

PEDESTRIANS DANCING: *Review of Underpass by* **Contemporary Dance** **Network Philippines** *February 22, 2011, Belmonte Underpass,* **Quezon City**

■ **RINA ANGELA CORPUS**

Rina Angela Corpus is an assistant professor at the Department of Art Studies, College of Arts and Letters, University of the Philippines Diliman. Her first book, *Defiant Daughters Dancing: Three Independent Women Dance* was published by UP Press in 2007. Her research interests include feminist dance history, spirituality and gender issues in the arts.

Writhing, wringing, falling, walking, flailing, tossing: these movements comprised the Contemporary Dance Network Philippines' (CDNP) novel dance at the newly constructed Belmonte Underpass in Quezon City in cooperation with the QC Culture and Arts Council, a fitting celebration of February Arts Month. Choreographed by Raul Alcosoba and performed by UP Dance Company and Airdance, this less than 3-minute dance entitled *Underpass*, is a truly inventive and contemporary way of using urban space for the purpose of making the everyday more artful. It was reminiscent of another project the group did of dancing in the Light Rail Transit station, entitled *Moving Dance @ LRT Express*, to celebrate the International Dance Day of 2010. A few years back, another initiative brought TULArt, which were Filipino poems posted all over the LRT. We see more attempts to bring art closer to the everyday commuter, making art more cutting-edge and independent, while staying away from the commercially risqué.

Wearing mostly black and grey regular apparel, the young dancers traversed back and forth the underpass, alongside fixed billboards and unassuming passersby. The resounding music of *Carmina Burana* by Carl Orff is probably

one of the things that set the mood of the piece as beyond everyday, while being in a quotidian site. Onlookers, friends, dance enthusiasts, photographers crowded the sides of the underpass, cluing us that this is, after all, a performative moment, and that dance is chiefly fugitive whose time-bound momentum needs to be captured. As the music crescendoes, the dancers finally rush up through the steps of the pedestrian tunnel, as if commuters galloping their way to catch the next bus.

One of the symptoms of the postmodern aesthetic is the breaking down of the fixity accorded by western Cartesian canonical construction of art that is traditionally construed to be distant, detached and far removed from mundane reality. Splintering binarist notions of art versus life, art versus reality, art versus society, the postmodern has the potential to overthrow such well-entrenched canons that this CDNP initiative is influenced by.

Cross-disciplinal moves also characterize this aesthetic with the melding of dance and architecture, dance and space, a project taken up by more contemporary dancers nowadays, including dancer Carol Brown of New Zealand and Filipina-American Marie Alonzo in New Jersey. Notably, Alonzo performed an 8-minute solo entitled *Till You Return* (2006) set to the live guitar music of a Constancio de Guzman kundiman, along the sidestreets of Princeton as part of the town's Communiversities Outdoor Performances. In the same year, Alonzo did *When Blue Skies Cry*, a tribute to the September 11 American tragedy danced outdoors at the sprawling Ronald Rogers Arboretum, performed by 8 dancers.

The crossbreed of dance and film is also notable here, as Contemporary Dance Network captures these performances in film that may now be viewed virtually by anyone via the CDNP official website and selected social networks, including Facebook. The everyday-ness of watching dance videos in You Tube, Facebook and the general worldwide web, especially for this generation, also dissolves the previous divide between art and its publics, making dance a cultural common as it was once a shared and embodied practice by our erstwhile sustainable and evenhanded indigenous societies.

In these instances, dance becomes a site-specific piece that is outside the boxed spaces and notions of legitimacy accorded only to art that is confined within the formal proscenium space – the theatre, the museum, the concert hall – where class and privilege are hierarchized in an unequal viewing locus. The choice of a little known underpass in Quezon City as venue also offers us a fresh move away from the stereotyped center of art performances like

the Cultural Center of the Philippines, and Manila as the standard bastion of the arts.

Other yearly main projects of the CDNP are the Contemporary Dance Map, a celebration of International Dance Day every April via performance tours in alternative dance spaces; and the Wifi Body Festivals which are a showcase of upcoming dancers and groups with juried competitions of contemporary, mostly multidisciplinary performances of various dance groups and companies in the country. The founding groups of CDNP are *Dance Forum*, *Airdance*, *UP Dance Company*, *Chameleon Dance Theatre*, *Kahayag Theatre* and *Dance Collective*, and *Lyceum Theatre Company*.