



**Elegant Ecstasies:
Metropolitan Fantasies and Gay Desires
in Carlomar Arcangel Daoana's
*The Fashionista's Book of Enlightenment***

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ELEGANT ECSTASIES: METROPOLITAN FANTASIES AND GAY DESIRES IN CARLOMAR ARCANGEL DAOANA'S *THE FASHIONISTA'S BOOK OF ENLIGHTENMENT*

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In a close reading of Carlomar Arcangel Daoana's *The Fashionista's Book of Enlightenment*, it is observed that his poems render excessiveness, affluence, beauty, and glamour as main thematic ways of problematizing the gay figure situated in the city and whose life moves between the poles of loss and love. This essay initiates a critical reading of the poems within the proposed ambits of metropolitan fantasies and gay desires in order to plot out their conspicuous upper/middle class and Western(ized) aesthetic, reveal their intimacies and intimations with an Other that does not only allude to a global audience but also to the desired objects gay men have, and critique a poetry that is predicated largely on consumerism, fabulousness, and sexual/sensual bodies.

Keywords: metropolitan fantasies, gay desires, Philippine poetry, The Fashionista's Book of Enlightenment

Through the years, urbanization and globalization have changed the complex yet convivial queer culture in the country. In his book *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora*, Martin Manalansan (2006, 13) writes that "the process of globalization... [has] complicated, if not transformed, the ways subjects create a sense of belonging and identity. Notions of being...gay cannot be easily apprehended in static, essential terms alone." If we are to take globalization as the economic, political, social, and cultural turns related to the expanding

movements and transactions of humans, objects, ideas, and capital across the globe, then this phenomenon logically affects identities, subjectivities, and ways of life in a number of complicated ways. Dennis Altman (2004, 64) particularly observes that “as young people pour into rapidly growing cities across the third world, they are exposed to new media images, through cinema, television, and above all the Internet, which offer radically different ways of imagining sex and gender arrangements and identities.”

The unstoppable entrance and residence of global forces on Philippine shores looks triumphant in shaking our traditional categories of gender and sexuality, and in producing queer identities and subjectivities that are largely urbanized and citified, if not Western(ized) in orientation and middle class in temperament.¹ In the metropolis, for instance, most of the educated and middle class gay subjects are celebratory about their identities and subjectivities. The annual success of the gay pride march, the publication of many gay literary anthologies, and the proliferation of conferences on gender and sexuality are venues where the gay community unfurls its concerns and advocacies.² Although oftentimes criticized for being Manila-centered and for propounding conceptions predominantly steeped in bourgeois sentiments, these venues constantly provide, disseminate, and to some degree, problematize pictures of the current state of LGBTQ in the country. Not only do we get to know the troubles and triumphs gay subjects encounter and achieve day per embittered day, but we also come to encounter the fantasies and desires they individually or collectively have.

These fantasies and desires are central to this essay, which intends to answer the question: How are metropolitan fantasies and gay desires articulated in Carlomar Arcangel Daoana’s *The Fashionista’s Book of Enlightenment*?

In using the term metropolitan fantasies, I am conscious of Neferti Xina Tadiar’s (2004, 9) usage of the word fantasy, which pertains to “a field of symbolically structured meaning (the unconscious) that shapes and regulates our desires, our modes of acting ‘in reality.’” She adds that “[fantasy] is belief which is radically exterior, embodied in the practical, effective procedure of people.” In this sense, a fantasy seeps into our everyday lives and wittingly or unwittingly directs the trajectories of our relations with others, our verbal and nonverbal linguistic registers, our behaviours, attitudes, and values, and the articulations we have of our membership in the society. It reveals not only the socius and status to which we think we belong, but it also hints at the aspirations we perform as regards our social, economic, cultural aspirations in a present that has yet to come. This

is not to say that a fantasy is purely inventive or imaginative; instead, as Tadiar (2000, 465) posits, it is “a symbolic act (in the sense of drama) which structure what we consider empirically to be reality.” In other words, this fantasy governs how we become at home in the world around us and, in turn, how this world is appropriated in a mode whereby it becomes a generating machine of wistful and wished-for formulations of becoming.

Within the proposed boundaries of this category, the global or modern city is an important locus because it is considered the “hotbed of creativity” where there is an unending search for the “new,” “spontaneous,” and “authentic.” Understood as a built environment in which land and landscape have given way to corporate and residential infrastructures and as a concentration point of economic trade, informational flows, power networks, social management, political organizations, aesthetic structures, and interpersonal/familial/extra-familial ties, the city is central to the conception and circulation of metropolitan fantasies that are predicated largely on frenetic and almost always revisionary spectacles, performances, and traditions. Elizabeth Grosz (1992, 249) writes that “different forms of lived spatiality [in the city]...[affect] the ways we live space, and thus our comportment and corporeal orientations and the subject’s forms of corporeal exertion.” Through the assemblage of infrastructural transformations, such as posh bars, clubs, gyms, and malls, all of which are facilitated by the machinations of neoliberalism, the city morphs into a alluring travel destination, especially for citizens who have access to see and enjoy it as such.³ In what Saskia Sassen pertains to as global cities, or “places that play a key role in the world economic system, and which are often marked by extreme concentrations of wealth” (Gilbert 2000, 14), “hegemonic forms of expression of our desiring-actions” (Tadiar 2004, 6) are systematically produced and erected. These hegemonic forms of expression are emphasized and stratified not only through patterns of social and economic practices, but most especially through the taste, fads, and fashions prevalent in the metropolitan center that is considered the cartography of modernity. These spaces and lifestyles in the city hinge on and are intensified by a prevailing fantasy that is rooted in a scene of locality, but does not fail to be in contact with and nuanced by desired global geographies and foreign audiences.

Beauty is also a crucial component of metropolitan fantasies.⁴ It is employed “to encapsulate a self-conscious notion of performance that is embedded not only in gendered phenomena but in the exigencies of everyday life” (Manalansan 2006, 15). Beauty serves as a heuristic and possible aperture to tease out fabulousness and flamboyance as metropolitan experiences and to interrogate

the idealization of physicality that feeds into the fantasy of *The Fashionista's Book of Enlightenment*. It will be argued that in Daoana's collection, beauty is not only fetishized as a state to be had, or an object of one's determination and desire; it propels a whole web of intimacies, imaginaries, and identities to be enunciated in a particularly Western rhythm. Inasmuch as the poetry collection revolves around the material world and its affinities with glamour, opulence, and excessiveness, to treat beauty as a major element in the internalization and externalization of metropolitan gay fantasies is to prompt a discussion on the artificiality of Western beauty's "seductive and beautiful coercion" (Arnold 2001, 89) to its faithful followers. Furthermore, to look into metropolitan fantasies is to destabilize its lures that realistically only fit a few even while they purport to cater to a universal multitude.

