

## **Across the City, Toward the Nation: Philippine Poetry, Metropolitan Trains, and the *Tulaan sa Tren* Project**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In 2008 and 2010, the Philippine government's National Book Development Board (NBDB) and Light Railway Transit Authority (LRTA) launched *Tulaan sa Tren*, a project "designed to provide train passengers with an appreciation for Philippine Literature as they listen to their favorite celebrities reading poems about Manila over the public announcement system of LRT Line 2 stations" (goodnewspilipinas.com). This project also initiated a poetry writing contest and produced poetry anthologies that predominantly depicted views of the city and city life. Part appreciation, part reevaluation, part critique, this paper initiates a sensing of: (1) the train as a figure of modern life; (2) NBDB and LRTA's enterprise as a state measure to bridge the disparity between the public's reception to Philippine literature and the intelligentsia's academic way of life; and (3) literary representations of the city in the poetry anthologies this project produced, namely *Train of Thought: Poems from Tulaan sa Tren* and *Off the Beaten Track: Poems from Tulaan sa Tren 2*. This paper argues that the institutional intervention of popularizing travel, literature, and the city may be seen as a way of generating a socio-political and literary consciousness among train commuters who are linked to and implicated in the issues and anxieties of their lives in the urban environment. By analyzing the poems in the anthologies, this essay ultimately critiques *Tulaan sa Tren's* attempt at nation building, identity making, and city mapping.

*Keywords:* *Tulaan sa Tren*, Philippine poetry, train literature, the city, NBDB

In 2008 and 2010, the National Book Development Board (NBDB) and the Light Railway Transit Authority (LRTA) launched an initiative that aimed to "invigorate [the LRTA riding public's] appreciation for Philippine poetry and rekindle their interest in reading the best poets and authors of our country" (NBDB). Taking inspiration from New York City's *Poetry in Motion*, Instituto Cervantes's *Berso sa Metro*, and De La Salle University's *TULAART* (Pasion-Flores *Train of Thought*), this project was called *Tulaan sa Tren*—a literary, visual, and aural venture that involved

Filipino celebrities' recorded readings of selected Philippine poetry in Filipino and English (played over the LRT's public announcement system at certain times of the day) and display of posters of literary texts (installed inside the train for the perusal of daily passengers). This initiative stood on an objective of encouraging Filipinos not only to read or read more but, most importantly, to "Read Pinoy." According to NBDB's Executive Director Andrea Pasion-Flores, "the challenge was, and constantly is, how to make people want to read? How do we make poetry, which is hardest to sell, sell?" (*Train of Thought*). Taking on the challenge were institutions and individuals—such as the government, photographers, artists, composers, musical arrangers, voice coaches, media corporations, book publishing associations, publishers, poets, authors, and celebrity managers—who assisted in assuring that *Tulaan sa Tren* would live up to its purpose, promise, and potential of "transforming the country into a nation of readers" (Pasion-Flores *Train of Thought*) and redeeming one's train ride from the quagmire of frustration and disarray.<sup>1</sup> To Pasion-Flores, the number of active stakeholders the project had demonstrated that the more people get involved, the greater the impact *Tulaan sa Tren* would have on those who labored over it and those it aimed to address.

Such institutional attempt to put together literature and travel, rebrand a regularly crowded train as a "poetrain" (Nadera), and convert one's train commute into "a more meaningful and insightful journey" (Pulumbarit) easily garnered praises from academics, government agencies, journalists, publishers, and the people it intended to reach. Like New York City's Poetry in Motion, *Tulaan sa Tren* was seen as a caring gesture from a nation-state that wanted to educate Metro Manila's residents through an "invasive" approach of communicating literature, which may "[move passengers] to laughter, to the feeling of love, to the reflection of their existence" (Buenaventura qtd. in Pulumbarit). In other words, it meant to make Filipinos "a more reflective and scrutinizing people [in] just a train ride away" (Buenaventura qtd. in Pulumbarit). Akin to the literary and visual spectacle in the trains of New York City that offered passengers a "moment of timelessness in the busy day" (MTA.info) while informing them about the metropolis, NBDB's version also operated on a pedagogic and performative logic that at once presented the city as it is and how it should be. Through the mediums it employed and the ambition on which it was founded, *Tulaan sa Tren* simultaneously affirmed the city's *being* and limned its possible *becoming* to the degree that the images and poems accompanying this project mapped out the past and the as-yet present of an urban environment susceptible to the constant "play" of culture, politics, and history. Although Poetry in Motion and *Tulaan sa Tren* differed in their geographical reach (the former was able to service over 20 cities and states and over 15 million daily commuters in the USA, whereas the latter only concentrated on Metropolitan Manila), their multi-modal approaches

(the poems featured in the former also appeared on the reverse sides of Metro Cards, on the MTA's On-the-Go touch-screen kiosks, and in other transportation venues, while those of the latter were limited to LRT 2's train coaches), their social recall (the former was tagged as "one of the most popular public literary programs in American history," whereas the latter had to surrender to the ultimatum of a contract), and their mercantile value (the former's publication outputs were published and made available in the market for purchase by big printing presses in the USA, such as W. W. Norton and Marlowe & Co., while the latter's anthologies were chiefly put out by NBDB, which made them available for free online), both nonetheless endeavored to help create a readership through the works of emerging and established poets.<sup>2</sup>

However, unlike Poetry in Motion that was instituted largely to inform and entertain train passengers in the cities of America, *Tulaan sa Tren* had a more overtly nationalist end as it sought to revive literature's affinity to and participation in popular culture, enrich train commuters by providing them with a source of relevant distraction while in transit and, in one way or another, recuperate, if not arouse, through poetry a consciousness in tune with the rhythms of everyday life in the Philippines, particularly in Metro Manila. National Artist for Literature Bienvenido Lumbera confidently asserted that:

Nabibigyan nito ang mga commuters ng *kakaibang karanasan* habang lulan sila ng tren sa kanilang destinasyon. "Yan ang *pag-asang tangayin sila ng kapangyarihan ng salita* na binigyan ng pakpak ng makata. Kapag ang mga salitang makata ay ipinapasok sa ating malay, *nababanat ang ating diwa* at ang bakas na naiwan ay *nakapagpapayaman sa ating pagdanas sa pang-araw-araw na buhay*. Ang *Tulaan sa Tren*, sa makatuwid ay makataong serbisyo ng NBDB (Lumbera qtd. in Garcia, emphasis added)

(This gives commuters a different life experience while they are aboard the train onto their destination. It comes with the hope that they will be carried away by the potency of words that the poet has given wings and flight. When poetic words are made part of our awareness, our spirit is stretched and the traces enrich the way we experience our everyday life. *Tulaan sa Tren*, in other words, is a humane service of NBDB.)

