The Filipino Author as Producer

This essay is for the women of Batis AWARE-Batis Center for Women, my neighbors, friends, and teachers in the work of community building and women's empowerment; for the Mission For Migrant Workers and the migrant women workers in Hong Kong whose zine, *Work Is Work*, is a touchstone for the work I strive to do in independent publishing; for the ever exuberant BLTX community, especially the tireless organizers who run the expo in Davao, Cagayan de Oro, Naga, and Baguio; and for Auntie Lorenza.

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The Filipino Author as Producer

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1.

Ten days after the strongest typhoon to hit the planet in recorded history made landfall in the Philippines, I flew from Albany, New York to Hong Kong for a poetry festival. Months earlier, as I coordinated my trip with the organizers, who were all strangers to me, I thought it absurd that they would want to bring an obscure Filipino writer attending graduate school in the United States to Hong Kong to do a reading of her poetry. I was, however, happy to overlook the strangeness of their invitation in exchange for a free plane ticket to a country in the same time zone as the Philippines. Filipinos could enter Hong Kong without a visa, and it was close enough to Manila, where my partner was living, which meant he could afford to travel to the festival and we could spend a week together.

When Typhoon Yolanda, known internationally as Haiyan, hit the Visayas, it pulled ships from the sea and sent them pummeling into coastal neighborhoods. It destroyed roads and farms, cut off communication lines, and wiped out entire villages. Those in evacuation centers found no refuge as the centers succumbed to the force of the typhoon. In the aftermath of the storm, survivors searched for loved ones in the ruins and among the many corpses that littered the streets. At the UN Climate Change Convention in Warsaw, the Philippines' chief negotiator, whose hometown was in the path of the typhoon and who had yet to confirm the safety of his own family, went on hunger strike to demand specific policy changes and resource allocations to address the climate crisis. Rejecting the term "natural disaster," he insisted that Haiyan and the like be understood as outcomes of social and economic inequity on a global scale, with the poorest of the world enduring the repercussions of unchecked progress and consumption.[1] The death toll from Haiyan would eventually reach 6,300. The typhoon, which affected close to a fifth of the Philippine population, destroyed over a million houses and displaced 4.1 million people.[2]

As the Philippine government's response to the calamity shifted from silent to painfully slow, and as survivors, who were literally living among the dead, struggled with hunger and disease, I embarked on a series of flights two hours short of taking me home. On one of the flights, the attendants handed out envelopes to passengers for

donations to the Filipino victims of the typhoon. I saw my partner "in real life" again at the Hong Kong airport. It seemed absurd to be alive and intact, even happy. We shared a car to the hotel with an American poet, an editor for New Directions, who was also a guest at the festival. Our small talk during the drive was sporadic. It was evening in Hong Kong, and two of us had just emerged from long-haul flights. The American poet asked after our families back home. At some point during the ride, I mentioned to him that a Filipino poet, José Garcia Villa, was an editor for New Directions in the late 1940s. I was surprised by his interest in this bit of information. Apparently, he was quite familiar with the history of the publishing house yet he had never heard of Villa. He asked me to repeat the Filipino poet's name. The American poet promised to look him up.

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Hong Kong has the fifth highest concentration of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in the world. Of the 331,989 domestic helpers working in the country, 173,726 are Filipinos.[3] Months before I attended the poetry festival, the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal ruled that foreign domestic helpers, unlike all other foreigners employed in Hong Kong, could not obtain permanent residency after working in the country for seven consecutive years. Two Filipino domestic helpers had taken the fight for permanent residency to court, and the legal battle, which spanned a couple of years, culminated in the landmark decision. The Hong Kong court maintained that foreign domestic workers should not be regarded as "ordinarily resident" in the country.[4] Its tautological logic invoked the precarity of the domestic worker's labor as justification to keep her vulnerable, subject to deportation upon unemployment, and permanently ineligible to move her own family to the country where she works. At the festival, when people learned where I was from, the conversation often turned to Haiyan, which continued to figure prominently in the news. Occasionally, and noticeably when in the company of Americans living in Hong Kong, I was asked about the "situation" of Filipino domestic workers, a matter more contentious where we were and therefore less palatable as material for small talk than the catastrophic typhoon. That Filipinos were "the help" in Hong Kong was a reality one would be hard pressed to ignore, observed the Americans, who were mostly working in the country as translators, university professors, or teachers of English. Maids were an ordinary part of Hong Kong households. Some of the Americans, in fact, employed Filipino helpers at home. More than one of them said to me that I was the first Filipino they had met in the country who was not a domestic worker. They were unanimous in their recognition of the gulf between their position as "expatriates" and those regarded as "migrant workers." They were equally incredulous over the Court of Final Appeal decision.

The first Filipino I met at the festival was a woman with whom I locked eyes as I stood among the crowd outside the performance hall after a poetry reading. When I returned her smile, she approached and greeted me warmly in English, saying I must be the Filipino participant at the festival. Oo, I said. She said she had been on the lookout for me. Buti andito ka, I responded, referring to her attendance of the reading. Ako ang yaya niya, she said, pointing to a child in the crowd, the son of the Chinese poet who was the director of the festival. Ah, sikat yang boss mo, I chuckled, which prompted Auntie L-- to tell me about her employer, whom she described as a kind and generous amo. He was easy to talk to. He had a house full of books that she was welcome to read. He hosted writers from all over the world in his home; she was in charge of their meals, but she often also got to meet them. Auntie L-- first learned about the festival when her amo was planning it, and she told him she hoped he would invite a Filipino poet. She was unfamiliar with Filipino poets herself, but surely they were out there. He seemed to think this was a good idea, because after a few days he mentioned the name of a male Filipino poet to her as a possible guest. It would be nice if you chose a woman instead, she suggested. Later, he told her about a female poet, a Filipino-American living in the US. She said he could consider inviting a poet who actually grew up and still lives in the Philippines. Now the festival was happening at last, and Auntie L-- couldn't be happier that a Filipina was chosen to represent our country. She said her boss even invited a Filipino band based in Hong Kong to perform in the same program as my reading. He insisted that she invite her friends to the event. She hoped they would go; there would be no reason for them to miss it since it falls on a Sunday, their day off from work.

I had been wondering to whom I should credit my invitation to the festival, which had reached me via what seemed a convoluted route (a message sent via academia.edu, a platform I rarely use) that bore no distinct link to my department in the University of the Philippines, where I was employed, or to any of the writers I knew back home. As I laughed and listened to Auntie L--, who was quite the energetic storyteller, it became clear to me that I owed my presence in the poetry festival to her, a Filipino domestic helper, whose intervention occurred as she went about her household duties while chatting with her employer, a famous poet in Hong Kong.