When I put beauty and the city together, I am driving at a metropolitan fantasy that highlights and is highlighted by urban, middle class projects and pronouncements. Geographies of the city engender a particular fashion culture in the same way that the "topographies of taste" (Frank Mort in Gilbert 2000, 11) influence the premises of the city. As cities undergo structural and technological changes, the fashion industry as major source of concepts of beauty also gets affected (Gilbert 2000, 8). Reka Buckley and Stephen Gundle (2000, 334) argue that the growth of cities characterize and is characterized by the repositioning in the marketplace of some aristocratic attributes, the opening of high society to exponents of the arts and show business, and the increasing role of appearances in social relations. According to Rebecca Arnold (2001, 3), modern city life provides the space in which "new categories and new fashions could breed and multiply." As shopping malls and e-commerce become trendy, the city consequently transforms into a repository of established global, local, and modern products as much as these products are made for and disseminated in the city. This connection between fashion and the city makes it possible for us to intuit what David Gilbert calls "sartorial imperialism." Thus, as Gilbert (2000, 19) forwards, "it is therefore useful to think of cities as the objects of fashion, as well as the physical context for fashion."

In all this, consumerism is found at the heart of metropolitan fantasies and experiences. Made visible and pervasive by mass media, consumer or commercial culture manufactures the semblance and reproduction of stylishness, wealth, and breeding (Buckley and Gundle 2000, 335). Most of the time, it centers on fashion as "an experience rather than a disembodied and unplaced act of consumer choice and purchase" (Gilbert 2000, 11). For instance, shopping becomes a mode

of distraction from the humdrum of life. Visiting the mall is a way of walling oneself from the harsh realities found in the streets and of realizing one's desire for modernity. Purchasing power, then, becomes a status symbol that alters and is altered by one's self-signification, identity, and subjectivity. Writing about the significance of fashion in the nineteenth-century city, Elizabeth Wilson (in *ibid.*, 11) forwards: "New and more complicated 'codes of dress' developed, for in the metropolis everyone was in disguise, incognito and yet at the same time an individual more and more was what he wore." Wilson's entry suggests that the city is fashionably discursive and discursively fashionable, precisely because it is the production site for new cultures, trends, and subjectivities, on the one hand, and tangible objects like gadgets that may define, dictate, and direct its inhabitants' ways of life, on the other.

This paper also aims to map out how Daoana renders gay men as "young, urban, middle- and upper-class [subjects] who...are marked by a longing for and a precarious sense of belonging" (Altman in Benedicto 2008a, 317).⁵ Bobby Benedicto (2008a,275) writes that gays have been associated with a set of linguistic and symbolic elements that are considered as "things-that-are-gay," including clothing labels, hair styles, and manner of speaking. Generally, middle- or upper-class gay subjects go beyond the *gay* tag, evade traditional restrictions of their society, and boldly perform their identity in their everyday life—"from the rapid rise of gym memberships to the proliferation of bars and parties patterned on those located in gay metropolises" (*ibid.*, 288). It must be noted, however, that the bold confidence of gay subjects to perform who they are may stem from their class background, educational attainment, economic independence, and open and liberal relations with their families.

Their capability to move around and beyond the city, to be part of encounters considered novel and mobile, and to emotionally and sexually desire and be able to enact this desire in a comparatively unencumbered manner are telling of these gay subjects' privileged subject position. This mobility across and outside their purviews facilitates the emergence of these sexual and emotional desires to the extent that it brings forth "zones of contact" in which gay subjects may come across their kind or their prospective objects of lasting or brief affection. I will forward that gay desires are not only produced and consumed through sexual intercourse, but also by the momentary act of gazing. The pleasures brought about by gay desires are not only limited to the actual touching of bodies; they, too, may be experienced through the eyes that surreptitiously survey other people's corporeality. It is in this sense that I will look into the voyeur's gaze as

an aesthetic and erotic activity, which, according to Norman Denzin (1995, 46), produces “an awareness of self both for the persona who looks and for the person who is looked upon.” I will maintain that it is through the gaze that the Self (the gazer, the gay man, the persona, or the poet) constructs and is constructed by the Other (the muse or the other man). Thus, the relationship between the gay gazer and his object(s) of affection may never be viewed as one-way, for the Other animates the Self as much as the Self creates the Other.

Ultimately, I shall also determine “the ways in which the body is psychically, socially, sexually, and discursively or representationally produced” (Grosz 1992, 242). Defined by Elizabeth Grosz (*ibid.*, 242-243) as “a concrete, material, animate organization of flesh, organs, nerves, muscles, and skeletal structure which are given a unity, cohesiveness, and organization only through their psychical and social inscription,” the body has to be deciphered in its coded meanings and significations in relation to the society that has made them possible. Particularly, the gay bodies in Daoana’s poetry collection are continuously written on and written about, especially when they move within the ambits of their labor, love, and lust. They come into form through and against the mechanisms of discipline that try to contain their excessiveness and fragilities. These bodies, however, remain excessive despite social containment, and continue to function in relation to the biological tasks expected of them and to other objects or bodies implicated in bigger social structures or networks. Furthermore, they stay untotalizable amid social control as evidenced by their desires that remain indeterminately at a state of play in the liminal spheres of the city in which they emerge, circulate, and flourish.

Metropolitan Fantasies

Elizabeth Grosz (1992, 250) forwards that “the city’s form and structure provide the context in which social rules and expectations are internalized or habituated in order to ensure social conformity, or position social marginality at a safe or insulated and bounded distance.” Hence, the city is not only the “most immediately concrete locus for the production and circulation of power” (*ibid.*), but also the most convenient site for individual and collective fantasies.

What are the metropolitan fantasies found in Daoana’s *The Fashionista’s Book of Enlightenment*? What notions of beauty pervade the fantasies of Daoana’s project? What responses or resistances guide Daoana’s poetic vision? When I

inquire into fantasies, I am not limiting my query to the literary or imaginary. Tadiar (2000, 465) posits that fantasies “perform a kind of work and in this sense they might be considered a force of production of our individual and collective lives, that is, of personal and collective histories.” To explore the fantasies of Daoana’s personae is to acknowledge that these are valid symptoms and consequences of a material and global condition, and that they too are “a mediation of concrete social relations—a form of praxis” (ibid.).

In this paper, metropolitan fantasies are “characterized not by the achievement of wished-for objects but by the arranging of, a setting out of, the desire for certain objects” (Arnold 2001, 71). They magnify glamour and beauty, the creation of “dream-worlds” in fashion and consumerism, and a class consciousness that is contingent on money, decadence, sexuality, and fame. They pertain to a group of people, to projections, and to projects that engage in pleasure and hedonism. These fantasies are characterized by utterances or actions that use “settings and events that were ‘realistic’ while eliminating inconveniences, employing coincidences and beautifying individuals such that the ‘imagined experience’ came to represent ‘a perfected vision life’” (Buckley and Gundle 2000, 333). All in all, they emanate from an imagination whose claims and representations are propelled by capital, the market, and the convergence of systems and scenes in the urban center.