Lumbera's appraisal needs further analysis, if only to thresh out the probable implications of its optimism toward a state-sponsored project that attempted to instrumentalize the written word and the poetic form in espousing a literacy of an urban register. The cited passage assumes a formation of a "different life experience" or *kakaibang karanasan* among commuters aboard a train, which did not only cut across the city to signal departure and arrival, but also carried with it literary texts

of a certain potency (*kapangyarihan ng salita*). As one of the editors of *Tulaan sa Tren's Off the Beaten Track: Poems from Tulaan sa Tren 2*, Lumbera foregrounded an awareness (*malay*) and spirit (*diwa*) inflected by the travelling texts accompanying a train ride, which an administrative and cultural body like the NBDB aimed to repackage as a “humanizing” experience. Lumbera’s statement hinted at the capacity of social institutions to sustain the pertinence of programs that ideologically and administratively intend to control the metropolitan environment, on the one hand, and, on the other, manage the lives of city dwellers and passengers through cognitive and affective measures such as visual installations, literary readings, and artistic performances in public places. Furthermore, Lumbera’s confidence in *Tulaan sa Tren* signified a recognition and evaluation of the government’s ability to educate its citizenry with regard to a nation’s or a city’s history and social order not only through literature, but also through state-owned properties such as public trains.

This trajectory of reasoning informs this paper’s interventions, which primarily revolve around and branch out from the inquiry: Of what consequence is the *Tulaan sa Tren* project? This paper recognizes that by rebranding a normally crowded train, commissioning Filipino celebrities to record works of Filipino writers, and publishing *Train of Thought: Poems from Tulaan sa Tren* (2008) and *Off the Beaten Track: Poems from Tulaan sa Tren 2* (2009), the academe and the government tried to mediate the lives of Filipino commuters and generate among them a social consciousness very much linked to and implicated in the issues of their city living. With no attempts to be conclusive, this paper begins a sensing of: (1) the train as a figure of urbanization that accommodates and propagates the conflicting desires and subject formations of the city’s inhabitants; (2) NBDB’s enterprise as a state measure to lessen the disparity between the public’s reception to Philippine Literature and the intelligentsia’s academic way of life; and (3) selected poems in the anthologies that depicted views of a postcolonial city and city life.

### **CUTTING ACROSS THE CITY: TRAINS AND TRAIN STATIONS**

On 12 July 1980, by Executive Order No. 603, the Philippine Light Rail Transit Authority (LRTA) was established “to create a fully integrated mass rail transit network to alleviate Metro Manila’s serious congestion” (Razon 38). According to Evangelize Razon, the Meralco Transit Organization (METRO)—once a wholly-owned subsidiary of Meralco and, now, of LRTA—was assembled and contracted to supervise and run the system on a daily basis under a 10-year Management and Operating Agreement (38). Construction of the first LRT line started in October 1981 through the initiative of then governor of Metro Manila and key dreamer of the ‘City of Man’, former First Lady Imelda R. Marcos.<sup>3</sup> Addressing a lack of an operational rail-based

transport network in the National Capital Region (NCR) and a fantasy of making the country's major city at par with other world capitals, she orchestrated the construction of the elevated transport line known as the LRT (Satre 36).

It is important to state that various fantasies set the construction of the Metrorail in motion: the fantasy of decongesting the primary thoroughfares of the city from gridlocks and traffic brought about by the oversupply of cars, jeepneys, and buses; connecting cities in NCR with those in peri-urban areas; and reifying a probable image of modern stature and scale. In line with what, at that time, was referred to as the "edifice complex" of the conjugal dictatorship of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos, the erection of the LRT on metropolitan ground could only be symptomatic and consequential of a megalomania that took full liberty in controlling not only a country and its demography, but also their corresponding understanding of urban time, speed, distance, and relations.<sup>4</sup> In no time, the Metrorail became part of the everyday routine and terrain of a city open to trade and commerce, at one point, and to tension and crime, at another. Its function of making people mobile within the city's ambit was realized to the extent that one may tremble at the idea of what the daily situation would become without this basic mode of transport.<sup>5</sup>

Despite its deteriorating conditions at present, the train remains relatively functional and affordable to the degree that it still renders public transport in these densely congested parts with a semblance of rapidity and connectivity. One of the cheapest transit systems in Southeast Asia, the services of the Manila Light Rail Transit cost significantly less than those of similar systems in the region. Ticket prices range from 12 to 20 Philippine pesos (PHP) for single-journey tickets, depending on distance, and PHP100 for stored-value ones. From five o'clock in the morning to 10 o'clock in the evening daily, the whole train system caters to a huge number of passengers, composed mainly of workers, students, and citizens who decide to move their way in and out of the city without having to endure long hours stuck in traffic. On the whole, as the LRTA website indicates, train systems, train services, and train rides "continuously provide efficient transport services while promoting economy and efficiency of operations."<sup>6</sup>

A constant fixture and function in metropolitan life, trains certainly influence the perception of their passengers. Like the metropolitan flyovers that Neferti Tadiar cognitively maps as "a space deprived of detail and content and reduced to abstract textures from which one can extract a particular kind of aesthetic pleasure" (*Fantasy Production* 84), trains provide an aerial perspective of the city as well as an occasion for commuters to be at once detached from and attached to the hustle and bustle of

the urban center. On the one hand, to be elevated is to avoid the grit and grime present on the ground, to permit oneself to act as an omniscient eye that sees quite generously a familiar and unnerving terrain, and to lose connection, albeit temporarily, from the natural world and natural time. With its height, distance, and speed, the train “blurs marks of decay and makes details of the corroding urban landscape and its trash disappear into a ‘postmodern’ spectacle of the heterogeneity and fragmentation of its pronounced uneven development” (Tadiar *Fantasy Production* 84). On the other hand, to be aboard a Philippine train is to experience long queues; to encounter the deferral of one’s schedule while waiting for the train’s inconsistent arrival, to endure the compression of human touch, movement, and personal space at the station and on the train, and to witness extensive sprawls of business districts and informal settlements seen beyond the train’s window frame. Indeed, boarding a train in Metro Manila magnifies the binary between what is outside the train (such as shopping areas, multinational business centres, and exclusive residential neighborhoods, which may raise a certain illusion of affluence and grandeur) and what public commuters undergo during an uncomfortable train ride in particular and within a paradoxically bleak and bright city at large.

Although the train was initially perceived as a figure of industrial development, it eventually devolved into a signifier of what Tadiar describes as the Philippines’ conflicted status as a Third World presence in First World drag. On 30 December 2000, for instance, the Blumentritt station of the Light Railway Transit 1 in Sta. Cruz, Manila was the site of what would later be identified as a terrorist attack by the group Jemaah Islamiyah (JI). This eventuality, which killed 11 and injured 19 train passengers, was only one of the five bombing cases that happened in Metro Manila that day, while the country was observing Rizal Day (Porcalla). On 6 October 2012, a commotion among LRT commuters ensued when the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) reported, via social networking site Twitter, a blast at the LRT 2’s Recto station. But this announcement was inaccurate, as the Manila Police District (MPD) bomb squad, after blasting open what was described as “suspicious-looking boxes,” only discovered broken glassware (Elona).

