The Aesthetics and Politics
of Appearance:
An Insight into Surban's *Apir*

Lope A. Lesigues

'Appearance' is a curious category in the fields of theology and art. Its fleetingness and dissimulation render itself highly suspicious; yet, as Goethe would say, the only way to present a loftier reality is through the employment of appearance. This paper revisits this uneasy correlation, using Max Surban's homegrown song: Apir *as the jump-off point for discussion. From hereon, various interlocutors – Sennett, Arendt, Bakhtin, Ranciere, Derrida – are brought to the open by the author in order to create imagined spaces of engagement and occasion the re-emergence of 'anonymous poets' – those ordinary aesthete-theologians that populate the undersides of sociality.*

*L*et me begin by stating that my paper treads along Derrida's *parergon*, fumbling its way 'outside the frame', or on paths which the frame 'unframes'. One summer, I met Max outside the Louvre. He was just concluding his concert tour in Europe, thanks to the invitation of the Filipino OCWs, particularly the *au pairs* in Paris and Rome. I told him I was a fan. When he asked me if there is any particular song I fancy, I said *Apir*. He laughed and just as I quickly turned to dispose of an empty Coke can, he vanished into thin air. *Dis-Apir*. And so, this prestigious audience may begin to ask: what has a *baduy* song got to do with such lofty topics as aesthetics and theology? No easy answer…except to plead, bear with me.

In this paper, I invite the reader to stand in the tradition of poets and artists who, like Balzac, find poetry in every word. Its utterance is a participation in the act of Creation by making things 'come to being'. *Apir* is one such poetic word, I claim. Of course, the habit of squirming over the inclusion of a tacky *Apir* within a serious conference like *Dakateo* is a kneejerk reaction of an aesthete whose

sensibility does not see value of a Surban sitting side by side with a Mondrian, a *Tractatus* or a Cúeto. Or worse, disturb the morning lauds with tawdry lyrics and cheap inflections from what one commonly hears blasting in ghettos. However, if we follow Rancière's plea to search for some 'anonymous poets' among us – the ones who do not just patronizingly give voice to the dominated but join their feeble voices and actually live out life's primal 'groans and guffaws' - then, I think Max's poetics is worth listening to.

In *Apir*[1] Max reinvents a way of talking about what philosophers talk about in reference to *aletheia*; or what theologians refer to as 'Incarnation'; or what artists refer to as estrangement, that is, 'making the word strange'. *Apir* may not have the same rigor as the rest, but does the rest carry the same weight as Max's, as to celebrate poetics *in his own terms*? I think I am touching on a strain concerning the question of standards for what would be considered aesthetic, and it is here that I stand vulnerable with my claims. Leave out momentarily the *bakya* accusations: let me first say that Max's 'poetico-populist' lyricality presupposes and verifies, in Rancière's sense, "the equality of intelligences,"[2] and thereby affirms the capacity of those who 'don't know how to properly speak' by speaking out, in halted logic and fragmented notes, a message too deep in its shallowness. As Rancière prophetically states, "[i]t is in the moments when the real world wavers and seems to reel into mere appearance…that it becomes possible to form an [aesthetic] judgment about the world."[3] This paper interrogates the 'aesthetic judgments' cast upon this all-too-familiar word in philosophic disciplines: 'appearance', which became an iconic expression of conviviality and fellowship among *kabayans*. The interrogation shall hopefully unravel the hidden politics

---

1. Listen to Max Surban's *Apir! Apir! Apir!* on YouTube. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bzz19uOYEsg. For translation to English or Tagalog, let me request the help of Randy Odchigue, Danny Pilario, Ramon Echica, Rey Raluto, Aloy Cartagenas, Karl Gaspar, Sonny Garcia and other Visayan-speaking participants.

2. Jacques Rancière, "Politics and Aesthetics: An Interview,"in *Journal of Theoretical Humanities* 8 (2003): 203 [191-211].

3. Jacques Rancière, *The Nights of Labor: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*, trans. John Drury (Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 1989), 19.

and poetics in *Apir*-appear dynamics, especially as it titillates and tickles the imagination of fellow voyeurs – readers and myself.