Inasmuch as Daoana prefers structure and surface, affluence and lavishness, I focus on beauty that is the logic of the modern, the commodity, the spectacle, and by being so, works out a “world colonized by false desires and illusions” and a “paradigm...[that] seduces us with the ‘hyper-reality’ of ravishing and perfect images” (Evans, 2000, 95). Beauty is a state to be aspired for even as it serves as a driving vehicle that facilitates the seductive undertaking of materializing predominantly Western(ized) registers and renderings. Daoana announces: “All of us, including you, have to rely on the sheath / Of appearances, wear what we think as a suitable / Disguise, cough a politically correct outcome, / Err, alas, on the side of the world” (“Desire”). From the outset, the penchant for physicality already sustains and animates *The Fashionista’s Book of Enlightenment*.

In “Diva,” the persona declares: “Whoever denies this world and wishes for another one— / Less mattered, light-lifted—is committing a serious mistake.” This opening line brings its readers to the here and now of this life, to the grit and texture of living, for as the poem implies, it is the only way to inhabit this world. This predilection for the heft and complexity of life—a mattered existence—is

expressed with flair because it is nothing but the product of the fantasies in which Daoana invests his own project. To be more precise, it is this acceptance of the material world that signals surrender to the lures of consumerism.

This line jumpstarts the collection's ambition to be part of a bigger fantasy, that is, to be part of the global world, where symbolic engagement and conversations are done with a particular (imagined) audience to whom the poems are being addressed. But what constitutes this materially global world? How can Daoana's personae and project be part of it?

How can, for the sweet aching life of you, unravel a river
Which is a scarf studded with sequins or dismantle the threads
Of winter evoked as a white coat the elms don with such élan?
Each time you caress petals and poems, are you not simply
Reaching out to softness, to brightly-colored words,
The rainbowed stones scattered inside the sleeve of earth? ("Diva")

The poem's persona seems convinced that tangible products are the primary constitution of a material world. Through experiencing "the caress [of] petals and poems," one may find meaning to his or her existence ("are you not simply / reaching out to softness, to brightly-colored words?"). My interest in these lines stems from the fact that one can glean the "dream-work" of the persona's—and of Daoana's—fantasy from the images to which he refers: a scarf studded with sequins, the threads of winter, a white coat, rainbowed stone, and sleeve of earth. All these sensory details are based on Western beauty, and in many ways reveal what sartorial inclination this poetry collection bears and flags. Gilbert (2000, 5) is of the mind that "the modern character of fashion culture in cities...cannot be understood without reference to their imperial past and post-imperial present. Most obviously, the economic ordering of the fashion industry has been shaped around the international divisions of labor established in the imperial age." In Daoana's context, his poetic articulations are hard to isolate from their close contiguity to American popular culture and to the positions of privilege that such Western-ness immediately triggers and perpetuates in the Filipino imaginary.

Because articles of clothing "enjoy a close proximity to the flesh, outlining, emphasizing, obscuring or extending the body" and therefore have an intimate relationship with the body, not only do they hint at a person's class or background but also become "a kind of visual metaphors for identity" and a manifestation of a particular sociality (Entwistle 2002, 133). Joanne Entwistle (in

ibid., 134) writes: “Our dress does not only belong to our bodies but to the social world as well. Thus, any understanding of the dressed body must acknowledge the social nature of it—how it is shaped by techniques, attitudes, aesthetics, and so on, which are socially and historically located.” If the cited artefacts of one’s wardrobe are bound up with personal predilections and bigger societal concerns, they consequently may map the persona’s cognition as a privileged subject, on the one hand, and show the embodiment of his metropolitan fantasies vis-à-vis his milieu, on the other.

When the persona proclaims “Surface is all: mineral, fur, shimmer, gold, feather, snakeskin,” the poem’s points of reference become clear in the same way that the influences of such verbalization become more concrete. Here is a persona who does not refuse worldliness; who steps on an imaginary stage to announce his unashamed indulgence in “the arrogance of things visible”; and who is bent on believing that:

We are meant to tumble outwards: words and orgasms.
Spilling, somersaulting, securing, our thoughts don’t service
Untouchable palaces; our tongues pay more homage to skin
Than gods. Hospitable heaven is mankind’s greatest fallacy.
Here is the only world, the adorable whore we love. (“Diva”)

The persona performs his preference for good taste, where good taste is “exemplified by high or couture fashion, the trappings of wealth, and media conceptions of beauty” (Manalansan 2006, 79). At this instance, the persona embodies a carnal (“our tongues pay more homage to skin / than gods”) and earthly (“Hospitable heaven is mankind’s greatest fallacy”) lifestyle. If anything, the objects he points out show that consumerism transcends itself as an economic activity: it is also about “dreams and consolation, communication and confrontation, image and identity” (Arnold 2001, 3).

What is more significant to point out is the poem’s rhetoric and aesthetic that have naturalized “the impact of economic growth, consumerism, urbanization, social mobility, and improving telecommunications” (Altman 2001, 30). To render the world (“Here is the only world, the adorable whore we love”) and these “sensation-drenched bodies” within the paradigm of decadence is to reify the fantasies that have brought them to being. Indeed, as Guy Debord (in (Evans 2000, 95) forwards, the society of the spectacle has “only intensified its effects, harnessing the new technologies of the image to do what it always did so well: visual seduction through fetishizing the commodity form.”

In “Garment,” a poem written after Gustav Klimt’s *Portrait of Adele Bloch Bauer*, the exultation of consumer culture stays, as fashion and art—and the love for it—are treated as a necessity (“as if the threads [of it] had been worked into [our] being / And [our] bodies have no choice but to convey solely surface”). In his imagining and imaging of the life of Adele Bloch Bauer, the persona describes the object of the painting as “spun [in] gold and ornamented [in] silver” and as “a glittering fish of a woman.” As much as the poem may be read as an interpretation of Klimt’s painting, it too can be interpreted as an expression of excess.

Look at her

And see what Klimt probably visualized in his mind
 Amid a background of disintegrating copper: neck
 Waylaid by metal, necessarily so, in order that the wrist
 May bend at an angle and all the slim fingers ringed

With nothing are entangled into a gesture of madness.
 One entire braceleted arm kept close to the ribs so that
 What should be unsaid may remain unsaid because
 Life is one complete loop whose center is silence. (“Garment”)

Excessive glamour is underlined when the persona describes Bauer: “Witness the slow corruption of the skin as though / Her blood, at this very instant, is tainted with rust, // Or perhaps it’s just meant to mimic gold because / the flesh is as unstable, has its own boiling point.” The lines reveal a double consciousness on the persona’s part: on the one hand, the acknowledgement of degradation due to excessiveness, and on the other, the justification of this “slow corruption of the skin” as a human phase or need. To yearn for the texture and color of gold, and to celebrate its shine and shimmer, is certainly to put oneself within the trappings of the material world and the commodities that comprise it. It is an illusion that flourishes in the midst of consumerism, affirmed by declarations like “There are consumptions that are inevitable.” Bauer’s image is taken as a rendering of pleasure and desire, which creates the persona’s “as-if” world. Bauer becomes a fascinatingly elusive, elegant, and exciting figure that “stirs the imagination and appeals to a taste for the unconventional, the unexpected, the colourful, or the exotic” (Buckley and Gundle 2000, 332). Focusing on decadence and indulgence, the persona locks himself up in the bourgeois inclination toward high fashion, sensual elements, and flamboyant lifestyles. Until the poem’s conclusion, it is not art in general nor the Klimt painting in particular that the persona extols. Inevitably, it is the superficial—the love for exteriority—that wins (“What will triumph is not art but the shiny foil that wraps it.”).