Although they happened separately, with more than a decade between them, what these two incidents point at are the vulnerability and violence that public architectures, such as trains and train stations, may carry or attract due to their loose systems and procedures. That the Rizal Day bombing curtailed lives and jeopardized others can tell of an absence of a ‘no frill’ transportation system in these parts and, as such, also exposes a government whose claims for a citified habitus of global proportions remain at the level of conjecture. That authorities

concluded that these train attacks were terroristic in nature and attributable to groups like the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the JI speaks of a government that knows the identities of what it considers its enemies and their potential threats, which get circulated and realized within and through the properties it owns, funds, and administers. That the MMDA sent out the wrong signal to the public as regards the bomb threat at Recto station in 2012, only to dismiss it later in the day as mere “false alarm,” with an uncertainty that failed to account for the panic and delays that ensued, exposes an entity of power that is entitled to the employment and employment of knowledge and information. And finally, that security was tightly controlled at train stations, and that everyone was considered both potential victim and suspect,<sup>7</sup> indicates that train travel and trains are “impersonal, mechanized system[s] that place...passengers under the jurisdiction of officials and [that create] new centralized, bureaucratic spaces” (Garrett 69).

These occurrences are cited because they put into focus the dynamics among authorities who govern public transportation in Metro Manila, commuters, and the train procedures in the Metrorail. They also gesture at the fact that the train is neither neutral ground nor *tabula rasa*, precisely because its history and utility are linked to the Philippine state, which maximizes this mode of transport’s spaces and services in asserting the state’s hegemonic rule over its citizens and in perpetuating state-conditioned ideologies that enable commuters to formulate an affective experience, cognitive image, and collective vision of the city as a whole. In other words, the train does not only become a locus where the state’s hegemony may be disseminated latently or overtly; it can also be a launch pad where government initiatives, which aspire to manage a critical mass of commuters as to how they may view the milieu in which they reside, may take sense and shape. To Tadiar, the train (especially the MRT constructed above EDSA ground) is “part of a more general, if haphazard, strategy of social disciplinary action and regulation that might also limn aspects of the current order of power and conditions of struggle” (*Metropolitan Life* 316). Like any state-owned property, trains and train stations are bureaucratic sites placed under the contraptions of state propaganda and corporate interests. A congeries of booths, billboards, and brands of the government and privately-owned companies are strategically positioned in train stations—food and prepaid stalls, automated banking machines, newsstands, public announcements of business and agencies—made available for commuters’ consumption. In this regard, the trains and train stations are not in any way free from significations attached to spaces of a city that remains in the jurisdiction of normative social institutions. Inasmuch as their conditions of possibility are grounded on both business and bureaucracy to the extent that their operations endorse and are maintained by private-public partnerships, the whole train system facilitates and is caught up in complex social-

economic-political protocols: from the transportation of multitudes from one area to another, to the exhibition of advertisements and trivia about things and people, to the circulation of representations, affects, and motives among humans and objects, and to the formation of shared identities, intimacies, and imaginaries in the city. For passengers and institutions, trains may be considered a scene of encounter or a site of struggle that structures lives and life-worlds that, in turn, also structure it.

## **A CRITIQUE OF INSTITUTIONAL MOTIVES**

What critique, then, can we make of a project such as *Tulaan sa Tren*, where trains and train stations become vehicles for an institutional motive to popularize Philippine poetry? How can we interrogate a project that aims to bridge the disparity between the public's lack of appreciation for Philippine literature and the state's intention to respond to this lack by making what is generally perceived as a difficult genre such as poetry part of the day-to-day commute of train passengers?

If anything, NBDB and LRTA's project "is a mode of material as well as symbolic production. It is a mode of regulation and control but also a medium of desire that helps to produce the effect of subjectivity" (Tadiar *Fantasy Production* 79). Firstly, as mode of material production, it employs recordings, posters, pictures, poems, anthologies, and physical bodies of artists and administrators not only in realizing but also affirming this initiative's rationale of making a train ride an "insightful experience." Secondly, as symbolic production and medium of desire, it shows an alliance among involved government agencies showing off the forms of capital they possess through the very conditions that make these synergies possible. The *Tulaan sa Tren* project contributes to an urban imaginary—that is, a notion of what the city *should be* than it what actually *is*—as it enacts a scheme of discourses (representations, images, myths) about a particular ecology. Taking cue from Catherine Belsey, who elaborates on Althusser's concept of ideology, *Tulaan sa Tren* provides "a set of omissions, gaps rather than lies, soothing over contradictions, appearing to provide answers to questions which in reality it evades, and masquerading as coherence in the interests of the social relations generated by and necessary to the reproduction of the existing mode of production" (*Constructing the Subject* 594). It renders a picture of city life and the city's terrain that may or may not be totally different from what pedestrians sense when they are routed through crowded ground-level streets. And thirdly, as social control, *Tulaan sa Tren* shifts the attention of passengers from the discomfort they experience while in transit to the works of art and literature exhibited in the train. A prosthetic and poetic lift such as this project not only alters the common chaotic scenario inside the train and in the train station, but it also impacts the travel habits of passengers. LRTA administrator Mel



Robles admits that the LRTA authorities get complaints from passengers as regards the boring ride and the annoying advertisements repeatedly played over the train's sound system. He adds that posting poems and playing recorded readings are ways to give commuters something worth their while (Lopez). In other words, *Tulaan sa Tren* is more than its aural, visual, and literary aspects; more than anything else, it is a controlling mechanism that includes a spectacularization capable of suspending a full understanding of the existing conditions on the train and in the city, and how people are implicated within these conditions. It is an effort of the state to formulate a discourse of the city's intersecting and diverging material conditions, which are linked to the joys and difficulties of travelling by train.