Taking the cue from Max, the gesture of clashing two open palms to signal friendship and amicability is popular, although not exclusive, among Pinoys. Seen as a form of handshake, I have seen it in matches, in welcome parties, in bars, and so on. I have asked around for the origin of the word '*Apir*', but nobody seems to give an adequate explanation. It is one of those *mots étranges* that slips into the culture naming an already adaptable practice, ready-at-hand (Heidegger) rather than a glorious word still finding its day in the sun among prospective interpreters. Nope, the word simply 'appears'. Some give it a topological explanation, 'up here' to signal 'over the head' or a 'high five' affirmation. Others believe it is a migratory word, crediting peoples who gather in, say, Hong Kong's Victoria Park or Rome's Piazza Ankara on holidays – they are called '*au pairs*'.[4] Legibly or audibly, '*Apir*' and '*au pair*' are not *that* close. However, since there's no guardianship of strict philology or proper inflections at this side of the park, such sociological explanation holds. One hears peals of laughter with hand-clasped '*au pairs*' in public gatherings, as if announcing a self-referential affirmation of identities. Then, there is Max's song that renders close proximity to the English word: 'appear'. This ontological correlation seems to warrant credence because of its corollary negative, '*Dis-apir*', which immediately waves out a gesture of disappearance or 'erasure'. For these reasons – topological, sociological, ontological – the reader may be persuaded to see that the de-automatization of an innocent lyric: *Apir*, and un-tangling lyricity out of its taken-for-granted receptions may yield an aesthetics of incarnation, of a Word-made-flesh in the social body that articulates it. Like any art, its muteness speaks volumes, and hearing it speak or spoken to *for the first time*, lifts us out of the *baduy* existence ourselves and offers us possibilities of our own incarnation.

---

4. Surban composed a song *DH ug OCW* which registers the plight and stark realities of Pinoy workers abroad. He lauds the *kabayans'* hardwork and heroism. However, the racist undertone of the song is hard to miss. Listen on YouTube. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9OMf9UTYGs

'APPEARANCE' IN BROAD STROKES
AMONG CLASSIC PHILOSOPHERS

As a brief background, appearance has the connotation of 'seemliness', almost a nebulous, tentative category. In Plato's *Phaedo* and *Republic*, appearance is a suspect word. Plato contrasts being (or existence) to appearance, where the Being of Ideas is the seat of perfection and the concomitant appearances are but imperfect reflections of those Ideas that one acquires through lowly sense perceptions. Yet, this 'background information' instantiates one of those caricatures of Plato while failing to nuance him. In Plato's *Parmenides*, appearance is the Idea's shape and form; it provides, say, the Idea of Beauty with beautiful objectivity. Plus, of course, there is hesitation on the part of Plato to create another 'beingness of appearance' which will complicate the arrangement in his otherwise orderly two-tiered worlds. Aristotle himself deplores the separation of being and appearance. Yet the Eleatic philosopher's argument, constantly reminding Plato of being's self-sufficiency and rendering any relationship outside of it superfluous, has gained enough momentum and force that even Aristotle, while defending his original position, is not averse to treat appearance with indifference (as can be gleaned in his reflection of substance). A recollection of Plato's plastic nuancing would have spared 'appearance' its inferior status, but since forgetfulness pervaded all through the sweep of history, appearance was not just inferiorized, it was also treated with indifference and suspicion. No wonder theater and play as artificers of shadows and appearances became banned on the holy grounds. Augustine's wanton indulgence with them in his younger days afflicted him with guilt in old age.

Well, Kant remembered the Platonic nuance. So did Hegel. In Hegel the debate shifted from existence-appearance to essence-appearance relations. For him the latter has reciprocal relations. He claims: "Essence *must* appear. Seeming (*Das Scheinen*) is the definiteness, through which essence is not mere being, but essence, and fully developed seeming is appearance. Essence is thus not behind or beyond appearance, but existence is appearance by virtue of the fact that it is essence which exists."[5] This does not mean a heralding of appearance by Hegel, but

---

5. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Appearance as the Arrival of the Future," in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 35 (1967): 109 [107-118], referencing Hegel, *Enzyklopädie*, 131.

rather an ontological overtake, installing essence over existence, where existence is conceived as appearance's ground. Appearance is again an alienated mimesis of essence. The essence of the Hegelian Idea, in fact, is finding its instantiations in the appearances of religion and history.