“Two to tango” initiates a conversation between a poet, who argues for the value of words, and a fashion enthusiast, who defends a worldly existence with tangible objects. Divided into two segments—namely, “What the poet says to the fashionista” and “The fashionista responds”—this poem makes manifest, through an exchange about the nature of art, literature, and fashion, the fantasies that pervade Daoana’s collection.

“What the poet says to the fashionista” starts with “Dear lady of Louis Vuitton, Ferragamo, Commes des Garcon, listen to me for a while”—a line that indicates the class origins of both the poet and the fashionista as well as the investments they find important in their social milieu. Enunciated in a speech that contains materials only a few people can purchase and claim as truly theirs, it also assigns a particular currency to the extent in which these personae can take their citified subject positions and their liberties as regards consumption, mobility, social engagements, and language.

I have been observing you for sometime now
 As you laugh, a champagne glass in hand,
 In a red empire-cut dress that brushes
 Your knees delicately as you try to balance
 In those killer stilettos that prop you
 Almost taller than the world.

.....

Your loveliness is a hook: the way you
 Gesture and lean towards the table, raising
 A left foot so deftly, the way you flow
 Into the crowd, the red dot of compass
 In a swirl of directions. (“Two to Tango”)

Clearly, the poet’s admiration for the fashionista is based on façade, or on “the polite consistence of [the fashionista’s] looks.” However, alongside this admiration is the poet’s recognition of the fashionista’s stifling lifestyle. This is to say that while the poet finds the fashionista’s classiness inviting, he also perceives it as restraining. As he says to the fashionista: “You need an exquisite escape.”

I want to bring
 You there, in this place without names—
 Away from Balenciaga, Lagerfeld, Dior,
 Away from the changing and brief

Interlocution of folds and seams, away
 From *polish*, where the human, that ache,
 Reclaims us, in a lush Eden of silences. (“Two to Tango”)

When the poet talks about escaping from the material world, he is perhaps pertaining to his own craft—“this place without names.” The assumption is that poetry unlike fashion is devoid of consumerism and capitalism. Unlike the physical world, it brings the fashionista face to face with her humanity. As A. Rosen (in Khan 2000, 116) puts it: “Art is all about permanency and fashion is all about the moment.” This view is really nothing but ideal and romantic, for it separates poetry from its social and economic realities. Poetry in this sense is a sanctuary for the troubled. As the poet states: It is “where the human, that ache, / Reclaims us, in a lush Eden of silences.” This line is problematic precisely because it promotes a lifestyle that capitalizes on “new freedoms” whereby one “can live for the glamour of the moment, apparently without a past, and oblivious to the future” (Arnold 2001, 3).

In poetry as in fashion, Daoana’s utterances hinge on what he barefacedly articulates from the very start: Western(ized) beauty and metropolitan fantasy. Although the poem’s persona finds the fashionista’s ostentatious way of life constraining, the poet still expresses, in the end, his fondness for the “Lolita of [his] longing, [his] *tender*.” This ambivalence is a site of Daoana’s fantasy. If anything, this uncertainty towards the fashionista’s lifestyle and personality only shows how delighted the poet becomes in being near the other person. I speculate that the poet sees himself in the fashionista. His craft and subject position are not really different from hers. He finds solace in words, while she indulges in commodities. The poet is a man of letters, while the fashionista is a woman of the world. Therefore, the intersection of their paths and the dialogue they have with each other may be seen as a conversation between one high art (poetry) and another (fashion).

In “The fashionista responds,” the fashionista speaks back and defends her lifestyle. She refuses to accept the poet’s suggestions, for to her they signify nothing but boredom, isolation, and stillness. Inasmuch as her identity, subjectivity, and lifestyle are determined by her access to, and use of, an ever-increasing range of goods, consumerism is the fashionista’s way of life. Although the fashionista recognizes the “grandeur and fireworks of [the poet’s] mind”, she remains unimpressed. As she professes: “The loneliness is stopping.” Furthermore, she thinks that poetry’s intangibility does not fit her inclination toward the material. She adds:

All this hapless talk about
 Enlightenment, all this passionate pursuit
 To engage me in thought, to dig deep
 Into my humanity, to value what is invisible:
 It's not a path I have chosen to commit. ("Two to Tango")

It is for this reason that she asks the poet to "see [her] beyond the sequins and furs of [her] exterior" and to "look at [her] as [the poet] would look another woman, / needing a surface." This plea comes from a person immersed in consumerism, and is proud of it. Gesturing at the artificial and the external, it implies that the need for surfaces and the love for consumption are natural to being a woman.

What I wear, who I am—
 The countless faces I reveal to the public
 Mark me in this created world I have learned
 To love. Civilization is my pristine cup of tea.
 All of this is my anchorage. Asking me to let go
 Is an abandonment of the city's many-layered
 Dresses. I don't want to be naked. ("Two to Tango")

Unlike the poet who is "buoyed up in [his] scintillating metaphors," the fashionista grounds herself in the "real" world. Definitely part of the urban fabric, she announces her enjoyment in being with various people, in different situations, under countless disguises. Her presence in this environment is a performance which is half-revealed and half-concealed. And yet this is performed neither with guilt nor resentment, precisely because this is what directs her "reality." Furthermore, this is what characterizes her outgoingness as well as what satisfies her appetite for the "city's many-layered dresses."

If anything, the poet and the fashionista use their respective art forms to forward their subject positions. On the one hand, the poet finds comfort in his words and even persuades the fashionista to share the poetic experience with him. On the other, the fashionista is satisfied with her extravagance and is no way interested in giving up her lifestyle that is deemed intricate by others. Although they are polarized by lifestyles and worldviews, they are somehow linked in several social aspects.

First, both the poet and the fashionista have a metropolitan mindset. This is evident in the poet's idealistic attitude toward poetry and the fashionista's

materialistic way of life. Second, both are products of their middle/upper class backgrounds. Third, both of them are part of an urban consumer culture, for they “physically and symbolically occupy, produce meaning and create belonging in the spaces and places that constitute the commodified city” (Jayne 2006, 7). And fourth, both espouse a certain metropolitan fantasy which again zeroes in on the Western(ized) notion of beauty. Whether rendered through words or through commodities, the metropolitan fantasies of both the poet and the fashionista characterize their language and regulate their reception to their identities and subject positions. For instance, the poet finds consolation in his words, in poetry, on the blank page; while the fashionista operates in the “capitalist ideology of consumer sovereignty and choice” (ibid., 8). Indeed, what sustains this social exchange between the poet and the fashionista is the commodity, or any product that gratifies human want and is valued by existing market forces dominated by global capital. The word is to the poet as branded objects are to the fashionista.

