and listener may occupy for saving face.

Act VI: Epilogue, The Undelivered Lecture

Tropical Megacity Circulatory Tactics

I was going to read, as I normally do, an excerpt from text written about two years ago that describes the material context in which we—as Hardworking Goodlooking, vehiculating the research of the Office of Culture and Design (RIP)—published books in Metro Manila. But now that I've lived in the Netherlands for over a year, it seems somewhat haunting to read about how we used to print in the city where I was born. I miss the city, because it is home and I feel that I don't quite fit in the city where I am now, a chilly hotbed of architectural cuteness and modernist order and laser cutting and design thinking. And I hate Manila in the same breath, as it has become an epicenter for neocolonial fascism, toxic and institutionalized violence and misogyny, human rights violations, and perverse authoritarianism under the rule of Rodrigo Duterte. So to read what I wrote about the city two years ago—before my unexpected and politically induced resentment set in, before I longed for the city so deeply, as migrants do—is a haunting.

Also, the cottage industry street scenes I describe in my previous text have disappeared from the area around Recto Avenue in Old Manila, thanks to the newly elected Mayor Isko Moreno. This young and dangerously idealistic neoliberal wet dream of a candidate decided, soon after he was sworn into office, to sweep the streets, quite literally, of the vibrant commerce that has always characterized the city. He did it in under three days, if memory serves me, which it often doesn't. There are pictures of him pointing a firehose at the stalls of an underground pedestrian walkway where tiny printers and tailors usually set up shop. He looks rather heroic, unfortunately. Photos of the disemboweled downtown area after the cleanup shocked me. The streets, once engorged with informal markets and cottage industries and informal dwellers (usually migrants from the rural areas), were empty. I could not recognize my home, playground, source of vitality and good humour,

print center, field of inquiry. Hawkers and street vendors of all kinds have, over centuries, built and sustained an informal economy in Manila. It is a secondary market that caters mostly to those who can't afford store-bought bottles of soy sauce so they have to buy soy sauce from big bottles repackaged into little sachets by a woman with a sidewalk store. We call this the sachet economy, and it has profoundly influenced the way large corporations distribute consumer goods in countries like the Philippines. The soy sauce vendor's sidewalk neighbor—a shoe shiner or stamp maker or peanut stall or restaurant-in-a-basket or goldsmith—can't afford storefront space for their microbusiness. So they build and unbuild their cardboard and plywood empire, cheek to cheek, maybe on wheels, every morning and evening. They might even sleep in it. These sidewalkers might serve clients such as a nursing student or call center worker or motorcycle messenger or department store clerk or security guard on their way home from work but stuck in so much traffic that street-side services are most convenient.

All of that industry sustaining all of those people, gone in a few days. No relocation plan, no warning, no alternative, no choice, no fucks given. Boom. Just like that. And the rest of the megacity reacted with glee. They also cheered when over 12,000 people were killed with no due process in a much-hyped drug war. Rodrigo Duterte's pretext for sowing fear against a scapegoat culprit (drug users) for all the country's ills. His consolidation of strongman power involved authorizing the shooting of dubiously identified "suspects" on sight. For long weeks, at the beginning of his presidency, many of these neutralized suspects appeared as corpses, dumped on trafficked streets at mysterious hours, their heads wrapped in packaging tape. Those affected by the drug war? The very same strata of citizens who participate in the sidewalk economy. Duterte's cheerleaders pretend his constituency is exclusively composed of the salt of the earth, of sidewalkers. They sell Duterte as the poor man's president. This is a manipulation. Many of those who enable Duterte's violent and rape-joke-laden policy also applaud the likes of Mayor Isko Moreno and his neoliberal street cleanup project that aims to "Singaporize" the city.

I have heard that in other countries around Southeast Asia, local governments had tried to do the same, sweep the cities clean of hawkers. But the public cried out in protest, because they understood that this street culture was integral to their identity and survival. And the initiatives were halted, or so I was told. Not so in Manila. We are thrilled to have our cities spayed. We have bought into the modern narrative of cleanliness, order, progress, and design thinking at the expense of autonomy and individual rights and, of course, the poor.