Earlier than Hegel, Kant proceeds – as we all know – with what he himself believes, namely, the traditional separation between the thing-in-itself and appearance, and roots this distinction as the foundation of all human unknowing. Yet, according to Pannenberg, Kant makes "appearanceness as the fundamental characteristic of being itself."[6] A Kantian apologist by the name of Barth stresses the point that only a thing that appears is understandable; without appearance, nothing is understandable. Hence, "appearance as existence takes priority over all notions of essence." Under this dispensation, "the notion of appearing simultaneously comprehends both the act of coming-into-appearance [existence] and the 'something' that appears," which intimates the eidetic content of appearing [essence].[7]

To cite an example: Max's 'appearance' in the Louvre takes out the 'seemliness' of that appearance, because he is actually present right there, all smiles without his proverbial guitar. Yet, the truth of the matter is that he still exists even if he does not appear. This means that appearance is more than physically 'being present here and now'; it has a subsistent property in itself. This is consistent with Kant's observation that the idea of appearance points back to a being-in-itself which is different from the appearance, since it would be nonsense to say that there is appearance without there being something to appear.[8] In Pannenberg's sense, appearance exceeds more than just its capacity to be present; "it manifests something more than that part of it which appears."[9] This way, appearance is analogous to existence; yet, transcends it.

---

6. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Appearance as the Arrival of the Future," 109.
7. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Appearance as the Arrival of the Future," 110.
8. See Preface to the Second Edition, Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, *2ndEdition*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003).
9. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Appearance as the Arrival of the Future," 107.

This full disclosure of the value of appearance is patent among many philosophers from Schiller and beyond, yet that does not stop detractors like Rousseau et al. from associating appearance with shallowness and temporariness. Such aesthetic judgment leads many to link it ethically to hypocrisy and deception. In the foregoing discussion, we create a fictional space where Max's notion of *Apir* comes in contact with Sennett's and Arendt's 'theatricality of appearance'; Bakhtin's carnival appearance; Rancière's 'appearance of the political' and finally, Derrida's 'disappearance of the Messiah'. On this last note, let me abide by Derrida's distinction between "general theology" and "restricted theology" – lest I be accused of not *explicitly* theological in my discourse. The distinction implies that the latter is drawn to the deliberate or assertive discourse about God while the former is set as a horizon for the articulation of the "possible affirmations of the absolute" (e.g., in the realm of arts or human freedom) or the condition of possibility of "all metaphysical determinations of truth," whether God is explicitly mentioned or not.[10] It is mostly within the horizon of a 'general theology' that I shall deal with the questions at hand.

THE 'THEATRICALITY OF APPEARANCE' AND MAX'S GESTURE OF 'UP-HERE'

Sennett and Arendt talk about the topological space of appearance: the 'public arena'. It is a lofty site where free people 'appear' with their immortal works and words. Max's *Apir* seems to point to a spatiality as well, as 'up-here' is not exactly an incorrect reading of the 'over-the-head' clasping of hands gesturing toward social bonding. Yet, if you come to think of it, up-here creates a spatial torque upon traditional imagination accustomed to thinking

---

10. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 10. For a discussion of "restricted and general theology – two theologies [distinguishing] between 'revelation' and 'revealability', between 'manifestation' and 'manifestability', between the 'science of God' and the 'science of divinity' [and] between 'the experience of faith' and 'the experience of sacredness'", see Hugh Rayment-Pickard, *Impossible God: Derrida's Theology* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 5-7.

of 'up' as 'there', 'out there', *là-bas*, *labas*. It therefore familiarizes the lofty 'up' with a grounded 'here'. To put a critique in advance, it seems that Max's 'up-here' upturns the overdetermination of Arendt's clear-cut *polis-oikos* divide.

 ARENDT, ROUSSEAU AND ROBESPIERRE ON 'APPEARANCE'. In Arendt's analysis the issue of 'appearance' became a hot topic during the mid-eighteenth century, especially as it pertains to 'public space'. In their time, Rousseau's and Robespierre's reflections dealt contemptuously with the French virtues and their underlying 'hypocrisies'. The divulgence of the inner machinations of 'hypocrisy' is important in order to understand the ethos of the French Revolution. Since 'appearance' and playacting in the public space became solely associated with deceit, and therefore, with hypocrisy, Robespierre and Rousseau unleashed their blistering attack upon these publicly superficial practices. The supporting logic here draws from antiquity. The 'enlightened philosophes' recall Parmenides' insight about the ever-present 'is' as the grounding *archç* for everything. That 'appearance' cannot give a definitive 'ground' or *archç* for itself contributed to the decline of its plausibility. The implication became starkly contrastive, devaluing the manifold and the changeable as 'deceptive semblances'. The response from Rousseau and Robespierre is the installation of *l'homme naturel* and the retrieval of the 'authentic self' freed from vain semblances and worldly façades. This habit of denigrating appearance as attached to 'falseness of character' is not shared by Machiavelli, who much earlier on, stated: "Never mind how you are, this is of no relevance in the world and in politics, where only appearances, not 'true' being, count; if you can manage to appear to others as you would wish to be, that is all that can possibly be required by the judges of this world."[11] Machiavelli has a more optimistic reading of 'appearance' along the lines of 'playacting'. For him it is revealing "the idea of a distinct public self, or the view of oneself as an actor performing for an internalized audience,"[12] which is a long shot from deception or shady