It is at this point where I go back to my questions regarding the fantasies in Daoana’s project. Who gets to experience and construct these metropolitan fantasies? From “Diva” to “Garment” to “Two to tango”, similar strands of beauty, art, fashion, and materialism prevail. They look homogenous and limited when put together, for all of them revel in the external, the superficial, and the outward motion of life. They carry a lifestyle that wants to be brought to public, ornamented, displayed, and performed. Moreover, they project various personae situated comfortably in the urban center.

Most of these personae are engendered by the consumerist culture to which they belong. Their fantasies are implicated in, affected by, and constitutive of such condition. If their inclinations are toward artificiality and exteriority, it is because their surroundings call for it. If they unremorsefully assert their freedom and unaffectedness, it is because “consumer choice has become the foundation for a new concept of freedom in contemporary society” (ibid., 12). It is this “pseudo-sovereignty” propounded by consumer capitalism that conditions these personae to believe that they have control over their lives. Furthermore, if they find their partiality to surface and sheen enabling, it is because they have already assimilated such belief into their everyday life. I forward that Daoana’s collection contains various personae whose dominant concerns are typically if not ideologically bourgeois. Their bourgeois consciousness heralds “a new role for fictions and narratives in sustaining the economic system” (Buckley and Gundle 2000, 333). They speak for and of a group of people who hardly see beyond their vantage points, inasmuch as they “occupy a self removed from facial confrontations with

its social contradictions” (Tadiar 2004, 90). As subjects, these personae seem mobile, ambulant, on-the-go, and in free-flowing circulation all the time. In Tadiar’s (ibid.) words, they are “an I occupied by a free-floating consciousness.”

At this juncture, speculating about the addressee of these personae’s utterances is essential. To whom are these metropolitan fantasies addressed? This part of my paper conjectures a real or symbolic audience to which Daoana’s projections are offered. I maintain that it is their Western(ized) fashion that gives Daoana’s personae access to the audience with whom they aspire to converse. Through the garments they put on and the penchant for luxury they profess, these personae find means to present and represent themselves in the metaphorical or actual (global) stage of which they want to be part. I forward that this is the very reason why they knowingly and shamelessly affirm and execute their position as consumers and urbanites. Through performing identities and subjectivities that are contingent on their lifestyles, these personae (as well as the author that conceived them) unconsciously express their metropolitan fantasies. In connection, it seems apt to mention what Vicente Groyon (in Altman 2001, 30) writes with regard to the fantasies cultivated by Western magazines:

You are under the impression that you belong to the world the magazine describes, and not in this tropical, underdeveloped, unstable country. You dream of escaping to this world full of perfect people, with perfect faces and perfect lives and perfect clothes and perfect bodies.

Indeed, these metropolitan fantasies of beauty, art, and fashion are implicated in and directed at a very narrow social class, on the one hand, and a bigger and wider global market, on the other. I further speculate that Daoana’s fantasies attempt to access, wittingly or otherwise, a foreign public. They may be part of the dream-work found on television, on the Internet, and in the pages of newspapers and magazines, all of which are connected to or inflected by the pressures, pleasures, and persuasions of First World countries like the USA. This speculation of course latches on to Tadiar’s (2004, 85) idea that “[t]he international community is precisely the point of symbolic identification that defines the parameters (the field of action) of Philippine fantasy-production.” Tadiar, following Freud, adds that: “One’s dreams or fantasies are produced in behalf of another, that is, with a certain obligation (or debt) to an Other, whose power one must take into account and who thereby influences one’s desire” (ibid., 466). As such, I forward that Daoana’s project in its entirety is constructed for a metaphorical Other that encompasses not only the partial social class that the collection talks to and portrays, but also to the

international community whose conceptions of beauty, fashion, and art Daoana's collection seems to imbibe and echo.

In the following discussion, this Other will have a face and history of its own. I will argue that Daoana creates a clearer distinction as well as connection between the Self (his personae) and the Other (his addressees) as he tackles gay desires and the gay gaze.

Gay Desires, Gaze, and Bodies

Studies on gaze indicate that between the gazer and the one being gazed at, it is the former who is always in power. As Denzin (1995, 46) writes: "In creating [you, the one being gazed at], I give you a history, an erotic reading, and a standing in the situation. I may treat you with indifference, and let my gaze brush across your face... Or I may seize you in my gaze, and draw you near to me. Now my pleasure comes in being able to control your presence for me. As I bring you near I arouse myself, using you for my fantasy purposes." Denzin is of course pertaining to the male and patriarchal gaze, whose capacity to capture the object being gazed at is beyond doubt. After all, the male gaze is hegemonic, unyielding, and omnipresent.

But what if the gaze is gendered? What if, unlike the ever controlling male gaze, it is characterized by delicate and unrequited desire? What if the gazer is gay?

It is difficult to talk about *The Fashionista's Book of Enlightenment* without touching on the desires that Daoana's personae have toward others. As the poems show, these desires are produced and consumed not through sexual contact, but through the surreptitious act of seeing, or simply put, gazing. It is through gazing where these gay subjects/personae construct and concretize their yearning for an Other, and where they encounter their subject position in society. As they come across the Other, these personae also discover the painful realities they have to confront, undergo, and accept.

In the context of Daoana's project, I argue that gazing is not always a powerful practice. To gay men, the act of gazing is most of the time paradoxical. It provides them instantaneous pleasure, while making them realize their susceptibility to loneliness and need for the other. If there is anything the act of gazing affirms about the lives and loves of gay men, it is this: that their desirous

and desiring lives are, after all, an unstable one. And as I argue further in this paper, it is in the course of looking at and desiring others from a distance that gay men come face to face with their vulnerability.

In “Prayer,” a gay man addresses a co-passenger on the bus. The latter becomes the muse of the former, and is given detailed description as the poem—and its “pile of words & significances tight as houses, light-ambushed & rain-cohered”—progresses. The persona states:

I invoke your pure delight & luminosity, boy
 In a red jacket, registering as both breath &
 Emergency, as the bus dips—sideways—
 Into the three o'clock road. See you neither
 Falling nor swimming in the fog, simply,
 Standing & staring with no heft of purpose,
 Just gazing, marvellously, letting time precipitate
 As your slow body tilts toward the dissolved:
 Landscape bereft of contradictions. (“Prayer”)

At the outset, the persona already knows the improbability of being in close contact with the Other. No matter how engrossed he is with the “boy in a red jacket” and with his “pure delight and luminosity,” the fact that everything between them is as fragile, short-lived, and ungraspable as “breath & emergency” remains.

As the persona describes the Other, we do not only learn about his longing but also about the parallelisms that, to the persona’s mind, metaphorically connect them.