NBDB Director Dennis Gonzales writes: "People ride the train with their day to day worries and anxieties as they move to their destination. But we also want to *inspire them to have this moment of sparks of insight and wisdom* through the very rich Philippine poetry" (qtd in Garcia, emphasis added). An aspiration to incite insight from train passengers may be deemed thoughtful at the surface—one that rightly deserves recognition and encouragement—precisely because it foregrounds the possibility of a welfare state that first acts as a source of information, judgment, and reflection, on the one hand, and an ethical compass guiding the social and intellectual life of its citizenry, on the other. Gonzales brings to light the accountability that agencies such as NBDB arrogate to themselves in serving as conduits of cultural, political, and social thought and action. In other words, he suggests that the government is willing to promote literature, culture and the arts, and make its constituents acquire a certain personal and collective consciousness through these very mediums. And if affirmative stories, testimonies, and write-ups posted on the Internet via blogging sites are telling of a project's success, *Tulaan sa Tren* has indeed made a mark among its target audiences. These positive reinforcements do not only indicate how this institutional enterprise has struck a popular chord among commuters in degrees that deserved documentation; they also suggest an intimate yet fraught link between Metro Manila's train commuters and their appreciation for a state-sanctioned stimulus, in a context that employs populist pedagogy and performs the "Filipino genius" through mediagenic devices.<sup>8</sup>

However, despite the congratulatory feedback *Tulaan sa Tren* gained, NBDB Director Gonzales's hopeful statement still warrants an evaluation. This is not to debunk its merits but, rather, to tease out and lay bare its implications vis-à-vis the project it openly celebrates. In Gonzalez's statement, the insight and wisdom that passengers may get from *Tulaan sa Tren* are paralleled with the daily concerns they usually have in transit. This parallelism intimates a juncture where the passengers' experienced way of life (reality) is mediated by an aesthetic exhibition of posters,

poems, and audio materials (representation) inside the train. Although this parallelism wishes to dissolve the distinction between the real and the simulated, this proves impossible for a project placed in a location not totally convenient for passengers, given its decrepitude and almost always unbearable crowdedness.

Aspiring for insight is made viable through an exhibition that intersects or diverges from uneven development outside the train. In this state of wishful thinking, authorities like Gonzales and developmental projects like *Tulaan sa Tren* have to confront the problems of public venues such as the LRT, of literature, and of consciousness. They have to recognize that ticket prices for the LRT and other trains in Metro Manila are no longer bound to be affordable in the coming months or years, as the government is bent on hiking up fares and privatizing railways sooner than later.<sup>9</sup> However, for those who can pay for increased ticket prices, any train ride may be notoriously inconvenient and exhausting. There is no time to loosen up and be in a daze nor to set one's gaze elsewhere or everywhere, for doing so would more or less make oneself and one's personal belongings vulnerable to theft. In this regard, a project that aims to popularize literature by placing it inside trains must not only have to overcome the comparatively exclusive and limited demographics of passengers, but it must also deal with the trains' overly loaded and battered state.

Second, literature is used as "an important mediating role in the development of nationalist consciousness because it is implicated in the social processes that create the conditions for knowledge and action" (Hau 19).<sup>10</sup> Catherine Belsey writes, in her landmark book *Critical Practice* (2002), that "literature, as one of the most persuasive uses of language, may have been an important influence on the ways people understand themselves and their relation to the real relations in which they live" (55). *Tulaan sa Tren* not only sponsors Philippine literature that is portable and fungible; it also endorses a brand of thinking about living in the city and the nation. This mediated project, realized through photography, recordings, and literature, may lead to a prescription of a certain sensibility toward the city, a normalization of urban renderings that may or may not be accurate or true, and a stabilization of an urban experience largely based on the mood and manner of Metro Manila's so-called culturati and literary intelligentsia. Views of the city are made visible and metropolitan inhabitants are given voice, but only in so far as the language of the intelligentsia permits the production of meaning in a limited existing social formation. It may be provocative to intuit that there is something homogenous at work in the organization of polyphonic voices which constitute *Tulaan sa Tren*, and in the strategies by which it smoothes over the contradictions of the ideology inscribed in it (Belsey, *Critical Practice* 117).

Third, social consciousness is only promising as much as it is problematic. Dennis Gonzales envisions *Tulaan sa Tren* as able to “consolidate our collective conscience, clarify our senses of reality, and strengthen our sense of country” (6). This vision is loaded with complications inasmuch as it puts too much pressure on writers who are expected to respond to the demands of building the nation, a task that they themselves hardly yearn for in their own writing process precisely because of its sheer ambitiousness. The premise is that these pieces of literature and the authors who bore them into being are capable of shaping train commuters into sentient subjects whose conception of a city or a nation is seen through poems in particular or fabulated during a train ride. Another premise is that these writers and what they write can be employed as pedagogical tools and objects of legislation that may address (as they are supposedly abreast with and rooted in) the population’s or their readers’ socio-cultural and moral predicaments. One may infer that there seems to be a form of instrumentalization at work in a statist gesture of considering literary writers and their works as springs of morality and ethics, judgment and reflection, awareness and nationalism. This instrumentalization is founded on NBDB’s claim that Philippine poetry can enhance the lives of Filipinos, even outside the classroom and in an informal setting like a train ride, and that it can also generate a sense of belongingness among passengers.

Caroline Hau is instructive in this respect as she relates the problem of consciousness to the problem of knowledge and “of how the subject comes to acquire an accurate knowledge of her society” (39). NBDB’s project intends to speak *of* and *for* a nation in ways that manufacture national sensibilities and sympathies citizens may imbibe and hopefully live by in their everyday life. What *Tulaan sa Tren* intends to do is to provide universal ideals about the city and the nation so as to cater to a wider audience of commuters, on the one hand, and to realize these very ideals in a specific Filipino context so as to evoke nationalism, on the other. To talk about a “collective conscience,” a “sense of reality,” and a “sense of country” is to aspire for a “knowable community” of conscientious, conscious, and nationalistic subjects, and for a reshaping, reassessment, and reactivation of the national character through literature and culture. To purport a social consciousness is to discriminate, prescribe, and arrive at a totality that may summarize a society’s adversities and aspirations. Like any nationalist discourse initiated and disseminated by the state—susceptible to essentializing and homogenizing tendencies—*Tulaan sa Tren* seems to elude and elide the linguistic, cultural, and social heterogeneity of the nation. On this note, it also forgets to take into account questions such as *What* collective? *Whose* conscience? *Whose* consciousness? *Which* reality?

Answers to these questions may be partially found in the poems included in *Train of Thought* and *Off the Beaten Track*, which have been distributed to educational institutions and uploaded on the Internet. According to Pasion-Flores, NBDB wants *Tulaan sa Tren* “to reach school teachers, libraries and creative writing institutions after it was captured in book and CD form” so that it can be used “as an aid to teach students our poems, which is so hard to sell” (Lopez). By exploring the kind of national and urban life rendered in the selected poems, this paper problematizes the relationship among the city, literary mediations, and the formation of a citified consciousness. It further argues that the poems in *Tulaan sa Tren* allow their writers and their target readers to imagine themselves as part of a fractured city. Finally, the last section of this paper forwards that the riding and reading experience “connects not only different places, but also various appearances of people in different parts of the city, thus producing a condition for the ultimate critical reflection [of the passengers’] own class and [subject position] in society” (Kal 369).