Manila is, by the way, a city of around 13 million people. She is a marvel of circulation that happens against all odds. Overpopulation is only one cause of the city's congestion. Rural to urban migration also plays a large part, and not just the kind of migration wherein people reside permanently in the city. Manila's daytime population is roughly 3 million more than her nighttime population. She counts on the influx of peri-urban workers who cannot find work in their cities or suppliers who deliver truck after van after truck after van of any number of imaginable and unimaginable goods that a megacity needs to survive.

For decades, there were only two main roads to get in and out of the city, Northern Luzon Expressway and Southern Luzon Expressway. Now there are 5 or 6 access roads, perhaps more now that Duterte has yoked us with abandon to China's One Belt, One Road neo-Silk Road infrastructural masterplan. But even these arteries are not nearly enough to decrease the city's

congestion. Evening rush hour lasts 6 hours, from 3 PM to 9 PM. More when it rains, which is often. A typical commute from home to work or school may last 3 hours, one way. Which means it is plausible for a citizen to spend 6 hours a day in a moving vehicle, 5 or 6 days a week. There are only two light rail transit or overhead tram lines plying a route down two major streets. The rest of the city is left to mobilize for itself, with misnomered public transport. It isn't exactly public. All of the buses and jeepneys and tricycles and pedicabs are privately owned. The city is privately and publicly congested, but somehow a massive amount of citizens circulate. If the arteries are clogged, alternative capillaries are opened. The citizens, the lifeblood, find a way around faltering infrastructure that bleeds from multiple forms of corruption, exhaustion, and ineptitude. Somehow the city does not collapse. Her citizens are too weak to complain but strong enough to survive.

To live in Manila, if one dares to live at street level outside of air-conditioned bubbles, is to learn how to circulate through the cracks, even when they tell you it's impossible, even under punitive threat. It is to learn a certain kind of self-belief that lives in the muscles, allowing you to perform feats of the body beyond all rational frameworks of what the body is capable. It is to manifest mobility as an act of faith. It is to have the courage to cross 12-lane major highways as a pedestrian, bullfighting SUVs and 16 wheelers. It is to develop the cold blood to cross (or simply lounge in) neck deep, E.coli-laden floodwater. In many ways, growing up in Manila prepares one quite well to make independently published books. You circulate madly but feel like you're going nowhere. You have faith but are constantly on the verge of giving up. You are full of life force but also utterly exhausted and afraid all the time.

Dutch Institutional Circulatory Ennui

Content and research as a humour by which to measure a culture's critical vitality, the blood within the body public, the publishing haуз. A humour that has become thick with access to cultural capital, heavy and sluggish with the re-cyclical management of knowledge and, in rare cases, with the production of it.

Indian activist and Philosopher Sunil Sahasrabudhey writes that knowledge is only produced outside of academic or institutional environments. It is generated, in the form of craft and informal technology, vernacular wisdom, socio-political effects and behavior, datasets, affective currency, history unfolding, material culture, market flows, etceteras at a street or popular level. Those in the "high" cognitive class merely manage knowledge, shuffling it around, stacking, reconfiguring, finding connections and leveraging the resulting conclusions, playing mahjong like my grandmother used to play with my great aunts on Sundays. But this cognitive class does not actually produce knowledge. The key, thus to empowering those marginalized—those made to believe that they do not have any value, much less intellectual value, outside of being the menial labor force—is to position them as makers of knowledge. They could thus recognize themselves as sources who control and contribute, not just as fetishized victims to be mined of what they know and how they do. Some thinkers and grant-giving bodies would certainly take offense at this assertion that knowledge cannot be produced in institutions. Especially those steeped in and/or otherwise seduced by Western and almost invariably phallic concepts of the intellectual genius, in his ivy-laden tower, somewhere in the seat of modernism, surrounded by chocolate bunnies. Their discomfort at being stripped of the label of knowledge producers speaks volumes of cognitive institutionalization and its

reproductive violence. Reproductive in the sense that the Western institution aims to produce endogamic copies of itself, equipped with an ISBN as birth certificate that establishes someone's divine parentage as Author or Editor.