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Only two of Auntie L--'s friends joined her at my reading, two equally maternal aunties who were lavish in their praise of my performance, my ease as I read my work onstage, my excellent command of the English language. I myself wouldn't want to spend my day off at a poetry reading, I (half)-joked to appease Auntie L--, who was unhappy that the rest of her friends didn't show up. We were sitting at one of the tables outside the performance hall for post-reading refreshments. Over snacks, the aunties told me where I should go to get good shopping deals in Hong Kong. They also talked about their amo, and once again I heard how lucky Auntie L-- was, this time according to her friends, whose working conditions were far less ideal and whose employers were not particularly kind to them. The conversation drifted to longed-for trips back home, the never-ending work hours of domestic helpers, God, Yolanda, the annoying children they were helping to raise, the adorable children they were helping to raise, the children they left back home to be raised by relatives, the extended families they needed to support. Periodically, one of them would look in the direction of the festival crowd and say to me, Kaya mabuting andito ka, para makita nilang hindi tulad namin lahat ng Pilipino.

Between Auntie L--'s broad-strokes description to her employer of what she thought a Filipino poet should be (similar to her, a woman born and raised in the Philippines) and why the aunties approved of my presence at the festival (I was a Filipina who was *not* like them) lies a thicket of political and economic realities that intensify my lack of conviction in the capacity of poetry (or art) to represent national

identity and serve as an agent of social transformation. When I am asked to produce one, then two, then three identification cards in a Tokyo bank so that I can have my money changed, I know that I am being sized up and subjected to bureaucratic tediousness because I am presumed to be an entertainer, which my documents and a brief conversation about the university where I am an exchange student eventually dispute. When I hold up an immigration line in the Amsterdam airport because I'm asked to explain what a writer's residency is, and then show the letters to prove that I am indeed on my way to one, I know I'm being made to dispel the suspicion that I am actually a domestic helper with fake travel documents. When my travel companion and I are taken to the "inner room" at the airport in Detroit because his tone in responding to an immigration officer's question is deemed insufficiently subservient, I know that we are being trained, through the threat of deportation, to combine our unquestionably legal travel papers with the appropriate demeanor of Filipinos seeking entry into the United States. When we are presented to the deporting officer, I do the speaking for both of us, because a petite Filipino woman seems more likely to communicate deference effectively than a burly Filipino man.

In all instances, I experience the treatment endured by and reproduce the submissiveness expected of the aunties, my newfound friends in Hong Kong, on a daily basis as Filipino women who are overseas domestic workers. In all instances, our sameness is short-lived, and it is in my interest for our sameness to be disproven. The sooner it is determined that I am not an "unskilled worker," let alone an undocumented immigrant, the less likely it becomes that I would be at risk of deportation, or detention, or harassment, or plain old rudeness, which domestic workers must contend with on top of the low wages, long hours, lack of security and benefits, and susceptibility to abuse and violence that are part and parcel of the work that they do. In a letter sent by José Garcia Villa in 1950 to his employer at the American publishing firm New Directions, the Filipino poet rages against what he believes to be unjust treatment from his boss by declaring, in no uncertain terms, the types of blue-collar work he has been forced to but *should not* be made to do. To retrieve his dignity, Villa insists that certain forms of labor are beneath him; in effect, the Filipino expatriate poet asserts difference from the Filipino migrant worker, distancing himself from his contemporaries who

take on undesirable, low-wage jobs in the United States, and from the aunties of the globalized world.[5]

My profile in the professionalized world of poetry is not unusual: schooled in academic institutions of creative writing, both in the Philippines and the US, published by university presses and literary journals based in universities, employed in an English Department as teacher of literature and creative writing courses. It is unsurprising to see these details recur in the brief biographies of eighteen poets from eighteen countries in attendance at a poetry festival. In a country where "Filipino" is regarded as synonymous to "maid," I go onstage, buttressed by my academic degrees and the grants that granted me time to write, and read my poems in English to an international audience. Behind me, translations into Chinese of my lines, as I read them, are flashed on a big screen. The space I am given to present my work is made possible with the help of a domestic helper, who reminded her employer to consider including a Filipino in the festival lineup. My poems betray preoccupations removed from the realities of the three Filipino aunties in the audience, who have, perhaps unwisely, decided to dedicate a portion of their day off to showing their support for a Filipino poet. The poems are what they are in part because I believe that what's worse than a Filipino poet in English who does not in her poetry speak on behalf of fellow Filipinos is a Filipino poet in English who does.

On the international stage of professionalized poetry, I belong to the minority by virtue of nationality and ethnicity, and my presence both signals and advocates inclusivity in the world of letters, whose achievement continues to define the struggle of writers from the margins. My presence, however, is also indicative of multiple privileges that set me apart from the minority that I appear to represent. I am the Filipino at the festival precisely because I do not come from the margins of Philippine society. I neither live below the poverty line, like most Filipinos, nor am I forced to migrate to other countries in search of better (minimum) wages, like Auntie L-- and many others. My privilege is encoded in the very language that I use to write. A Filipino poet who writes in the language of the educated and the elite cannot easily claim to represent the oppressed in her work. A Filipino poet can hardly claim to address or express solidarity with the marginalized, if she writes in the language that excludes them.

The need to reckon with the privileges inscribed in Philippine literary production in English is obscured, I think, by the minority position of Philippine literature in the "world republic of letters," combined with the likelihood that Philippine literature in English, rather than in other Philippine languages, would gain access to this minority position, since it can be read by a global audience without the aid of translation.[6] What dominates the hierarchy of literatures in the Philippines becomes a stand-in for Filipino national identity in the global literary arena, where it is an extremely minor player and must struggle for visibility. I think this struggle, or even just the idea of it, at times emboldens Filipino writers in English to testify to the global audience about the lives of Filipinos, and to occupy or represent, in art, subject-positions of the marginal from which they are estranged in their immediate environment. Such moves can predictably generate essentialist or exoticized renditions of "the Filipino experience" by these authors, whose deployment of otherness to pander to the market is arguably compensated for by the space they strive to carve out for Philippine literature (in English) on the world literary map. More complex and nuanced imaginings of national identity, while contributing more meaningfully to the struggle for representation, are nevertheless still embedded in the *business* of representation. This inevitably commodifies the struggle and converts it to cultural and economic capital, whose immediate beneficiary, for good or ill, is the writer herself. It is simply more likely that efforts at literary representation would translate to accolades, or sales, or promotion points, or plain old recognition or credibility among the smallest of audiences, or an additional line in the writer's curriculum vitae, than to a world where the exportation as cheap human labor of Filipinos (who live in the margins that frame the writer's speech) becomes obsolete.

The invisibility of Philippine literature globally, when generalized to a degree that downplays the hierarchy of literatures locally, also reinforces the valorization of writing as a struggle in itself and thus in itself an explicitly politicized action. That the page is the arena in which the writer labors has yielded a routine exercise in the local world of letters that presents itself as a form of activism. In a country prone to disaster and rife with atrocity, the Filipino poet, myself included, responds to disaster or atrocity by writing poetry about it. In some instances, the magnitude of the death toll, or the extent of

the violence, can drive a poet to mobilize other poets to write more poems, to post the poems on social media to reach a wider audience, perhaps put together an anthology, perhaps donate the sales from the anthology to the victims. Such gestures seem to restate even as they conceal the division between aesthetics and politics. There is something amiss in collective action when all that comes out of it is more poetry.