## **POETRY, THE CITY, AND THE TRAIN**

In her article “Metro Manila: City in Search of a Myth,” Cristina Pantoja-Hidalgo wonders about the lack of what she calls “city fiction” in Philippine literature. For a city that has “grown to mammoth proportions” and that has become one of the most interesting in Asia in terms of diversity, density, and culture, Hidalgo laments that Metro Manila “does not play a central role in our fiction in English” (303). She wants to see more literary pieces in which the city does not only figure as a “backdrop against which the personal drama of the characters are enacted,” but also in which “[it] breathes and throbs . . . [and] might be said in some way to shape the destiny of the characters, to propel the action, and, to a certain extent, determine its outcome” (303). She further asserts that “in many of our stories in English, the city remains on the level of setting. It is dismissed with a few perfunctory lines, always either steaming in the noonday sun, or drenched in monsoon rains, clogged with traffic and suffocated by fumes” (303).<sup>11</sup>

Hidalgo’s puzzlement and curiosity are important in the discussion of the poems included in the *Tulaan sa Tren* anthologies. Her assertion that the city “does not really come alive in all its distinct, multifarious details” in the short stories she read is also important in this paper’s assessment of NBDB’s poetry anthologies, which render tropes of corruption, poverty, wanderlust, discovery, desire, migration, and memory as primary themes characterizing life in the city. In analyzing the poems, what critique can we make of *Tulaan sa Tren*’s attempts at city mapping and

nation building? If a city's mythology, according to Hidalgo, is "created, as much as by the people who actually lived it, as by the artists who have imagined it" (317), what contribution to myth-making does *Tulaan sa Tren* make?

In her discussion of the submissions NBDB received during the *Tulaan sa Tren* poetry writing contest, Andrea Pasion-Flores hints at the meanings writers and passengers ascribe to the train as well as to the city. She states:

We certainly did not expect the many poems of pain that made us realize how, for many of our people, travelling on trains has become more than just getting to and from school or work, it means separation from family and country, not just for the temporary few within a workday but for months—even years on end. And the pain that comes with this separation spoke of these faraway places not as places to visit as tourists, but as places to make agonizing sacrifices for those left behind. The train in these faraway places figure prominently in their poems, meaning more than transportation from one place to another, more akin to the transportation of relief from what we hope would be a temporary misery. (*Off the Beaten Track 7*)

Pasion-Flores puts to the fore the train as a technology which decentralizes the country, the city, and the countryside in that it makes viable the migration of people who transact business outside their hometowns, for the sake of survival, employment, and education. More than a mode of transport, the train also earns its affective currency as it signifies daily subsistence, sacrifice, and severance from loved ones.

A quick online search can give an idea about the reception commuters have given to NBDB's initiative, on the one hand, and their reconsideration of the utility of the train system upon the introduction of *Tulaan sa Tren* into their daily commute, on the other. The online (mostly privately initiated) documentation of *Tulaan sa Tren* may serve as testament to how it has been able to defamiliarize the common trajectory of the narrative of train travel in the Metro, and to usher in what may be considered, in the words of a blogger, "a literature that evokes feelings that you thought you've forgotten and gives different light to street sceneries that you usually dismiss as normal. It is the kind of literature that drives people to change" ("An Invitation to Board"). The raves the poets, poems, and the whole project received are consequential in making sense of an appreciation for a project conceived as a state apparatus which propagates false consciousness. They may signify an approval of *Tulaan sa Tren* as an essential fiction which remains vulnerable to both the consumption and revision of a people whose human agency and affects are excessive of any structural power that tends to contain them. These positive responses may locate the convergence of *Tulaan sa Tren's* effective enactment of its intentions as

regards nation building and city mapping, on the one hand, and an activation of affects from train passengers who are part and parcel of an ever unravelling form of postcolonial modernity. This online participation signifies that passengers relate to poetic visions and renderings of a city which they populate and perhaps wish to transform. In other words, bloggers also want to speak *about* and speak *back* to poems whose topics generally speak to them.

In Manuel Principe Bautista's "Tren," a lyric sequence in six parts, the mechanical train ("Dugo mo/ay langis,/uling mo/ay buhay,/lakas mo ay apoy,/ugat mo/ay bakal") (23) is depicted as a snake that enters and exits the city ("O tila /ka ahas/kung saan/nagbuhat:/ nagsuot/ sa bundok,/ sa lungsod /lumabas") (13). The train signals the arrival of metal and oil, usual symbols of industrialization and modernization in the city. Liking a train to a slithering serpent that leaves the countryside and arrives in the city may also describe residents outside the nation's capital, who travel by train to reach their jobs in the urban environment. Movement from the periphery to the center may allude to a national condition of migration and to the centrality of Metro Manila in the discourse of the nation. Bautista's poem also renders the train as a vehicle that connotes hope and expectation, homecoming and valediction, distance and desire: "Sipol mo/sa hangin,/ang ibig/sabihin:/rumaragasa/kang/sa aki'y/darating" (33) and "Dini sa/Tutuban/kita'y/hihintayin:/lulan mo/na kaya/ang mutyang/habilin?" (42). To the personae of these short pieces, the train's speed and sound signal a furtive wish for company, a news of a return, a figuration of a presence, a promise of romance. As the train transforms into a carrier of affects, it also bridges proximities, geographies, histories, and, as such, emerges as a locus of possibility. Tenderness may reside in a machine, after all. Interestingly, these short poems are not printed on one continuous page in the anthology; instead, they individually appear after several others, and may be read separately or sequentially. This deliberate editorial decision seems to resemble the stops that a train makes at every station. Also, they may remind the reader of the distance the train trudges each passing day as it cuts across the bustling city.

In "Awit sa Estasyon" (20), Mesandel Virtusio Arguelles tackles the unpredictability and inefficiency of the Metrorail. The train becomes a metonym for Metro Manila's suspended operations, compressed time and space, and irresolute improvements. The poem's lacunae, fragments, and echoes of sound may be seen as aesthetic devices trying to capture the disorder of the city's frustrated modernity and weak modernization plan. They, too, may demonstrate the drifting mind of a passenger while waiting for the perennially delayed or packed train to arrive. Agitation and boredom characterize the persona as well as the other passengers, both of whom

adumbrate disappointment and seem to demand efficiency from the operators and administrators of the train.

Nang huling dungaw ko:  
papuno na ang estasyon  
Sapagkat huli na naman sa usapan  
malapit na akong mapuno

Umuugong ang usap-usapan  
ng mga kapuwa pasahero  
ngunit wala ang paparating na tren  
Anuman ang gawing dungaw  
sa abot-tanaw ay walang nagbabalik-  
dungaw sa kurba ng riles

In Vincenz Serrano's "Shadow and Pedestrian," the city is an *I* that illustrates and speaks of its inassimilable and irreducible character: "I am legion—the umbra of jeeps,/ walls, motorcycles, fences—/and yet I am lonely. You hurry//past me without glancing./ I open myself to you,/ I throw myself at your feet" (20). The city as persona is aware of its wreckage, but refuses to accept its very irreparability: "On the ground, the shadows/of branches are a frenzy/of fissures after a quake,//the shadows of buildings/long coffins without lids./I am not as dead as I seem." Furthermore, it talks to its citizens and encourages them to see beyond their personal fear of the urban environment: "Although I surround you,/I know I become real// only when you stare beyond/the blind corners of suspicion."