Since I moved to Europe and now, for the first time in my life, have academic institutional access, I was shocked to discover a dirty secret of Western schools. They publish expensive books that do not circulate. These books sit in boxes in the rooms of deans, directors, lecturers, professors, and assorted fleshy creatures of the research community. These books—which, to me, seem quite expensive to produce—are entirely subsidized. Glossy as a fresh manicure yet astonishingly cheap to purchase. They are so cheap, you can even pick them up for free. People shove them into your hands and beg you to take them away. "I have three more boxes at home or in the research center or under my desk." These books are filthy secrets, public failures, knots in the stomach. They do not circulate, and because they do not move it is assumed that nobody wants them.

Some of these books are vanities, uselessly large calling cards, travesties that might be called by euphemisms such as coffee table books or catalogues or monographs or retrospectives or collections of essays or readers. They may look more or less cosmetic, but what they share is a lack of vigor, which concurrently manifests in the difficulty or impossibility of their circulation. They are often peppered with logos of credible cultural currency, to no avail. They are unurgent, well-fed, and gone to flesh. They have not known the disquiet of hunger.

Some of these publications are actually quite interesting. You see some in smaller runs, published in-house on employee print cards or at the print workshops on campus, on gloss-less paper, on the company printer. Sometimes they're fancier publications with some pretty decent content, produced under reputable co-publishing schemes and 5-year research trajectories. They *could* circulate well, the content is strong, but they *don't*. They stack up in the same kind of boxes that end up hidden in backrooms. A source of embarrassment. A mark of excess. Those backrooms become engorged with static wealths, useless accumulations, overly expensive research trinkets.

The humors and bloodways of the Western institution are thick with I'm not quite sure what, at this point. As a once-outsider looking in and now insider looking around, it's easy to say the blood has gravied with the fat of luxury that breeds complacency that provokes a sedentary turn that corrupts into anxiety. To be fair, I have seen this same thing happen in colleges and universities and local government unit offices in the Philippines as well. Except less, because there isn't always much money for publishing. But when they do print, they tend to go big, copies in the thousands, and the boxes, they stack just the same. To be even fairer, the first book I ever published suffered this fate. I sympathize with the pain of poor circulation. I remember it sharply as a complaint that manifests in my body as a stomachache or a pain in my heart.

To locate these pains of publishing within the stomach and the heart, the physical body. To write constantly rooted in the voice and experience of the I, the cognitive body, the I that *I* am, is not something academia quite likes, especially when its preferred gray matter, the thesis, preens for public debut. At this moment especially, it races to to erase the personal—which is deemed vulgar—in favor of the abstraction, which I'm guessing has higher value within a framework that sees emotion, honesty, sweat, blood, tears, cursing, belly laughter... all these humours... as something to be hidden, too undignified to circulate. We talk about embodied knowledge, but rarely show the toll

knowledge production (or is it management?) takes on our bodies, the grotesque or unself-conscious shapes it twists us into. We talk about emotional labor as valuable. Emotional labor: A favorite battle cry for a certain kind of dusty wave feminist who excludes those who contradict her from the sacrosanct realm of wyleydi (or wesleydi) feminine liberation. This exclusion may be targeted at transwomen or mothers or hijabi or, more insiduously, diasporic allies who disagree with their site-specific resentments that do not quite translate to other cultural contexts. Anyway, I was saying. Emotional labor. Despite it being waved around all the time as a (fund-friendly) flag of all trades, it still remains largely invisible in formal settings of study. When any signs of actual, effortful emotions arise, they are not given the dignified label of emotional labor, rather one is reprimanded for hysteria. That was inappropriate. That was too familiar. That was a show of weakness. That was uncalled for. Our humors are spit into polite handkerchiefs and shoved hastily back into pockets of files never shown, drastically edited, trashed altogether. It is a humour, like blood, that makes a mess and won't wash out. The stain of bodily humors recalls shame, especially if they have been left in the aftermath of defective wanting or reproductive desire.