I don't think I have ever felt the uselessness of being a Filipino poet more acutely as I did when the aunties in Hong Kong regarded me with pride because I was not like them. That I did not represent them made me fit to represent them at the festival. My privilege is indeed my loss.[7] It is hardly consolation that the gulf between us would remain unaltered, even if I had written poems on domestic helpers for the occasion.

2.

According to the National Anti-Poverty Commission, poverty incidence among Filipino households declined in 2015. For every five Filipino families, one was poor, with an income below Php9,140, the minimum income required to cover the basic necessities of a family of five. When divided equally among family members, this translates to a budget of around Php60 (a little over a dollar) per person per day. The government claims this amount is enough to ensure a decent standard of living, with access to food, clothing, medicine, education, water, electricity, transportation, and hygiene.[8] Php60 buys me one meal, a meat dish and two cups of rice, at the neighborhood carinderia. It covers round-trip fare by jeepney and train from Kamias in Quezon City, where I live, to Makati (both locations within Metro Manila), with a few pesos to spare, which cannot buy me a cup of rice for lunch, let alone an actual meal. In order to claim that it has reduced poverty in the Philippines, the government offers the most effortless of solutions: it changes the definition of poor. If you live on only Php60 a day, you are not poor. And still, each member of one in five Filipino families lives on less.

The most recent book I bought, Vicente L. Rafael's *Motherless Tongues*, costs around Php400. It is cheaper than usual, for a scholarly book published by the Ateneo de Manila University Press (such titles are typically priced from Php500-800), but it is already worth close to a week's worth of expenses for the basic needs of the not-poor Filipino. The poetry books published by the Ateneo Press are cheaper, in the Php300 range. Literary titles by other local university presses (which would be most inclined to publish such works) are similarly priced. These numbers, I think, expose the absurdity in the logic that locates the path to a wider Filipino readership in the transformation of the literary text in itself. In conferences and festivals, in workshops and lectures, at the dinner table or over beers, it is not unusual for conversations among writers to revolve around the question of cultivating readership. In a country of over a hundred million, the typical print run of a literary title ranges from 500-1,000 copies, to be sold over a period of several years, a testament to the smallness of its audience. In any given branch of National Book Store, the largest bookstore chain in the Philippines, the lack of readership is reiterated by what dominates its floor space: office supplies and adult coloring

books.[9] A shelf or two, often tucked behind displays of international bestsellers, is assigned to Filipiniana, where literary titles compete for space with a hodgepodge of books, including dime-store romances, self-help books by celebrities, religious publications, and hagiographies of politicians. Does the key to more readers lie in one's choice of genre? In one's style of writing? In one's choice of language? How must the writer write to make literature more appealing to readers? How can literature's appeal become more popular?

It seems to me that the question of how to cater to the potential Filipino reader, while placing emphasis on writing as a social act, easily degenerates into a call to produce more marketable commodities for the culture industry, which, if not disregarding the toiling majority altogether (i.e., how can we get the people who can afford books to buy *our* books?), regards them simply as untapped consumers who would find reason to allocate their time and meager resources to literature, if only it were written to better suit their tastes. If the pursuit is not mercenary, it is myopic, for it makes readership primarily contingent on how the writer crafts the literary text. Her domain of responsibility begins and ends with the realization of the literary text as aesthetic object. While I don't dispute the relevance of the writer's skill in drawing the attention of readers, I think it is more crucial to foreground the inherently restrictive role of material conditions in the activity of reading any kind of literature. The ordinary Filipino cannot afford to be a reader, and the writer cannot address this fundamental issue by way of craft.[10] No amount of skill in producing "finely crafted literature," even when it pointedly represents and expresses solidarity with the oppressed, can grant Filipinos access to the material and activity of reading the way that equitable redistribution of wealth can. When the question of readership is conjoined not only with the appeal of literature, but also with access to it, the folly of treating the aesthetic realm as the chief site of the writer's struggle is exposed.

In "Self-abolition of the poet," Jasper Bernes, Joshua Clover, and Juliana Spahr imagine poetry in a society defined by "a fundamental equality of opportunity and equality of access to the means of cultural expression."[11] Among their projections is the disappearance of the poet and the poem as we know it: "There would be no need to seek out distinction by way of difference as happens in capitalist

society, since distinction and singularity would be the given of social life… where social interactions are animated by collaboration and cooperation rather than competition." In this ideal form of a communist world, not divided into public and private or free and unfree activity, "Poetry might become more intimate and more social all at once." The American poets, in imagining this alternative world, stress the modest capacity of poetry to contribute to its realization, which necessitates nothing short of revolution.

I get a glimpse of what a poem that is simultaneously intimate and social might look like in Joi Barrios's description of Jose F. Lacaba's "Ang mga kagila-gilalas na pakikipagsapalaran ni Juan de la Cruz."[12] Written in the early 1970s, shortly before the declaration of martial law, the poem plots a series of oppressive scenarios that eventually drive Juan de la Cruz, an avatar of the ordinary Filipino, to the underground movement. Read in class, recited in choral speaking programs, and performed in activist events and demonstrations, "Ang Kagila-gilalas" is one of Lacaba's most popular poems. It is so popular, says Barrios, that many who have heard the poem recited or seen it performed may not even know who its author is. This, she continues, is perhaps the kind of honor appropriate to Lacaba's work, "ang siyang pinakapatunay na ang tula ng makata, gaya ng kanyang sentral na tauhan, ay naglakbay na rin, hindi na kanya, upang kumawala sa mga parisukat na bumabakod sa espasyo ng panulaan, at upang maging bahagi ng pakikipagtunggali para sa isang lipunang malaya."

Instead of turning into a household name, Lacaba becomes obscure as his poem circulates more widely. To hail this growing anonymity as an achievement exemplifies the counterintuitive impetus that animates the avant-garde project: to create art that negates itself as well as the existing relations of author, audience, and artwork, in order to dissolve the divide between and mutually transform art and life. In the instances when the poem is no longer attributed to the poet, it moves closer to the dream of belonging to everyone. While the journey of the protagonist Juan de la Cruz, which culminates in armed struggle, reinforces the role of revolution as the inevitable requirement to restructure society, the journey of the poem "Ang Kagila-gilalas" away from its author emulates the life of poetry after revolution, undermining its identity as property as well as its poem-

ness, for poetry after the fulfillment of revolution is by necessity beyond our recognition. More than the message of the poem, its existence apart from its author is what moves me, not because it is an anachronistic iteration of the authorless texts of pre-modern, pre-capitalist societies, but because it resists full absorption into today's relentlessly privatized world, where material is also at once commodity, to which an owner and a price tag are attached. That it moves in circuits of dissemination both pointedly disinterested in and detached from art institutions is perhaps what allows "Ang Kagila-gilalas" not to suffer the fate of many anti-aesthetic projects, for which art institutions are both homing device and permanent address.