I call to you
 Instead of the muse, not just because we share
 The same millennium, the same hollowed-out
 Clouds of the unhinged city, but because—
 Let me put it this way: You venerate lostness.
 You know how to stop, & stopping, the blur
 Is summoned from the details, & the unknown
 Rolls like the spokes of white wheels, &
 Something gets polished inside you & what shines
 Is a small, incalculable belief in the little bit. (“Prayer”)

The persona’s descriptions are employed to give the Other story and voice. As seen in these lines, the poet/persona simultaneously speaks about and

for the Other, and in the process, also reveals the similarities they have. At this point, it may seem that the persona is in control of the situation; that through his gaze, he manages to produce a distinct moment, a unique person. Furthermore, it is through the persona's gaze and his emotional screen where this particular encounter with the Other becomes clear. As Denzin (1995, 44) writes: "Each begins with a phenomenological conception of vision, the eye, the look, the gaze, the voyeur, spectacle and specularity. Vision refers to my perception of the visual field that confronts me. My eye, my act of looking, renders the field visible, brings it into play, and makes it real for me."

The poem also shows how the persona and the addressee can be one and the same. By desiring the Other, the persona is also animating his own very Self. This is evident in "Prayer", as the persona invokes the presence of the "boy in a red jacket." In him and through him, the persona seeks to find life, vivacity, and enthusiasm ("So bless me. / Restore me to my edginess. Intervene / Against the wind shutting down flames & / Roses in my head."). Indeed, what the persona intimates is the absence of inspiration in his existence.

If anything, this poem shows how the gaze of a gay man is not at all authoritative or manipulative, for as the last lines clearly show, the persona exposes a certain kind of dependence on the addressee. The gay gaze here just becomes a pretentious practice of power, if one can call it that to begin with, because in this poem, it emphasizes nothing but desires that can and will never be reciprocated. Furthermore, it expresses the persona's self-consciousness of his unrequited longing for the Other, that is, the persona's awareness that the guy he saw in the bus ride and whose life he elatedly erected in his imagination would not in any way be his.

As soon as I hit forehead
 Against the page, you should have known:
 That I write because you exist on the other side,
 Smoldering with a life that stays put (the way
 You want it) complete & incomparable
 In total mist, needing me not one bit. ("Prayer")

It is this fleetingness which the poet/persona contradicts with the permanence of literature. In his intimate relationship with the blank page, the persona documents his feelings toward the guy. As the gazer—as the one who documented and described that momentary event with the Other—the persona knows that everything passes quickly, and that whatever his gaze produces will

neither be permanent nor fully graspable, as it is owned by a constantly shifting emotion, moment, scene, event. Denzin (ibid., 49) adds:

In everyday life the gaze is seldom, if ever, fully regulated, or fully structured. It is an uncertain, unstable production; a fleeting process, leaving its invisible traces, now here, next there, constantly on the move, an absence defined by its moving presence. Thus a person or a thing is seldom, if ever, a full presence to be captured in entirety.

In “Burn,” a persona talks about a particular chance encounter with another man in a place where “darkness drifts.” Reading closely, the reader gets enough hints that the persona is referring to a “one-night stand” with someone he meets accidentally. Desire in this poem is not limited to gazing, unlike in the previous poems that have been analyzed. The persona finds the courage to bridge the distance between him and the other person (“Whatever / The mind insists about the gulf between two bodies, / The chilling solitude, is, thank God, not present here.”) and actually initiate a conversation (“You are warm, the animal that you are, and your breath / Shade permeable angels in the cold.”). It is here where desires emanate from the gay body and where the sexual activities of gay men are made known. We see that the persona converses with the man, and in such instance, we see an allusion to the attitude most gay men have toward chance encounters and one-night stands. The persona engages in a short interaction with the man, “[r]egardless whether death is standing by the gates or not.” What follows is a burst of emotions, or a body’s adoration for another body:

We kiss, within time’s bracket,
As the oars make funny sound in the lake like someone
Gurgling, within space’s bracket. The world chugs on,
And we don’t care, at least I don’t; someone I love
May be dying but all I give a damn is this incidence.
You pool my helplessness in such a nice and tidy basin
That I don’t leak anymore. My god, you are so beautiful.
What kind of fire burnished you? What elixir do you
Contain in each and every cell of your body? I want
You to love me; I want to perch on the summit
Of your mind, like that mall in the distance, shedding
Its radiance off. (“Burn”)

Urgency is present in these lines. Everything is bursting at the seams, it seems, as the persona gets into the moment, into the person, all impulsive, confessional, and open about his feelings. The persona’s composure is let loose, his

susceptibility bared, and his yearning for the other person made obvious. Again, I am reading the persona as another example of a gay man putting his desires on the line. In this case, the gay persona is braver and bolder in declaring his emotions. But while this may seem to be a sign of courage, the sting and hurt brought about by the uncertainty of such act cannot be denied. The persona in “Burn” is fully aware that he cannot possess the Other in his entirety, no matter how much he declares his admiration toward him (“My god, you are so beautiful. / What kind of fire burnished you? / What elixir do you / Contain in each and every cell of your body?”) and pleads for affection (“I want / You to love me; I want to perch on the summit / Of your mind, like that mall in the distance, shedding / Its radiance off.”). Despite this, the persona risks it all like a true lover would, and rightly so, “precisely because between remaining silent and expressing [one’s self], it is silence that is always the less livable way to live—and love” (Garcia 1996, 11).

In the end, the persona contents himself with the casualness of the instant. With this decision comes the recognition of the impossibility of having a deep relationship with the addressee as well as the acceptance of the transitory nature of their encounter.

All I could be is to be exquisitely funny
 (End of scene). We mutter goodbye and walk apart.
 We look back at each other at the identical second
 (No commentary). Tomorrow, at almost the same hour,
 You will fuck me because that’s what you can give,
 And not the entire city where we both live. (“Burn”)

Apart from the metropolitan fantasies and gay desires discussed, the representation of gay bodies in Daoana’s poetry collection is this essay’s final unit of analysis. In the following paragraphs, I aim to explore “the role of the [gay] body in the production of gendered subjectivities” (Alsop et al. 2002, 166). I argue that through Daoana’s portrayals of gay bodies, *The Fashionista’s Book of Enlightenment* is able to discuss the social issues affecting almost all gay men. Moreover, through the movements of gay bodies in the city, Daoana reveals his own trepidation and helplessness in the face of a disease like AIDS.

I am viewing the body as a product that becomes “the primary signifier of gendered identities” (ibid., 168) and whose contours are integral to the exploration of gay subjectivities. This attempt gestures at the fact that through the actions and activities gay bodies do, a mode of living is revealed: one that is contingent on

habitual action and inner sensation. It is through habitual actions and responses that subjects gain a corporeal or postural schema or body image (*ibid.*, 172).