---

 11 Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1965), 101.
 12 Dana Villa, "Theatricality and the Public Realm," in *Politics, Philosophy, Terror: Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 138. [133-154]

misrepresentation. This description of 'appearance' will become relevant shortly.

The search for 'natural authenticity' puts a halt to perceiving public playacting or mask-wearing as vehicles of a distinct kind of truth, that is, "as the means by which the actor's voice could 'sound through' while his private self remained protectively hidden".[13] Once this nuance is no longer honored, any public performer is irrevocably disgraced. Under such logic, the platform of the open, public space becomes problematic and any "impersonal presentation of self" becomes highly suspicious, artificial, and unnatural.

Max may be a good instance, but his *au pair* audiences are even better examples of a people of appearances, who risk leaving the intimacies of the household and trying their niches in the limelight of the big city (although their worksites are nowhere close to 'open spaces'). This time, they rely on the anonymous freedom and masked theatricality that the public life can offer them. In his study of the eighteenth-century London and Parisian culture, Sennett takes notice of the 'circle of strangers' that congregate together in the urban metro*polis*. This thick huddling of people triggered the question of space and audience: "how to know and to judge the appearances – the words and deeds – of individuals encountered in this new, anonymous public?" According to Villa, Sennett's insight proffers that "the eighteenth century dealt with this problem by drawing on the venerable tradition of *theatrum mundi*, the image of society as itself a theater or stage. Expanding on this analogy, urban life in the eighteenth century built a 'bridge' between the stage and the street, transferring a set of theatrical conventions and criteria of judgment (of dress, utterance, and believability) to the 'theater' of the city."[14] It may seem that the individuals-strangers' movement toward the public space in eighteenth-century Paris does parallel the movement of the appearances of *au pairs* in the public spaces in many European and Asian cities nowadays. However, many aesthetes disagree, believing that Sennett here is referring to bohemian rhapsodes and artists (the likes of Gréco or Basquiat) spilling their artistic inks wastefully on the walls of Montparnasse or Greenwich Village, and not the sort

13. Dana Villa, "Theatricality and the Public Realm," 138.
14. Dana Villa, "Theatricality and the Public Realm," 148.

of people congregating in public parks on weekends as a way to 'while away the time' for greater job productivity the next working day. The difference is that the former are *littérateurs* reading *Borges*; the latter, to quip, are *mga borgs* taking *litrato*. 'Pa-Kodak 'ta bay, *Apir*!'

In Sennett's 'impersonal sociability', such observation may seem to hold true. Sennett's search for true public appearance purveys a practical philosophy in which "the work itself draws apart from the man working and his social relations. And this separation of the worker and his work...accustom the artist to think of his efforts as greater than his circumstances, to think the work worthwhile despite its approval or disapproval at a given moment."[15] Independent from the personality of the artist-aesthete, words and deeds simply appear out of nowhere like 'miracles' in the public space, and they 'create' the world of arts.

SENNETT'S APPEARANCE OF 'IMPERSONAL SOCIABILITY'. Sennett's plea of 'impersonal sociability' serves to create a distinction between the performer and the performance or the actor and the act itself. The aesthetic act and performance are governed by conventions (such as dramatic actions, athletic movements, masks, etc.) and principles (such as techniques, rules of engagements, etc.) that have nothing to do with the person of the actor, the performer or the player herself. The former is the seat of expressive conventions that are 'seen' and 'experienced' for what they are, and not for the *persona* of the performer. Therefore, two attributes inform the aesthetic of public theatricality. One is the 'attribute of the act' which is the central point of attention and the 'attribute of the actor' which is hidden, and irrelevant in the evaluation of any performative action.[16] This distinction is a buffer against the prevailing style of evaluative judgment that lumps performer and performance *together*, going by the 'intimate' justification that once the performance is proved atrocious, the performer is to be blamed for such atrocity. Sennett debunks this position, as does Arendt. For them the whole point of the theatricality