The failure of art to abolish itself, which relegates the avant-garde to a historical rather than existent category, is often attributed to its co-optation by what it strives to critique and destroy. If art is to become avant-garde, its self-abolition cannot simply occur in the realm of aesthetic experimentation, which has repeatedly proven to be prone to capture by institutions in the business of providing aesthetic frames. Rather, the abolition must also occur in the material realm, where the artwork literally removes itself from the stranglehold of industries and the institutions. Countering the presumption that she no longer writes because of her activism, the poet Kerima Tariman states that she, in fact, has never stopped writing. "Ang kaibhan lang ngayon, mas madalas ay wala na sa isip ko ang paggamit ng sarili kong pangalan. Hindi ko na iniintindi na maglagay pa ng indibidwal na byline o pirma dahil kolektibo naman ang karaniwang paraan ng paggawa at pagpapalaganap ng mga pahayag, akda o likhang-sining."[13] Perhaps to be truly avant-garde at this point in time is not to affix one's signature to a thing, thus inaugurating its identity as a work of art; instead, it is strive to purge the work of art of one's signature, as one works for and toward a community where art is no longer an exceptional thing to circulate in the market and preserve in the museum.

Under the rule of capital, however, it is difficult to imagine how *not* to affix one's signature to any given thing, even if it is poetry, whose "amazing ideology," writes Joshua Clover, permits the illusion that it is without economic value and unshackled from labor discipline. Invested with symbolic power as a domain of and for freedom, poetry in itself seems to be always already a radical counterpoint to the status quo. Clover examines this assumption by turning to his own work as a professionalized poet, a university professor whose salary and security are contingent on forms of labor that include the production of more poetry. Where poetry intersects with salary, the poet is paid all the time and at work all the time; this arrangement (enslavement), at times, even hinges on the very idea that poetry is a bastion of autonomy, impervious and resistant to the regime of capital. "But that part we know is not true," writes Clover. "People buy [poetry] all the time. It just looks like something else is happening. In the society of ambient discipline all verse is unfree."

While my own choice to remain committed to poetry is an option abandoned by many when the reality of competing for entry into the workforce sets in, it has also become a direct route to unfree verse. My employment as a teacher of creative writing in a university converts my work in poetry into salaried work. The pursuit of tenure obligates me to produce poetry along a path apart from Lacaba's "Kagila-gilalas" or Tariman's work: the anonymity to which their poetry aspires is the fate my poetry ought to evade. It is in my interest as an academic for writing to become a precious commodity produced by the specialist. In the academy, a branch of the professionalized literary world, my signature is a necessity whose value should increase over time. This trains me to invest my work in pursuits compatible with the industries and institutions whose recognition of my byline invests it with value. It is a credit to my name, for instance, that I began my formal education in creative writing with the poet Edith Tiempo, matriarch of the New Critical tradition in Anglophone Philippine poetry. It is a credit to my name that my earliest exercises in lyric expression are included in the third installment of Gémino H. Abad's multi-volume anthology spanning over a hundred years of Philippine poetry in English. While obviously provisional, my position as the last and youngest poet in the third volume of what is so far the most extensive, chronologically-arranged anthology of Philippine poetry in English assigns my signature with relevance as a boundary from which to regard Philippine poetry that already exists and Philippine poetry that is yet to come.

These early forms of literary validation provide a strong foundation for my reputation as a poet, which I continue to build over time

through the awards and grants I receive, the degrees I earn, and the work I publish. The credibility I acquire as an "expert in the field" depends not only on the necessarily unwieldy notion of artistic merit, but more so on my participation in propagating myths of literary prestige: the prestige of being accepted into a workshop, a conference, or writing program; the prestige of being published by a university-based journal or a mainstream press; the prestige of winning a Palanca or a National Book Award. The opportunity to acquire the prestige bestowed by these mechanisms requires me to submit to their terms (which can range from what literary merit is to what writers' rights look like); my submission (combined with the submission of many others), in turn, preserves their prestige, which, should they deem me worthy, becomes my own. To enjoy and reap the benefits of their recognition, it is in my interest to foreground the integrity of the gatekeepers who hold me up as a model of literary excellence. Consequently, it is also in my interest to downplay the increasingly homogeneous aesthetic, the patronage politics, and the monopoly structure of capitalism that oversee the local literary world, my immediate professional context. In a country of a hundred million, this world is small, yet like the world at large, it has its own oligarchy: the same names recur as judges in or winners of literary contests or awards, as authors of mainstream and university publishers, as editors of magazines that accept literary contributions, as teachers in creative writing programs, as mentors in national writing workshops, as participants in literary festivals, and as representatives of artists, if not administrators themselves, in cultural institutions. "Nation building" endures as a lucrative concern that pairs writers with cultural patrons. The smallness of this world is underscored by the fact that the most prominent commercial publisher of literary and scholarly titles, Anvil Publishing, is also the affiliate publishing company of the biggest bookstore chain in the Philippines, National Book Store, whose name aptly conflates nation with corporation. For the author who seeks visibility in the marketplace largely monopolized by this distribution channel, a desirable route is to become an Anvil author, and thus part of the exclusive lineup that monopolizes the limited shelf space of National Book Store. These networks comprise the "ambient discipline" whose terms I must reproduce and whose relevance, in effect, I must help fortify, in order to produce my own relevance as a writer.

Because I have, for good or ill, decided to remain a practitioner in the professionalized world of writing, I am perpetually troubled by my complicity in the recognizably unjust mechanisms that govern it. What options for resistance are imaginable for the poet as academic, whose career requires deference to existing structures that poetry itself supposedly, at least symbolically, resists? In his first book of poetry, Charlie Samuya Veric prefaces his work with a poetics statement in which he proposes to be called an "anti-professional poet" who subverts the industries and institutions that administer the "regimentation of poetic life." Channeling strains of José Garcia Villa's professed aestheticism, though not the avant-garde poet's formal experimentation, Veric locates the radicalism of his lyric poems, which stay close to the dominant aesthetic tradition, in his unconventional poetic biography. As a poet without an MFA and unaffiliated with any literary collective or barkada, he envisions his poetic practice as one that occurs along the path of "expressive autonomy," addressing a more "capacious readership" in poems described as "citizens of multiple countries" that "stay true to what [the poet] feel[s]."[14]

I share Veric's belief in the necessity of an anti-professional poetry, as well as the construction of a frame from which to comprehend the motives and features of its negation. I think his brand of expressive autonomy, however, which focuses on his poetry's cosmopolitan and humanist sensibility, unduly relies on the myth of the artist as a solitary and sovereign individual to resolve, prematurely, the institutional critique that he initiates. While he points to his lack of an MFA as a form of resistance to professionalized poetry, Veric is silent on other vectors that embed his work in institutions: his book of poetry is published by the press of a private university known to cater to the Filipino elite, the same university where he is a professor of English and where his home department, through its peer-reviewed international journal, published a series of essays about his book by scholars and creative writers to celebrate its release. These facts are part and parcel of the contradictions that beset the professionalized poet, whose poetry is, by default, unfree, and who nevertheless reaps professional gains from this unfreedom. To claim autonomy from institutions without problematizing one's complicity in them is to gloss over these contradictions and to risk complacency in reproducing the status quo through the spectacle of raging against it.