As if emotional labor were only a matter of humiliation and suppression rather than a highly intellectual set of skills applied to professional settings. In its first sociological definition, emotional labor was defined as the work to suppress emotions carried out in relation to one's professional position in order to achieve a desired effect. Emotional labor was conceived as the smile of the flight attendant or fast food cashier who absorbs human rudeness because the customer is king. Surprisingly, we abide by this definition (because we like to agree with reputedly fashionable sources in print) and yet lament the fact that emotional labor is relegated to some sort of low-skill, non-intellectual, usually feminized, subservient position. Perhaps it is time to revise our definition of emotional labor in the frictionary.

Other Humorous Observations

Regarding published content as an ill humour, manifesting in the body as sickness, sometimes of the blood itself. Today I boarded a plane for the third time in three months, and I was tired, bone tired. I have been living this way, in sickly transit, for 6 years, ever since I started generating content as a member of the body public. Books (for lack of a better word... here I understand the book in its expanded form, beyond the traditional codex) require one to circulate, literally, physically, with the body. Books do not carry themselves, unless one belongs to a previously established empire of distributor infrastructure, with its Romanic network of bookways and its colony of peaceful merchant retailers. Books must go on one's back, climb on one's limbs, as leeches, as hand-carried items, stuffed into one's suitcases in lieu of warm clothing. (Hopefully the warm weather holds at my destination, my tropical heart shudders at the thought of book fair autumns, which count as winters as far as I'm concerned.) Books, at this juncture of the body public, require one to perform their content. More and more, one does not simply write and print them. One sells their mode of production in lectures, conferences, interviews, hallways, studio visits, assorted networkeries. One performs the practice that begat them in classrooms, workshops, summer schools, universities, art schools, festivals, biennials, assemblies. One turns them into films, TV series, full-length albums, plays, musical revues. The performative (or perhaps better said, performantic) turn of publishing requires one to become a minstrel and go on tour, to circulate and circumnavigate.

Excessive circulation causes all manner of illness, tumescence in the limbs. The long-haul threat of deep vein thrombosis from actual swelling of the legs that takes up to two days to subside after a cross-ocean flight. One herniated disc and another one on the way. (But you'd never tell from the way I swing my coffin-weight suitcases on and off trains and buses.) And my faithful book fair season friend, anemia. The circulatory and other diseases that have peppered my publishing affliction are not the only illnesses I suffer. The largest fever of all is that of making the publications at all. Why engage in this quixotic folly from a country like the Philippines? Though reading literacy is quite high, critical literacy is maimed by a post-colonial and even pre-colonial value system that punishes independent thought as an attack on the social fabric itself. Why make text-heavy research publications in a country that has no interest in them? These books are, confoundingly, consumed most eagerly in the ex-colonial seats of power that they critique. To go against indoctrination, to be the single defective heliotrope in the field that looks away from the sun (Side note: I recently learned that sunflowers that do this are elderly), to diverge or divert one's gaze from that which our anointed intellectuals and/or group think tell us is important... this is treated as madness. Book makers as convalescing patients, stricken with psychosis.

Financially also, we bleed out. Book making is for fools who've willfully unsewn the bottoms of their pockets.

What is also madness is the thickening of the waist, the engorgement of those who reside in centers of power. This madness is transferrable to those who frequent centers of power, though they may reside in the periphery and may not be so healthy-looking after a journey to the developed dreamlands. This is evident in the way their suitcases—swollen with their own publications on the journey Westward or Northish—almost burst with cultural capital in the form of publications on the way back home. Heavy gifts or compulsive purchases, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter that you lived as a mouse during your government subsidized master's degree in Norway, losing half your weight because the subsidy didn't come on time most months, rationing your meals at 3 cookies and not much else per day. Doesn't matter that your home university in Manila now owns you for the next 5 years and that you cannot travel overseas without their express permission until that period is over. By access to the center of knowledge, your privilege increases. Your waist is a full 4 sizes smaller. But you are now engorged. Now you are (legally) bound to recirculate the capital you have gained.

Publishing as bloodletting. Bloodletting as a form of redistribution of access to cultural capital. But also uncirculated or thickened blood as the sign of a sickness, a convalescence. Too much prosperity, too much fat, leading to problems of the heart, prone to attacks, bodies of too much flesh, the need to eat leaner, leaving food on the table for those on the periphery, hungry for access, hungry, period.