In “The long history of kissing boys,” Daoana presents what Altman refers to as the “young, upwardly mobile, and sexually adventurous” gay stereotype, who enumerates his intimate affairs with other men in various instances of desire. Here the gay body is full of carnal hunger; it is a body in motion, at play, entering into noncommittal trysts with others. In the following lines, the objects of the persona’s desires as well as the places where these desires are consumed are named:

Yes, boys, the various kinds,
Half-men, and perhaps, invariably beautiful.

We shared them: kisses in beaches and cubicles,
In proper rooms and churches, in theatres

And gasoline stations. They, in those brief,
Incalculable moments, helped me to ladder

Away from my mind, to the skin of this world,
Almost like saints, except smeared, perishable

Just like the mortal begging bowl I carry
And ask the void to fill: my body. (“The long history of kissing boys”)

The gay body comes alive through its sensual and sexual encounters and experiences. Corporeality here becomes written on and about through the accumulation of affects diffused through various spaces, of motions done in stealth and yet remain irrepressible, and of moments relished rather boldly in between poles of loss and love. There is a connection between the gay body and the places (beaches, cubicles, proper rooms, churches, theatres, and gasoline stations) where it is re-explored as an entity that frustrates repression, hazards a sensual action, and marks territories with its traces. Moreover, the mobile body of the persona and those of the “invariably beautiful” men to which it is related are mutually beneficial. The persona’s body is filled by as much as it fills, so to speak, other bodies, other “mortal begging bowls” that other men carry. What the abovementioned lines gesture at is the honest fact that bodies are experienced and enjoyed through the “particular sets of emotional encounters with [other] individual bodies,” because “the body...is a body whose particular contours are

laden with salience and significance, a body experienced not only cognitively but also affectively” (ibid., 174).

It seems that the persona has opened the floodgates of desires that characterize his gay body. The persona shows an intensity that is titillated, as he describes his desirous encounters with men who are “[h]esitant, / Unstinting... holy, / But most of course, hungry, human to a fault—.” The persona declares his overflowing desire—“the very nature of need”—toward these individuals, whose kisses “put [his] orbiting body into / Place, eased into that warmth and wetness.”

However, in his celebration of the gay body and his acknowledgment of “the interplay of the animal kingdom,” the persona also realizes the ephemeral “dissolution of solitude.” It is on this note where the gay body is brought back to a reality engaging gay men in general: gay desire, which, according to the persona, is nothing but “[a]n entire discourse from the blunt octaves / Of breath risen to form absolutely nothing.” In this sense, no matter how thrilled the gay persona is about the encounters he has had with other men, the entire poem ends with a melancholia about, if not a resignation for, passing engagements with others and the insecurities of a kind of yearning that is consummated perhaps without the requisites of reciprocity. In this sense, the gay body may operate as an open signifier for an unstinting daring toward risky relations, for one, and for an unrepentant fragility toward losing and getting lost in the maze of one’s desires, for another.

In Daoana’s collection, the gay body is not only characterized by uncontainable desires, for in some poems, it is also approached with fear and paranoia. In poems like “The result,” “Panic at Malacca,” and “Saturn stranding,” the gay body is threatened by HIV/AIDS and is, therefore, on the verge of corrosion. The spread of this epidemic may be attributed, as Altman (2004, 66) notes, to “the relentless movement of people, the breakdown of old sexual restraints, increasing needle use, and the unwillingness of authorities, both governmental and religious, to confront the real needs of prevention.”

“The result” shows the anxiety bogging down gay subjects when symptoms of AIDS start to appear on the body, like “the month-long diarrhea, / Fevers breaking only in certain hours, // Unhealable infection of the urinary tract, / Tonsils invaded by the biologically hostile / They needed to be plucked out, pus / In [the] urine, blood in your stool.” AIDS is referred to as “the inept / Murderer whose poison you imagine / Is contaminating your insides, hollowing / It out until

you will just be mud / And phlegm and quicksand.” This is the decaying gay body, one that suffers from the consequences of the seemingly polygamous and infidel activities and trusts the persona has had.

The AIDS scare also manifests in “Saturn stranding,” where the persona “finds [himself] at the edge of an age they said / To be the darkest.” In this poem, AIDS is referred to as “that imponderable darkness, / Piercing through the gauze of clouds, plunging // Dragon-headed into the human.” The following lines carry the persona’s confession about his anxiety with regard to his virus-infested mind and body:

How do I weather through the dissembling,

Find the antidote to a slow poisoning blood,
The grief, at last, that is bigger than the body?
As early as now, terrible thoughts trickle,

Shadow-hooded, sharpened knives in their hands.
Months ago, I thought a vicious virus was chewing me,
Cell by cell. Tests came in the negative but the mind,

Irreprehensible, continued to swarm with the virus,
Infecting all my memories, replicating with
The speed of a shout. I felt hollowed out, husk (“Saturn Standing”)

Characterized by tension and disquiet, these bodies are products of desires, inasmuch as “the touches of others, the interests others take in the different parts of our bodies will be of enormous importance in the development of the...body” (ibid., 173-174). They are vessels of the personae’s histories; that is, they contain and are derived from the “emotional and desiring engagements which [they] have undergone” (ibid., 174). Furthermore, the gay bodies in Daoana’s collection are made particular by the sexual desires in and on them. Their significations and their truths are anchored on the libidinal sources and receivers which have brought them forth. These libidinal sources and receivers are nothing but the subjects themselves and their objects of desire, both of which are momentarily and noncommittally linked by sexual contact. In the context of Daoana’s work, it is not only the personae’s sexual contacts with various men but also the outcomes of such acts that are written on these gay bodies. Indeed, they become the sexually coded meanings that make these gay bodies readable entities.

Conclusion

In this paper, I probe into the metropolitan fantasies and gay desires rendered in a gendered, urban consciousness that is exposed to and immersed in “the unstoppable march of cultural and economic globalization, the massive revolutions in information technology, and the local resistance to these various and related processes” (Garcia 1996, 420). By identifying and scrutinizing metropolitan fantasies, I maintain that Daoana’s project aims to be part of a bigger and wider space, one that endeavors to be global, for it tries to address a more universal, less national, and highly American(ized) audience. These metropolitan fantasies regulate and inform the mode and manner in which Daoana’s personae (and Daoana *per se*) perceive, situate, and articulate themselves, which almost always comes side by side with images, ideas, and instances of opulence. They, then, may be viewed as symptomatic and consequential of the heavy middle and upper class milieu that composes and is composed by them.

With beauty and glamour as central tropes of these fantasies, consumerism becomes a necessary concept. The net of significations that consumerism is made to carry puts into focus the great impact of Western culture on consumerist societies in which, as Mica Nava (in Arnold, 2001, 3) asserts, identities are so often assessed by appearance. Purchasing power means freedom; beauty signifies influence; and “money is the major *prerequisite* and the greatest *boundary* for the construction of autonomous, independent assertive...subjectivities” (Binnie 1995, 186). Specifically, the consumption of material products seems to drive the different personae in Daoana’s collection to realize their subject positions in society and the modes in which they relate to “reality.”