In "The Author As Producer," Walter Benjamin writes that the question to be asked of art is not, "What is the *attitude* of a work to the relations of production of its time?" Instead, it should be, "What is its *position* in them?" In a sentence that otherwise remains intact, the modification of a single word stages, with admirable clarity, a drastic shift in perceiving literature that foregrounds its commodity status and casts it in productive tension with the status of literature as a work of art. If, as Theodor Adorno posits, the artwork and the commodity are "torn halves of an integral freedom," then, as Benjamin rightly clarifies, there is a need to disrupt the tendency to conflate the form of critical engagement a literary text takes with the *attitude* it espouses. Its *position* in capitalist relations of production is an equally pertinent coordinate, if not a primary consideration, in comprehending its critical intervention. Disregarding this position downplays the existence of the culture industry and ascribes a facile autonomy to the literary text, grounded in the illusion that it fully transcends its material conditions and social context. Benjamin's proposition raises the stakes for the author, who must guard against the false autonomy she is prone to perpetuate when attitude eclipses position as the site of social engagement. Even the most overtly political works of art can simultaneously, as commodities, participate in the reproduction of the structural inequities they profess to condemn. The author *is* a producer. More than expressive autonomy, it seems it is material autonomy to which the author must aspire in order to intervene in the relations of power that oversee her labor. The position assumed by her art in this network is, in effect, is the form that its autonomy takes.

3.

The page is the proximate space for scrutinizing the enduring New Critical tradition of poetry in English, in whose image my poetry was shaped during my formative years as a poet. At its most popular and formulaic, organic unity, as espoused by this tradition, can be reduced to a checklist of moves.[15] Fusion and harmony take the form of a cohesive persona whose tone is often sincere and solemn. This persona ponders the meaning of life through a central metaphor or a cluster of objective correlatives, and the poem concludes with a quotable insight. The impetus of my earlier attempts to depart from tradition was my artistic dissatisfaction with what I felt to be petrified paths that herded my writing process, resulting in poetry that, one the one hand, I personally found predictable and uninspired, but on the other hand, was legible to the literary milieu in which I wrote and thus well-received. This incongruity has led me, over the years, to aesthetic strategies of the non-poetic. I often turn to prose and otherwise non-literary forms to write poetry. I am also drawn to procedural constraints for their capacity to destabilize the lyric subject, whose coherence is central to the well-wrought poem held up as the template for what constitutes (good) poetry. The given-ness of a cogent persona, I think, contributes to the proliferation of unstudied navel-gazing in poetry, where smallness of vision is justified by its sincerity and its relatable portrayal of the mundane. It also authorizes the use of "the personal is political" as a shortcut to confidence in one's capacity to testify, speak for, and represent other Filipinos from the position of multiple privileges, without contending with the vast experiential differences that occur within a shared subject (subaltern) position.

To contest the cursory pursuit of the identity politics that the prevailing aesthetic fosters, however, is similarly prone to smallness of vision when the imagined alternatives remain on the level of the formal. The page is the immediate space of scrutiny for the poet invested in the dream of a transformed poetry (and the transformed society that this implies), but it is not the only space, not when the politics of the monopolizing aesthetic owes its power to material conditions that privilege its visibility. It would be against the interests of cultural gatekeepers to channel the resources they control toward literature that deviates from and undermines the literary practices they favor.

In other words, I cannot reject the status quo simply by writing poetry. To propose an alternative *attitude* necessitates the creation of an alternative *position* in relations of production, a distinction which has in turn changed my attitude toward the publication and circulation of my work. My first book of poetry was published over a decade ago by the University of the Philippines Press, based in the university where I work, and was given the honor of a National Book Award for Poetry a year after its publication, an achievement that helped me secure tenure at my university. I have, however, since then, published books and zines of my work independently, through the DIY efforts of local small presses which I help finance and run. These works are neither eligible for awards, whose rules for participation require the resources of bigger publishers, nor visible in National Book Store, whose shelves are reserved for publishers that can afford their shelf space.

The shoestring publishing operations I am part of survive on the unpaid labor of and the funds pooled by the writers involved. We write, edit, and proofread work; design the cover and layout of the books and zines; canvass printers and paper sources for affordable deals; coordinate the printing and delivery of books; photocopy, collate, trim, and staple zines; ship and hand-deliver orders; and sell the books and zines at expos that we organize, which, if time permits, occur twice or thrice a year. What we earn either partly or fully funds the next cycle of production. I think of my practice as an independent publisher, which has led me to engage with poetry as a form of both immaterial *and* material labor, as a contribution toward broadening the means by which literature is produced and disseminated. If the poetry I write is also a commodity that I circulate, then the marriage of content and form is not simply negotiated on the page. The author disrupts the cultural and economic monopoly in art production when, as a producer, she takes up methods of production and circulation that skirt, if not resist, the market overseen by the monopoly. Such efforts, I think, can alter the work of literature itself, as well as the kind of community in which it is forged. In his description of the "detachment hypothesis" of DIY politics, Clover gives ballast to my incessant inkling that a just writing life entails the pursuit of material autonomy: "the idea [is] that we can develop within the present world a branching network of non-capitalist relations that can expand toward self-sufficiency, finally abjuring any exchange with the surrounding capitalist economy."

This is what I remind myself of, at least, as my self-publishing endeavors court the appearance of mediocrity in my workplace, where the prestige of publishing with a mainstream or university press remains a measure of excellence and productivity, and where "vanity publishing" is indicative of both self-indulgence and substandard work. Or I blame (in jest) my partner Adam David, my constant companion in the labor, both material and immaterial, of independent publishing. Adam and I, together with a few like-minded people based in cities in Luzon and Mindanao, co-run the traveling small press expo called Better Living Through Xeroxography (BLTX), which, as its name suggests, focuses on literary production via DIY efforts. A zinester and comic book maker, he has been plugged into DIY culture far longer than I have. Eight years ago, he published a manifesto on independent publishing as the antidote to the patronage politics in and homogeneous aesthetics of Philippine letters in the *Philippines Free Press*; it provoked the ire of the powers that be in the literary world and eventually cost him his writing gig as a reviewer of books for the magazine. Adam is the kind of writer who explores compositional processes mediated by technology. He puts up all the writing he does (including those with print runs) online, always for free, often as downloadable pdfs.