---

15. Richard Sennett, "The Artist and the University," *Daedalus* 103 (1974): 218 [217-220].

16. Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Knopf, 1977), 109-110, referenced in Dana Villa, "Theatricality and the Public Realm," 148.

in the open, public space is for one to be able to appreciate or depreciate the act at play without having to censure the *person* of, say, the rival actor. In a way, "one's opponent was simply an individual who had taken an evil or blameworthy role. In sum, it was the role that was condemned, not the person's *nature*."[17]

At this point, we need to ask the question once again: Does Max's intimation of *Apir* really apply to the *au pair* symbolic? And if it does, does our '*au pair*' appearing in the public piazza fit Arendt's and Sennett's description of the 'public individual' appearing in the public realm?

In my own opinion, our *au pair* hero/ine does not figure in Arendt's and Sennett's cosmos. In contrast to the public individual, Sennett talks of an "intimate society" where social dealings, despite their impersonal structure, are perpetually transmuted into the logic of personality (likes and dislikes, touch or preferences) in order to be meaningful. In such gathering, a pervasive fear looms in the hearts of people – the fear of alienation, remoteness, and impersonality. Strangers or strange ideas need to be recuperated into the familiar regions of knowability. The angst of distance is salved by personal warmth. The outcome, in Sennett's view, is the 'tyranny of intimacy' in which human life is ruled by fluffy emotions and not by a solid grasp of objective contents or greater ends. This goes against the true spirit of public life because it is precisely the public sphere that this tyranny wishes to eschew. What emerges out of this space is a politics of personalities and charismatic beliefs. The public has been privatized into a homogeneous realm of almost like-minded agreements that there is really no cause to investigate outside issues or entertain other people's ideas and viewpoints. Such attitude is afflicted, among others, with philistine provincialism and extreme regionalism.

The 'tyranny of intimacy' operates by canceling out the impersonal, objective contents of human life and denying them their force. According to Sennett, there is value in dealing squarely with divergent economic, political and other public matters of sociality, but the 'intimate individual' assembles them together into a

---

17. Dana Villa, "Theatricality and the Public Realm," 148.

commonality (or a distorted *Gemeinschaft*) that reduces public, agonistic transactions into the comfort zone of intimate sentiments and shared feelings. True to Durkheim's and Mauss's teachings, the drive of epidemiology as a social register of personal expression takes precedence, with the conscription of emotion, sentiment and skin-contact as the overriding principle in taking over what shall be judged as 'truth of the matter'. The drawback of such 'tyranny of intimacy' is the psychologization of the political realm, "where political action is routinely read back to the 'character' of the actor (his 'real' self) and its evaluation made a function of the actor's personal characteristic and believability."[18] In Sennett's lens, therefore, 'up-here' is an all-too-intimate vector.

ARENDT'S PUBLIC REALM AS THE 'SPACE OF APPEARANCES'. In Arendt's reading, the city is a 'space of appearances' in which heroic individuals perform great deeds and speak memorable words. This is the site of the public realm where equals are allowed to co-inhabit, and each is given a space to display one's skills and virtues, and outshine each other in superiority.[19] It must be noted that the Arendtian description of 'space of appearances' is borrowed from Heidegger's ontology that views true human existence as immanently linked to how a free person appears as being-in-the-world and gloriously 'unconceals' oneself to all peers and equals. As Heidegger states, "[T]o glorify, to attribute regard to, and disclose regard means in Greek: to appear in the light and thus endow with permanence, being. For the Greeks, glory was not something additional which one might or might not obtain; it was the mode of the highest being."[20] Hence, the *polis* has been the site of accolades for immortal deeds and undying glory. Yet, there is more to it than just the aesthetics of wreaths. "If 'to be' is actually 'to appear', then glorification actually makes the deeds

---

18 Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, 259, in Dana Villa, "Theatricality and the Public Realm," 148.

19 Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 145, 148-149.