These fantasies create subjects who are subsumed under the cloak of good taste, wealth, and luxury. Daoana’s personae are prey to such illusion, or are themselves the illusion, as they seem to be driven by consumption of material products, that is, by the objects they purchase and the penchant for materiality they almost shamelessly declare. They seem stuck with the allure of the capitalistic and consumptive present time in which they exist, almost vulgarly, distant from the past and heedless of the future. By performing their inclination to exteriority through poetic articulations, these personae at once provide themselves with an access to privilege and a free subscription to an unrealizable fantasy. As Benedicto (2008a, 333) writes, their aspirational metamorphosis into metropolitan or global subjects may be taken as an “inching toward a nonreplicable idealized model rooted in a history of colonial desire that involves intersections of class, gender,

and race... It is in this sense that we might say that...[these personae] will always be chasing the phatic image; [they] can only ever be aspirants, 'almost the same but not quite.'"

Another objective of this paper is to identify the gay desires and gay bodies pervading Daoana's project. I forward that the desires present in *The Fashionista's Book of Enlightenment* are produced and consumed in two ways: through the act of gazing and through sexual intercourse. Through the act of gazing, the distance separating the subject (the gazer) and the object (the one being gazed at) is symbolically collapsed, as the former creates the history of the latter, as the Self captures the Other.

But unlike the male and patriarchal gaze, the gaze in Daoana's collection is certainly gendered. It is gay. If the male and patriarchal gaze is forceful, authoritative, controlling, the gay gaze navigates the zones of owning and letting go, while remaining almost always conscious of susceptibility and loneliness. To qualify, the gay gaze, as exemplified in Daoana's work, is dependent on the Other, but aware that such dependence is momentary, unsustainable, and uncertain. So if there is one thing that the gay gaze proves time and again, it is that the lives and loves of gay men are almost always on the line, difficult to make permanent, as they are prone to slip away in just a blink of an eye.

The gay bodies Daoana makes available to the readers are at the edge of deterioration, for they are afflicted with various infections and viruses. I forward that these bodies are readable mainly because they have been written on, that is, they carry certain histories of pain, misery, and fright. These bodies are sites where desires and fantasies intersect.

All in all, the metropolitan fantasies, gay desires and bodies in Daoana's project are products and consequences of the material conditions enclosing them. All of them highlight a certain lifestyle, a similar concern, a particular point of view, all of which are moulded and sustained by the urban environment, by an urban upbringing, and by a middle/upper class penchant for excesses.

However, what Daoana seems to forget is the fact that these fantasies and bodies are also tied to the issue of class. It must be pointed out that no matter how free they feel or affluent they seem to be, Daoana's personae are still not liberated from heteropatriarchal norms. The fantasies they verbalize can never gauge how free they are, precisely because the fantasies themselves underscore the fact that

these personae, and even Daoana himself, are still trapped in a highly urbanized consciousness. In articulating these fantasies, the personae, the poetry collection, and Daoana himself are tributaries of, even as they try to nuance, Western(ized) and mainstream ideas and images on gender, sexuality, and class.

These fantasies, desires, and bodies are seemingly afloat in the air, searching for that big audience, that Other, with whom they wish to communicate. Predicated on an imperial present, they are discursive enactments of a vision of globality that evades indigenoussness and instead assumes the foreign as the openly available anti-thesis to the limitations of the native. They expose identities and subjects that attempt to reach a metropole in which travel, mobility, beauty, and wealth are more fact than fiction, accomplishment than aspiration. But as the poems and the social milieu to which they belong evidently show, this wishful thinking hardly materializes and instead puts its subjects in an in-between state of being almost the same as what they fantasize or mimic, but not quite: indeed, “a subject who is simultaneously privileged and marginalized, local and global, subaltern and imperialist” (Benedicto 2008b, 291).

Daoana’s personae bask in the illusion of freedom through wealth, beauty, and glamor. Any rehearsal of this problematic illusion can only signify complicity in the replication of narratives and representations against which resistance is rendered imperatively crucial. Ultimately, only when Daoana’s project discerns with reflexivity its fearfully fervent fantasies and desires, and when it reconsiders the implications of class, race, and gender in the configurations of its deft poetic form, that *The Fashionista’s Book of Enlightenment* will emerge with a gravity and illumination that deserve nothing but the warm, receiving light of day.

Notes

- 1 According to Manalansan (2006, 5), “globalization is often seen in extreme terms either as a foreboding specter of a catastrophic future or as a cause for a celebratory jubilation over the resolution of local repressions.” This dilemma has penetrated the lives of gay men / queer subjects in particular, as they flaunt and realize their identities and subjectivities. It must be stated that the annual gay pride march, for example, has always been viewed as Western in orientation.

- 2 The most famous and groundbreaking gay anthologies in the Philippines are *Ladlad* (1994), *Ladlad 2* (1996), and *Ladlad 3* (2007). According to John Hawley, in his introduction to *Post-colonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections*: “The fact that major conferences are just now beginning to turn their attention to the heart not only of gender issues related to ‘internationalization,’ but at the centre of issues of homosexuality as well.” On 26 June 1994, Progressive Organization of Gays in the Philippines and Metropolitan Community Church Manila organized the First LGBT Pride March in Asia, marching from EDSA to Quezon Avenue (Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines) and highlighting broad social issues.

- 3 Bobby Benedicto (2008a, 319), in his essay “The Haunting of Gay Manila: Global Space-Time and the Specter of Kabaklaan,” calls this “the scene” to refer to “a loose assemblage of transformations tethered to (localizable) neoliberal mechanisms—including fashionable bars and clubs, gym franchises, glossy publications, Internet portals—and to the individuals given privileged access to such mechanisms. The scene serves as the site where gay globalization plays out as an internalized project that is at least minimally teleological, necessitating a sense of history as well as an imaginative planetary geography built via the suturing together of other, distant city spaces and body spaces.”

- 4 I am taking inspiration from Martin Manalansan’s notions of *byuti* and drama found in Filipino gay men’s language. According to Manalansan (2006, 15), “these idioms serve as a means of understanding the world, and, more importantly, assessing proper conduct and action.” For the purpose of this paper, I am appropriating the notion of beauty and incorporating it with what is referred to as metropolitan fantasies.

- 5 I am consciously using the English term *gay* over the Filipino word *bakla* to highlight the economic background of Daoana’s personae and project. Almost if not all of Daoana’s personae reside in the city, have upward mobility, and can afford a luxurious life of play and party. They, too, are eloquent in the language that is considered to be elite and educated: English. On the other hand, Bobby Benedicto (2008a, 318) writes that “*kabaklaan* is a highly contested term that is sometimes read as a synonym for gay but is accurately, though no less problematically, depicted as a sexual tradition that conflates homosexuality, transvestism or effeminacy, and lower-class status, and which is embodied by the caricatured figure of the *parlorista*, the cross-dresser working in one of Manila’s many low-end beauty salons.”

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