A controversy triggered by one of his online writing experiments has been instrumental in my thinking about material (rather than expressive) autonomy, in the form of grassroots and independent publishing, as a necessary and generative wedge against a fully professional and professionalized world of writing. In 2015, Anvil Publishing and two of its editors threatened to sue Adam for a critique he wrote of an anthology of flash fiction they published titled *Fast Food Fiction Delivery*. To demonstrate the "flattening of aesthetics, politics, language, and form in contemporary English-language short story writing in the Philippines," Adam used the Anvil anthology as a source text for a "randomizer," which he coded and made available for free on Blogger. The randomizer was a Javascript machine into which he plugged various sentences copied from the anthology. It was programmed to generate what could be thought of as fast food fiction: a virtual assembly line of short short stories produced by randomly combining sentences from the source text. Each time a viewer clicks on a button, a machine-generated piece of flash fiction is instantly flashed on the screen, delivered, so to speak, to the reader.

The method of textual production performed by the randomizer riffs off the anthology title, which implies that the book's contents are formulaic and mass-produced. It also uses the anthology's own words, as well as the anticipated coherence of most texts generated by the randomizer, to enact its critique.[16] Adam posted the link to the randomizer on his personal Facebook page; it elicited a few emoticons of laughter and several screen shots of randomized texts left on the comments thread by friends who visited the site, some of whom were contributors to the anthology.

Weeks later, in a letter sent by the lawyers of Anvil and its editors, Adam was charged with four counts of copyright infringement for his technologically-enabled parody. The first three grounds focused on the unlawful reproduction of substantial portions of the text. The fourth count invoked the moral rights of the anthology contributors, since the randomizer "erod[ed] the integrity of every short story in the book." He was given five days to delete the randomizer, or he would be taken to court, which could impose the following penalties on him as mandated by law: "for each count of copyright infringement, the penalty is imprisonment of one (1) to three (3) years plus a fine of Php50,000 – Php150,000 [approximately USD1,000 – 3,000]."[17] For a work of appropriation deployed as a form of critique, he was looking at a legal battle that could result in a maximum of over half a million pesos in fines (which the ordinary Filipino living on Php60 a day can live on for 22 years) and over a decade of jail time.

In the unlikely event that a Pierre Menard-like turn occurs within the Javascript machine and the randomizer spits out, upon recombination, a replica of its source text, I think it is still arguably *not* a reproduction, given the creative process and critical intervention that inform it. Nevertheless, the mere idea that overseers of literary production like Anvil and its editors would actively seek to penalize unlawful reproduction seems out of touch with the Philippine context, where piracy is a crucial means by which we are able to bust the barricades, so to speak, and gain access to knowledge, culture, and information that would otherwise be inaccessible to many of us. Without piracy, I would not be able to teach my students at least half of the texts I require in my literature and creative writing classes. The books are neither available in the library of our poorly-funded state university, nor on the shelves of the ubiquitous National Book Store.

In the unlikely event that copies of such books are locally available, they are bound to be unaffordable to some of my students, who struggle to round up the cash to pay for the significantly cheaper, photocopied versions of the texts required in their classes.[18] It is also not necessarily easier to secure multiple copies of books published locally. I ordered several titles from Anvil for the courses I am currently teaching (yes, I continue to contribute to the enrichment of this corporation despite its threat to put my partner in jail because like SM, who's got it all for you, there is no escaping Anvil, who is the publisher of some books I love and must teach) and one of the titles I requested copies of, Jose F. Lacaba's *Days of Disquiet, Nights of Rage*, is out of print. Rather than opt out of teaching the book, I chose not to deprive my students of Lacaba's gripping coverage of the First Quarter Storm. I pirated my copy instead.

Without piracy, I would have fewer readers; it is not unusual for me to encounter people who know my work through photocopied versions of my first book of poetry, at times pirated by their teachers for class. Without piracy, the Filipino literati (including those with income to spare) would read less widely, since many cultural products are simply not sold in the Philippine market. Meanwhile, the claim made by Anvil and its editors that appropriation erodes the integrity of a source text resurrects fundamental and perpetually unresolved questions about what constitutes authorship, what delimits an artwork, and what counts as an artistic process. The debates provoked by the randomizer (and there were many, on social media), however, extend from the literary to the disciplinary, by virtue of what occasioned them in the first place: a cease-and-desist letter. In this context, engagement with the text leads not simply to insights about literature, often provisional, but to a verdict on the fate of the writer: either he deserves to be fined and do jail time or he does not. The question, ultimately, is not how the randomizer is meaningful, or generative, or beautiful, or offensive, or unremarkable, or inane, but whether it is criminal.

I belong to a generation that came of age after the martial law regime of Ferdinand Marcos, and my familiarity with writers as outlaws is conflated with state suppression. I learned from and continue to work with writers who are former political detainees. Despite the ouster of Marcos in 1986, the imprisonment of activist writers is

still not unheard of. In 2011, a friend of mine from college, a poet, was marked as an enemy of the state and detained in jail. It took two years of legal action and campaigns among activists and cultural workers to secure his release. I must admit, I felt shame when this same friend reached out to me to express concern over Anvil's demand letter against Adam. That imprisonment became a possibility for my partner because he made virtual fast food out of a source text called *Fast Food Fiction* seemed, well, silly.[19] It was a waste of concern better channeled toward those whose freedom was actually at risk or curtailed because of their criticism of the state. In the case of the randomizer, though, the threat was not from the state, but from two editors who are well-known in the local literary scene, and from the most prominent commercial publisher of literary and scholarly titles in the Philippines, which also happens to be the affiliate publishing company of the biggest bookstore chain in the country. The state, often the usual suspect, is not the only (obvious) enemy. Anvil's case against Adam literalized, for me, the corporation's power to deny visibility to literary texts forged out of an aesthetic other than what it authorizes, especially when such texts call into question the prestige that its literary products enjoy. It also demonstrated, in no uncertain terms, the privatization of literature, by relying on the strength of market logic to determine what is circulated and forcibly erased. Conveniently silent on the critical intervention of Adam's work, the cease-and-desist letter foregrounds literature as private property, whose profit generation is hijacked by the randomizer, to the detriment of the rightful entrepreneurs. Appropriation is framed as the defacement of property and the disrespect of its owner (the anthology contributor), whose integrity Anvil and its editors seek to restore. Never mind if mainstream publishing houses are themselves notorious for compensating their authors cheaply, if at all; the turn to litigation is a grand gesture that proves how the corporation values its authors, by defending them from the mercenary machinations of another author, who randomized their work in an obscure website that generates no income at all.[20]

During one of our legal consultations, a lawyer expressed interest in the fact that the parties involved in the potential case were a vocal advocate of independent publishing and a large local publishing house. DIY publishing is obviously not a good thing for Anvil, the lawyer said. I thought the impression was hyperbolic and said as much; the network of independent publishing as we know it is so small, sporadic, and informal that it is no competition at all. Oh, any threat is a threat, was the lawyer's response. At the traveling small press and DIY expo that we organize together with volunteers, the works made available demonstrate how small-scale and community-based the entire operation is. The xerox machine remains the technology of choice to produce the low-budget and limited-run materials, and the individuals and collectives who participate at any given expo are primarily from the community where it occurs. The works in circulation include poetry pamphlets, anarchist zines, short story zines, zines resurrected from the martial law era, photography booklets, alternative histories and biographies, sketchbooks by art school kids, anthologies by writing collectives, anthologies by migrant workers, comics by comic book makers, comics by mothers, comics by students, comics sent through channels by cadres from the underground movement, works in English, works in Filipino, works in Ilocano, works in Bisaya, works in Cebuano, works in Bikol, works in Kankanaey. Some of the more expensively produced books cost several hundred pesos, but some of the zines cost as low as ten pesos. Some participants give away their work for free, or adjust prices on the spot by request, or trade works with each other.