It is not difficult to associate this appeal to people who easily revert to their safe, clean haven: "Under the shiver of halogen//you go, into a clean,/well-lighted/place where things are clear/and craze no one." Be that as it may, the city persists and remains unavoidable. It throbs, breathes, moves, and upsets any declaration about its dullness and demise.

You go your way, yet you  
can never shake me off:

behind you, beside you, before you,  
look, I'm there, my footsteps moving  
in time with yours, my shape

shuddering out of your own.

The dynamic city does not exist without decay, however. Its dynamism is composed of, as much as it composes, corrosion and decrepitude. Conchitina Cruz's "Dear City" shows a landscape submerged in murky rainwater, and is blamed for this very inundation. The poem's speaker, a citified resident whose concerns carry middle class registers, addresses the city and demands explanation to her questions:

Dear City, explain your irreverence: in you, rain is a visitor with nowhere to go. Where is the ground that knows only the love of water? What are the passageways to your heart? Pity the water that stays and rises on the streets, pity the water that floods into houses, so dark and filthy and heavy with rats and dead leaves and plastic. How ashamed water is to be what you have made it. What have you done to its beauty, its graceful body in pictures of oceans, its clear face in a glass? (15)

The city becomes a locale of misery and reality of squalor. It is a sullied landscape that knows no civility and in which the blame game ensues. It is a violation of sensibility, a letdown, the frustration of propriety and primness. Amusingly, the persona says: "We look for someone to blame and turn to you, wretched city, because we are men and women of honor, we feed our children three meals a day, we never miss an election. The only explanation is you, dear city. This is the end of our discussion. There is no other culprit" (15). It is interesting to note that the speaker never points a finger at herself, and at her kind, whose participation in the fate of the city as exploiter seems rather determined. Instead, she blames an abstract entity—the City itself.

In such instance, "Dear City" launches an indirect critique of the lack of liability and reflexivity that residents of the city shamefully possess. As the speaker shifts the blame from herself and her kind on to the City, she too exposes the symptoms of her privileged but limited and disillusioned subject-position. To fetishize water or rain and what it has become in seasons of flood and filth is to avoid the more pressing concerns of the city (like inexplicable poverty and proper housing, for instance), on the one hand, and perhaps absolve oneself of culpability and complicity in the ruination of the metropolis, on the other. However, it must also be noted that to complain *about* the City is an indirect if not ironic way of implicating oneself in the construction and constitution of a landscape under ecological crisis. To yearn for an urban milieu long gone—or that can be conceived only in relation to traces of a past hazily imagined—is to admit the damaged present or the presence of damage in the city of which the persona plays a part.

If Cruz's poem talks about a social concern inflected with bourgeois undertones, Marra PL Lanot's poems are more grounded in the lives of what Neferti Tadiar calls



“urban excess”<sup>13</sup> (*Fantasy Production* 80) and, for being such, it symptomatically represents the incongruence of urbanization in the city and the nation. In “EDSA,” Lanot compares the present state of the capital’s major thoroughfare to its erstwhile undeveloped condition: “Mistulang bahaghari ang dating Highway 54/na humahawi ng talahiban/patungong dagat at langit” (37). The nation’s participation in globalization, partially made possible by loaning and banking institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, has brought about conflicted and conflicting changes in the Philippines. While cities are bursting at the seams with newly constructed malls, condominiums, universities, hospitals, and business districts, the countryside suffers from poor health and sanitation, militarization, joblessness, land grabbing, illiteracy, and poor social services, to name but a few. The centralization of development in the city forces people from the provinces to flock to and take chances in the urban environment.

As the nation’s capital turns to urbanization, EDSA becomes the overall image of the city’s failure and trickery: it may reek of progress, but within it are desperation, poverty, crime, pollution, and inequality. This major road and its daily traffic are telling of a current crisis concerning the expansion, circulation, and accumulation of global capital in the National Capital Region. EDSA’s condition of ungovernable gridlocks of private and public vehicles and unimaginable cohabitation of vendors, buildings, and billboards rests on an oversupply of a desire from government and corporate agencies to be globally competitive, on the one hand, and an absence of strict implementation of rules and regulations to realize these very desires, on the other.<sup>14</sup> Lanot shows how, with the rise of the city and the metamorphosis of what used to be Highway 54 into EDSA, Metro Manila can only predict excessive decomposition *amidst* and *in* excessive development. As lived everyday locale and discursive space, the city and EDSA are polluted, perilous, and chaotic. They victimize, as much as they are victimized by, not only the inhabitants experiencing them, such as the street children depicted in Lanot’s poem, but even the miraculous prospects of beauty and delicacy (like the flowers that Lanot references) that immediately vanish in the metropolis’ atmospheric danger.

Naging EDSA ang highway:  
isang natumbang balde ng gas  
na nanunuot sa lalamunan at baga;  
isang piring sa tanawin,  
piring na nakapinid sa mga mata  
ng kinidnap, ginahasa, kinatay;  
isang bumagsak na nagagalit na ulap;  
isang latigo na nagbali ng buto  
at nanghugot ng dugo;

isang makamandag na ahas  
 na iniluwal ng baha  
 at isinuka ng lindol,  
 isang sinturon ni Hudas,  
 mausok, maitim, mabaho,  
 nakapalibot nang mahigpit  
 sa mundo mula ala-sais ng umaga  
 hanggang ala-sais ng umaga.  
 Minsa'y pasulpot-sulpot na parang himala  
 ang mga kuwintas ng sampaguita,  
 champaka, kamia, ilang-ilang  
 na kasing-linaw at kasing-lungkot  
 ng mga mata ng mga batang namamalimos  
 sa walang-hanggang pagitan  
 ng takipsilim at hatinggabi.

Cristina Pantoja-Hidalgo also observes that, “with the exception of certain portions of Makati and Pasig—most of what we call ‘the city’ is not really urban, but ‘rurban.’ Behind every building-lined avenue is a shanty town, with laundry flapping from clothesline, fighting cocks crowing and strutting about in the dust, and an improvised basketball court in the middle of the road” (315-316). This “split-level development” and its resulting sense of displacement and disorientation is explored in Lanot’s “City Without Sidewalks” (12), a poem that describes the seemingly traditional and bucolic activities and features of provincial life that have been brought to and incorporated into city life. It also portrays the city’s landscape before its expansion, and forwards the idea that Metro Manila is a barrio “transplanted/Into a city without sidewalks,/With its dirt roads without pebbles/And children smelling of/Coconut and the sea,/Leaving behind birds, forests/And isles ever green.”