In an interview about Commune Editions, a small press he co-runs, Clover observes that capital isn't one to tolerate the commune that seeks to carve out a life apart from it. "Declaring that you will be making your own daily life without anyone showing up to be exploited may seem like a nice easy sidling away, but from the perspective of capital it is both economic and political attack, no matter how unthreatening everybody looks." Any threat is a threat, it seems, and when it manifests, says Clover, "capital and the state tend to show up with armies and sieges." The encounter with a cease-and-desist letter that frames artistic practice in economic terms has made me apprehend the antagonism inherent in my work as an independent publisher, which I tend to think of as (in Clover's words) a "piecemeal, peaceful detachment." In a milieu where appropriative artistic practices are vilified over exploitative industry practices, what is illegible to market logic is offensive to it. It is against the interest of a fully professionalized world of writing for writing communities with alternative motives and preoccupations to thrive. In this light, I see my continuing commitment to publish independently as an

attempt to align, however inadequately, with the life outside of capital of Lacaba's "Kagila-gilalas," which continues to travel away from its author's signature, unencumbered by the grip of its copyright holder.

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Last year, my often solitary self made friends with my neighbors. Through the mediation of a government agency, which invited me to hold a writing workshop with migrant workers, I met a community organization of former migrant women based a few blocks away from where I live. Prior to our workshop, writing was an activity removed from the lives of these women. Their lives had been written about by others, they told me, showing me a handful of publications written by academics and human rights advocates, which they had on file in their office. In these texts, the titas (they call each other "tita" in this group) served as resources on the plight of Filipino migrant women workers; their testimonies were incorporated into analyses meant to lobby for policies to protect the rights of Filipino women workers overseas. As I flipped through the pages of a book on Filipino entertainers in Japan, I recalled the poetry festival I was part of years earlier in Hong Kong, where the privileges that set me apart from the three Filipino aunties who attended my reading granted me access to represent them in the arena of cultural expression. I thought of how this professionalized arena, whose mechanisms have determined what constitutes good writing and great literature, has also sequestered the activity of writing as a form of expression from the public domain. That writing belonged to writing specialists once again became apparent to me in our workshop, when the former migrant women found the idea of writing their own stories down an obvious yet alien proposition.

A few months, several writing sessions, and multiple informal meetings later, the pieces they began drafting in the first workshop I held with them were published in zine form by the small press that Adam and I run. In the zine are narratives of their experiences as entertainers in Japan, and as domestic workers and caregivers in countries like China, Australia, and Taiwan. One of the titas recalls her attempt to seek work in Syria as a domestic helper, which ended in detention in Hong Kong over questionable travel documents. Another recounts the network of human trafficking into which she was trapped by the

promise of employment in Malaysia as a dishwasher. There are poems of love, of single motherhood, and stories of violence in the hands of employers and customers. Our zine project became an occasion for their support group to get together, to spend time apart from the routine demands of work and home life, and to sit down and write their stories. A cursory explanation of how the office xerox machine could be a handy tool for producing zines clarified the possibility of zine-making as a recurring effort, a relatively uncomplicated means to document and disseminate their stories, and to reach out to other migrant women.

We are currently in the initial stages of planning the second issue of the zine, which will contain extended firsthand accounts of migrant worker experiences, as well as chronicles of ongoing legal battles faced by some of the women of their organization, in which they are up against recruitment agencies with exploitative and illegal practices, or our own government, whose recognition of divorces granted in Japan, for instance, requires a bureaucratic process so convoluted and expensive that it is virtually impossible for former migrant women to secure. In one meeting, over coffee and turon, as we plotted our production timeline and computed the expenses for a round of writing workshops, the titas recounted run-ins with power-tripping cops and meetings with unenthusiastic public attorneys, procedures for securing documents from various government agencies, dialogues with potential allies in the legal profession, and coping mechanisms for evading the wrath of antagonized illegal recruiters. This conversation, like all our previous ones, once again schooled me in the vital role of collective struggle to achieve collective gains (or at least, to make the stalled achievement of gains more bearable) and the women's valiant efforts to author their empowerment. The fact of this authorship is simply made evident in what we hope to be an annual zine, where the women are authors of their own stories as workers overseas and advocates for the human rights of Filipino migrants.

Throughout the process of preparing the first zine for publication, and particularly during the hours we spent making several hundred copies of it by hand to fulfill an order made by a labor rights group, the titas referred to our endeavor as an addition to their livelihood projects. For its daily operations, their organization relies on the

support of donors as well as the money they make from various endeavors, which include a catering service, a laundry service, and a sewing shop. On the display shelf in their office, among the bags, purses, placemats, coasters, and clothes that they make and sell, the zine is another item in their collection of wares. There is a striking plainness to the inclusion of their literary production to the list of labors whose outcomes sustain their community. I am inclined to think that literature produced from this remarkable ordinariness is the condition of possibility for another world to occur, whose readjustment would transform notions of the literary work in ways beyond our current imagination.

Notes

1. Yeb Saño's exact words were: "Disasters are never natural. They are the intersection of factors other than physical. They are the accumulation of the constant breach of economic, social, and environmental thresholds. Most of the time disasters is a result of inequity and the poorest people of the world are at greatest risk because of their vulnerability and decades of maldevelopment, which I must assert is connected to the kind of pursuit of economic growth that dominates the world; the same kind of pursuit of so-called economic growth and unsustainable consumption that has altered the climate system." See "'It's time to stop this madness' – Philippines plea at UN climate talks" in *Climate Home*, 13 Nov. 2013.

2. Two years later, less than ten percent of the 16,331 houses pledged by the government and non-government organizations for typhoon victims have been built. Thousands of families remain in makeshift housing. See USAID Philippines' Typhoon Yolanda/Haiyan Fact Sheet #22, 21 Apr. 2014; Jazmin Bonifacio, "Less than 10% of target homes built for displaced Tacloban families" in *Rappler*, 5 Nov. 2015.

3. The top destinations for exported Filipino laborers, in order, are as follows: Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Singapore, Kuwait and Qatar, and Hong Kong. Approximately a third of the 2.32 million OFWs are laborers and unskilled workers. Remittances from OFWs total P173.19 billion. Statistics on Hong Kong's domestic workers are as of February 2015. See Jaymar G. Uy, "OFWs increase to 2.32M amid growth in lower-paid workers" in *Business World Online*, 29 Apr. 2015; Daisy CL Mandap, "Number of Filipino domestic workers in HK at all-time high" in *Rappler*, 17 Apr. 2015.

4. In the court's language, "The foreign domestic helper is obliged to return to the country of origin at the end of the contract and is told from the outset that admission is not for the purposes of settlement." See "Hong Kong's foreign maids lose legal battle for residency" in *Reuters*, 25 Mar. 2013.

5. Among the facts commonly cited in biographical sketches of Villa is his stint as an associate editor of New Directions, a publisher affiliated with experimental and avant-garde writing, from 1949 to 1951. New Directions published *Volume Two* (1949), Villa's second book of poetry published in the United States. The book was not as well received as his first book of poetry released in the U.S., *Have Come, Am Here* (1942). The lukewarm reception, writes Timothy Yu, can be attributed to the book's incompatibility with the modernist orientalism discreetly employed to celebrate his arrival in the American literary scene six years earlier (in "'The Hand of a Chinese Master': José Garcia Villa and Modernist Orientalism," *MELUS*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2004, pp. 41-59). Villa, it seemed, had become too universal and not ethnic enough in his second book of poetry. A copy of this angry letter sent by Villa to his employer is included in the poet's archive at the Houghton Library, Harvard Library (letter to James Laughlin, N.d., TS, Box 6, José Garcia Villa papers, ca. 1920-1997. 2008M-14). The letter and the response it elicited (also available in the Harvard archive) suggest that a falling-out with his employer, who was also his publisher,

could have significantly contributed to the eventual invisibility of his work in his adopted country.

6. The term "world republic of letters is borrowed from Pascale Casanova (2004).

7. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1983).

8. This information is presented in a series of colorful infographics on the NAPC website. Shelter, apparently a non-necessity, is not on the list. The NAPC also cites Php6,365 as the minimum income necessary to cover "basic food necessities" for a family of five, or around Php42 a day per person. In 2015, one out of ten families lived on less than this minimum income.

9. According to the 2015 National Book Development Board (NBDB) Annual Report, there are 200 branches of National Bookstore in the Philippines. With 91 branches, or less than half the number of National Bookstore locations, Book Sale is the second largest bookstore chain in the country.

10. Free access to books via public libraries is of course an ideal alternative to buying books. There are 1,396 public libraries in the Philippines, according to the 2015 NBDB Annual Report. Each library, in effect, theoretically serves around 71,400 Filipinos. Although I am constantly surrounded by and in touch with people invested in fostering a reading culture among Filipinos (people who read books, write books, collect books, teach books, design books, promote books, publish books, and sell books), no one has ever pointed me in the direction of a public library to find books or avail of book-related services. I think it would be safe to presume that public libraries in the Philippines aren't well-maintained and welcoming resources, though I would be happy to be proven wrong. I've learned not to expect to find most of the books I need for teaching in the libraries of the public university where I work. The collections are limited, most probably due to budget constraints; it seems it can also take years for "recent" acquisitions to be processed and made available for circulation. In the main library, for instance, I have not yet had luck in requesting for a book marked "in process" in the catalog to be pulled from its limbo state and lent to me. Recently, I attempted to borrow Rene Villanueva's *Personal* from the library, and was told that all their copies, including the one I borrowed and returned weeks earlier, had gone missing.

11. This is one of around a dozen essays written collaboratively by the people behind Commune Editions for *Jacket2* in 2014. I cite Joshua Clover, in particular, multiple times in this essay; his remarks are drawn from an interview with Commune Editions for *Huck Magazine* in 2015 and an essay of his titled "Unfree Verse" in *Harriet* in 2016.

12. A short essay by Barrios on Lacaba's work appears at the end of his poetry collection, *Kung Baga sa Bigas: Mga Piling Tula* (2002).

13. "Manggagawang Pangkultura" in *Bulatlat*, 16 Nov. 2015.

14. Veric's *Histories* was published by Ateneo de Manila UP in 2015. The various

merits of the book are discussed in five essays that appear in the Ateneo English Department's *Kritika Kultura* no. 25, also published in 2015.

15. For a sample checklist, see Edith Tiempo's *Six Poetry Formats and the Transforming Image* (2007).

16. A fuller description of the randomizer project is on available at himaamsir. blogspot.com. Said quickly, as if it were one word, "Hi ma'am sir" is a customary greeting by workers when addressing customers at Filipino fast food chains. The cheery demeanor of the worker is undercut by the seemingly automated greeting (the oral equivalent of "Dear Sir/Madam" in form letters).

17. The letter, signed by lawyers Anthony D. Bengzon and Franklin D. Galman on behalf of Anvil and its editors, also described the randomizer as a punishable offense under "the new Cybercrime Law, R.A. 10175." Filipino literary writers were among those who protested the Cybercrime Prevention Act of 2012 because it criminalizes libel.

18. In "Copy that: Textbook publishing (and photocopying) in the Philippines" (in *Story Book: Essays on the History of the Book in the Philippines*, 2013), book historian Patricia May B. Jurilla accounts for the historical and economic factors that fostered "xerox culture," or the widespread practice of unauthorized reprinting or publishing of textbooks and other reading materials, in the Philippines. She mentions the illicit yet commonplace practice of professors in UP in Diliman, who leave master copies of selected chapters, if not entire books, at "xerox stalls" for students to photocopy. More enterprising xerox stalls at UP Diliman offer a service called "book-alike"; for an additional fee, they reproduce the master copy, and then cut and bind the reproduction so that it looks like the original book. Jurilla's study features images of original and book-alike copies of my first book of poetry, which she used as a specimen for reproduction to gather data on the quality and cost of book-alike production. She gave me the book-alike hardcover and paperback versions of my book that she acquired for this study; these copies were among the hundreds of books from my personal collection that I kept in my office and lost to the fire that razed the Faculty Center on April Fools' Day in 2016. A former student who sent me a message of sympathy in the aftermath of the fire expressed how much they (she and other students) loved my books—a love, I thought, made possible by the technology of photocopying, which literally allowed my library to become their own.

19. The randomizer reminds me of Dieter Roth's *Literature Sausage* (*Literaturwurst*), which I saw at a retrospective of the artist's work at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in 2013. Using a traditional recipe for making sausages, Roth substituted meat with ground-up source texts and made sausages out of work he was jealous of or hated. Adam opted to forego the legal battle (an interesting test case for fair use as applied in the Philippines, said a sympathetic lawyer whom we consulted) since it would require years of our life, a significant chunk of our limited financial resources, and our inability to speak about the matter publicly throughout the duration of the case. He deleted the randomizer and put up a statement about it on the website instead.

20. A complication arising from the legal action pursued by the editors of *Fast Food Fiction* involved around a dozen authors included in the anthology who were among over 150 writers who signed a collective statement that denounced the threat of a lawsuit. The contributors were not consulted regarding the legal action, which, as stated in the letter, was made on their behalf. Although the copyright to each story belongs to the individual authors, the copyright to the anthology belongs to the editors. In publicly registering their disagreement with the legal action, the authors shed light on another gray area in the matter of literary property: whether editors, as copyright holders of an anthology, could pursue legal action on behalf of the contributors sans consultation with them.

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