What Lanot’s poem and Hidalgo’s observation seem to point out is that although urbanization has reordered, and is continuously reordering, Metro Manila’s terrain, it has not been and will never be able to co-opt the deeply entrenched traditional culture among the city’s dwellers. The city still sees ways of living that may simultaneously be placed outside and inside the protocols of a modernization that tries to elide them but totally cannot. Although these lifestyles may seem to be on the verge of elision under the machinations of the ever-expanding urban center, they stand the test of time and emanate as something else. In this sense, the city continuously sees a coexistence of modernity and tradition—a push and pull between past and present time—and a dialectical linkage between the present’s insistence to erase the past and the past’s obduracy to stay inassimilable to the present.

Now the city has become  
A vast playground where  
Toddlers stumble in the dust,  
Where kids hang kites  
On telephone wires,  
Spin tops on hard earth  
Play piko and tumbang-presos,  
Where teeners make electric  
Posts their shield against  
Flying broken beer bottles,  
Where housewives saunter to the corner-  
Store for a fresh glass of gossip,  
Where everyone plays patintero  
With cars and jeepneys.  
Except for the mad rush,  
It's still a town of barrio folds.

Lanot's "Quiapo" depicts that part of Metro Manila generally known for its church, patron, devotees, and industry of herbal medicines, sartorial articles, and other "bootleg" and "surplus" products like gadgets, pirated CDs, and sex toys. This poem limns a habitus known as the "old downtown of Manila" in a way that puts religion and poverty in tension with each other, and prompts a reflection on the unequal distribution of power even or especially among a multitude of inclinations toward divinity and sanctity.

The sea of heads heaves  
Beats against the rock—  
Beggars, millionaires, thieves—  
Which is the hope, the black

Or brown Nazarene  
Inside the church, the Sepulchre  
Is kissed by women and men  
Crawling and crying. Outside, a vendor

Melts like a candle,  
Squatting, spitting, shrivelled,  
As a pagan idol  
In a niche in the wall. (28)

The historical and religious grandeur of Quiapo church goes against the societal apathy toward the less-fortunate in the city. The spiritual commitment for the black Nazarene, as well as the collective of human bodies that this devotion annually

spawns at a particular juncture in the Roman Catholic Church's religious calendar, is contrasted with a street vendor whose existence is rendered marginal. This counterpoint provokes a judgement on how blinded, hypocritical, and inhumane society has become, especially at a time when faith easily falls prey to fanaticism, on the one hand, and social justice, class equality, and compassion handily succumb to indifference, on the other. The street vendor, then, becomes a character whose human worth goes directly against or is simply unmatchable to the significance of sacred statues that people regard dearly.

In Jose Lacaba's "Ang Mga Kagilagilalas na Pakikipagsapalaran ni Juan dela Cruz" (46), the city becomes the subject and object of Imelda Marcos's "City of Man" project, where the urban center was engineered into a well-disciplined, well-ordered, and well-maintained space that brimmed with military apparatuses and "spectacular modern public works designed to appeal to the economic and cultural sensibilities of [Marcos's] international political clientele" (Tadiar *Metropolitan Life* 318). In the birth of an authoritarian New Society, Manila and its neighboring cities were consolidated into a single and huge metropolis that served as stage, if not laboratory, for Marcos's bedazzling but equally deceptive and cruel vision. The fantasy of having a "City of Man" under the auspices of a dictatorship only becomes realizable in the face of massive oppression, marginalization, and expulsion of those who are tagged as urban and social excess, which include "the contradictory, 'inassimilable,' militant elements of the polity" (Tadiar *Metropolitan Life* 319), as well as the "people who engage in activities recognized as non-productive, unregulated and, hence, illegitimate according to the standards of the national economy" (Tadiar *Fantasy Production* 80-81).

Lacaba's was written and set in the chilling context of heightened political, social, and cultural protests against the new metropolitan structure. Its persona is Juan dela Cruz, the common allegory of the ordinary Filipino citizen who, in the process of drifting and drifting away, finds himself restricted by city rules and regulations. He is told "BAWAL MANIGARILYO" ("SMOKING UNALLOWED"), "BAWAL PUMARADA" ("PARKING UNALLOWED"), "BAWAL UMIHI DITO" ("PEEING HERE UNALLOWED"), "MAG-INGAT SA ASO" ("BEWARE OF DOGS"), "KEEP OFF THE GRASS," and "BAWAL MAGTAPON NG BASURA" ("THROWING OF TRASH UNALLOWED"). These encounters in the City of Man, all of which are confronted with trepidation by almost all Filipinos at that time, signal the shrinkage of Metro Manila and logically the entire Philippines under the iron fist of a regime that insisted on a modernization and urbanization that entailed regulation of the citizenry, eviction or dislocation of informal settlements, reclamation of vast lands for the sake of privately and

publicly-owned establishments, and abduction, incarceration or torture of individuals considered as “enemies of the state.” Lacaba’s poem shows the conspiracies of institutions as well as the tight control of citizens’ recreational, civic, political, libidinal, and spiritual lives. The exclusion Juan dela Cruz continuously experiences and contends with in the New Society drives him out of the city and into the countryside, where he enlists for the armed struggle. Neferti Tadiar, in her essay “Metropolitan Life and Uncivil Death,” eloquently writes, “Lacaba’s protest poem . . . epitomized a newly shared politicized experience of the repressive social and aesthetic mandates of the metropolitanist order . . . In a reversal of the typical relations of the country and the city, the rural areas were reinscribed by the revolutionary movement as a place of historical possibility, the site of future promise, which the metropolis had foreclosed” (319).

Nang wala nang malunok  
si Juan dela Cruz  
dala-dala’y gulok  
gula-gulanit ang damit  
wala pa ring laman ang bulsa  
umakyat

sa Arayat  
ang namayat

na si Juan dela Cruz  
WANTED DEAD OR ALIVE  
sabi ng PC  
ang walanghiyang kabataan  
kung bakit sinulsulan  
ang isang tahimik na mamamayan  
katulad ni Juan dela Cruz.

## CONCLUSION

Part recognition, part interrogation, part critique, this paper plots out the coordinates on which NBDB’s *Tulaan sa Tren* contrived a project that aspired for: (1) a dissemination of Philippine literature among passengers of the daily train, (2) a figuration of the city and the nation, and (3) an institutional intercession that initiated us into a pedagogical and entertaining experience of the urban environment even while aboard a fully-loaded train. The project thus utilized an overly used and under maintained mode of transport in conceiving and perpetuating a social and

literary imaginary of metropolitan proclivities. Despite its dereliction, the train was set forth not just as mere locus of action and articulation, but also, most especially, as the lynchpin that kept NBDB's whole effort intact and moving. In other words, the train was means and metaphor, drive and destination, technology and travel all at the same time.

Furthermore, this initiative capitalized on the prospect of making literature (frequently dismissed as the language of the decadent, the privileged, and the learned) enjoyable and comprehensible even to the layman who travels every single day of his life across the city for work, school, or leisure. Emerging from a time when Philippine literature is becoming far from marketable and essential to a population whose main concerns include but are not limited to survival and employment, *Tulaan sa Tren* was an attempt at making academics' and poets' words and verses transportable, digestible, and sensible to the riding public.

Poems that are cited and close read in this paper depict the city not only as a location of growth but, most especially, as a contested space of conflicted desires and interests. Although not totally representative of the entire *Tulaan sa Tren* project, the poems cited in this paper neither idealized nor reified the city in that they presented as much as commented on the dimensions of the urban environment that vanguards of the state tend to mystify or dismiss. Although these poems may easily drown in the deluge of more popular and comforting romantic, desirous, or funny poems in the anthologies, they remained relevant because of their dissent against and diversion from the trendier ways of popularizing literature and the city. In relation to the objectives of *Tulaan sa Tren*, these poems did not only offer passengers and commuters depictions of the city's realities concealed, forcedly or not, in a topography bursting at its seams with gargantuan infrastructures; they, too, offered insights that wished to transcend the myopic concerns of the citified subject. Finally, they took on the challenge of answering bigger questions and issues about city life and the nation, all of which were in no way separated from nor positioned outside the historical, cultural, and material circumstances that engendered and were engendered by them.

In all this, *Tulaan sa Tren* did not belabor its point and premise: to sell the unsellable, to refashion the tasteless—or in other words, to redeem and make popular, through literature, a city and a nation that most of us wish to turn away from and forget but cannot.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Some of the celebrities who read poems and recorded readings of these literary pieces were Edu Manzano, Miriam Quiambao, Nikki Gil, Matt Evans, Lyn Ching-Pascual, Romnick Sarmienta, Rhea Santos, Christine Bersola-Babao, Chin-Chin Gutierrez, and Harlene Bautista.
- <sup>2</sup> A comparative analysis of Poetry in Motion and *Tulaan sa Tren* is made to draw parallelisms and differences between these international and local spectacles. Most of the information about the former are taken from Poetry Society of America and MTA.info websites.
- <sup>3</sup> The *Tulaan sa Tren* project was launched and positioned at LRT Line 2. LRT Line 2 has a total length of about 13.8km and travels from Santolan, Pasig City to Recto in Manila. To know more about the LRTA, go to the Light Railway Transit Authority's website: <http://www.lrta.gov.ph/index.php>
- <sup>4</sup> In his foreword to Gerard Lico's book, *Edifice Complex: Power, Myth, and Marcos State Architecture*, eminent art historian and critic Patrick D. Flores writes about this Marcosian/Imeldific madness to govern sea, sky, and land. He writes: "There is something mad about how Imelda Marcos, former First Lady of the Philippines, ordained a kingdom by the bay and across an archipelago, tilling an environment and rearing a field for an imagined culture to flourish, paradoxically, in the wild . . . 'Imeldific' is the apt word for a madness that conceives a scenography marked by egregious excess of expenditure, a term embodied by the very person who had made it all" (ix).
- <sup>5</sup> In Business Mirror's editorial, "Subsidizing Trains," published on 8 September 2013, it is reported that "[t]here are about 1.2 million daily commuters of the LRT and MRT" who can attest that "trains of the Light Rail Transit (LRT) 1 and the Metro Rail Transit (MRT) 3 remain to be the most convenient forms of mass transportation available, despite their often-rickety coaches and irregular schedules."
- <sup>6</sup> For more information about the Light Railway Transit Authority, visit their website: <http://www.lrta.gov.ph/>
- <sup>7</sup> MPD Director Chief Superintendent Alejandro Gutierrez said, "It's not true that there was a bomb. It's possible that the person who called to say that there was a bomb and the person who placed those boxes are one and the same. We don't know. But I can assure the public that security has been tightened with every policeman on guard" (Elona).
- <sup>8</sup> A blog review fond of *Tulaan sa Tren* states: "Tama nga naman ang pagsabi niyang kailangang makita na ang sining ay karaniwan at bahagi ng pang-araw-araw na pamumuhay. Hindi dapat hiwalay ang paglikha at pagtangkilik dito sa ating karaniwang karanasan. Kung mananatiling nasa pedestal ang sining, hindi nito maabot at maaantig ang nakararami. Hindi rin matatanto ng nakararami na ang bawat isa ay may potensyang maging bukal ng sining" ("*Tulaan sa Tren: Sining para sa Lahat*" at <http://davidplatz.blogspot.com>). Another entry shares: "*Train of Thought* is a reading journey worth taking. Not reading it, or any of the works of our local writers, is such a waste because it is the kind of literature that . . . gives different light to street sceneries that

you usually dismiss as normal” (“An Invitation to Board the Train of Thought” at <http://brainchilada.wordpress.com>).

- <sup>9</sup> In his fourth State of the Nation Address (SONA), on 22 July 2013, President Benigno Aquino presented the justification for the hike in fares for the LRT 1 and 2, as well as MRT 3. He stated that it may now be time to make the fares for MRT and LRT closer to the fares of air-conditioned buses.

This long-planned increase, which continues to face stiff opposition, intends to minimize billions of pesos in subsidies from the government every year. See Camus’s “LRT, MRT to raise fares by P5 this year.”

- <sup>10</sup> Hau’s argument is part of her analysis of Amado Hernandez’s novel *Mga Ibong Mandaragit* (1969). She argues further: “Literature thus falls within the ambit of nationalism and nationalist thought; but more than that, its specific ordering of the relationship between knowledge and action becomes an important mode of apprehending and realizing the nationalist goal of developing and transforming the collective consciousness of Filipinos” (19).

- <sup>11</sup> Pantoja-Hidalgo cites four possible reasons for the continuing absence of the city in Philippine fiction. First, perhaps most fictionists, although now living in the city, are really transplanted *provincianos* and *provincianas*. Second, perhaps our writers are still schooled in the traditional city vs. country binary. Third, most of what we call “the city” is not really urban, but “urban.” And fourth, and the most compelling according to Hidalgo, is that younger writers possibly lack a sense of their city’s history.

- <sup>12</sup> In the discourse of traffic in Metro Manila, urban excess “is constituted mainly by pedestrians pushed off their proper place, the sidewalk, by illegitimate activities, ‘unconventional’ vehicles and motorists who would have taken public transportation if not for its inefficiency. Excess hence refers to the by-products of maldevelopment and mismanagement, to what is designated as informal production, that is, people who engage in activities recognized, as non-productive, unregulated and, hence, illegitimate according to the standards of the national economy”(80-81).

- <sup>13</sup> According to Tadiar, these gridlocks lie in “two things: excess and lack—among other things, excess of people and vehicles, lack of discipline and law enforcement” (80).

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