20 Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1961), 87.

what they are."[21] However, prior to Heidegger, Nietzsche has already given witness to the profundity of appearance, which is an inaugural gesture "to stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore appearance, to believe in forms, tones and words, in the whole Olympus of appearance."[22]

So our question persists: With Aling Gloria's sauntering around Basilique du Sacré Coeur or Manang Olympia's picnic reunion around Lumphini Park, does Arendt honor their being *au pair* with the wreath of public 'appearance'? The answer is no. Arendt's elitism limits the public theater to the immortal words and deeds of those living in the *polis*. Our *au pair* symbolic, while given the space to rest and recreate in public places, is still consigned in the private domain of the *oikos*. In Arendt's schema, free individuals and equals live in the *polis*; the unfree – families, workers, subalterns, slaves, people *sans papiers* – live in the *oikos*. The space of household is centered on the abiding necessity to maintain life, and people therein must live together for mutual support and subdual of needs and wants. Both labors, either species sustenance (e.g., work) or species continuance (e.g., childbirth), bespeak a trademark necessity that constrains the household to the logic of bodily needs and satisfaction.[23] In Arendt's recollection, the social cohesion or 'human togetherness' in the 'private realm' does not have any political import for Plato or Aristotle because it is a sociability shared with animal herds and is derivable from laborious, biological necessities of survival.[24] The private realm is the seedbed of injustices and insufferable antagonisms. It must be observed, though, with Arendt that the word 'privacy' has gone from a privative meaning (of, say, slavish workers disallowed from entering the public locus of the *polis*) to a more positive reception during the rise of modern personalist ideologies of Robespierre and Rousseau. Yet the logic prevails. For Arendt the relationship

----

21. Lewis Hinchman and Sandra Hinchman, "In Heidegger's Shadow: Hannah Arendt's Phenomenological Humanism," in *The Review of Politics* 46 (1984): 201 [183-211].

22. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 38.

23. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 30.

24. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 24.

between the *oikos* and the *polis* is one of negative reciprocity, where freedom in the *polis* basically means freedom *from* the *oikos*.[25] The spatial divide is starkly marked out.

When read with the Arendtian lens, Max's *Apir* is a parodic term because its referent *au pair* does not actually 'appear'. This means that their 'words and deeds' remain invisible in the public realm. That is why when Max gathers them in a public concert, 'ghosts' appear in the Lacanian or Zizekian sense, because voices and laughter can be heard in a (public) space that has effaced them long before they even arrive there.

BAKHTIN'S CARNIVAL APPEARANCE AND MAX'S FIESTA OF *APIR*

Both Bakhtin and Max are aesthetes of the carnival. In *Apir*, Max lyricizes a festive assortment of people in an egalitarian *communitas*: gays and lovers, oldies and kiddos, junkies and comics, men and women centered on 'appearing'. If we go by what the song says: '*Way gipili nga edad*', it seems that *Apir* is both time-expansive and enduring, which coincides with Bakhtin's description of carnival. Unlike Arendt's *polis-oikos* divide, the carnival spatiality erases the footlights that divide the theater/polis 'up there' and the street/oikos 'down here'. The hybridity of 'up-here' becomes alive in Bakhtin's democratic carnival, negotiating the meeting point between distance and familiarity, air and ground, or the sublime and the vulgar.

BAKHTIN'S CARNIVAL AS EGALITARIAN SPACE. Bakhtin's carnival is accessible by all, as "people live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people…. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom."[26] Needless to say, this aesthetic judgment of freedom departs from Arendt's concept of it. For Bakhtin, carnival serves as an aesthetic

25. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 30-31.

26. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1968), 7, 82. See also Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 122, 128.

guardian against stasis and intolerance. Carnival thrives in the certainty of the truism that when people are laughing they are not at war. In carnival, the popular enjoys "the gay and free laughing aspect of the world, with its unfinished and open character, with the joy of change and renewal."[27] Max's *Karnabal sa Pista* is a testament of laughable upturnings. It is a "permanent revolution" because it holds on to a firm, utopic belief that no revolution has (yet) spoken out its final truth.[28] Bakhtin is intuitive enough to realize that the 'official' culture does not speak the *whole* truth, for there is an 'unofficial' truthfulness to which the folk culture bears witness. Indeed, there are as many good fishes as ever that have come out of the sea.

It seems that Arendt's 'space of appearances' and Bakhtin's carnival agree upon the fact that both of them are a "complete exit from the prevailing order."[29] The difference is that, in Bakhtin, carnival is a 'suspension' from the established order, not by a flight from the social order (like Arendt), but by an intensification of its contact with it. For Bakhtin, the 'prevailing order' alluded to here refers to the elite *polis* that has installed the aesthetics of the sublime as the rule to distinguish itself from the informalities and crassness of folk culture. Carnival's exit or suspension from that order is its way of "inverting official values [in recognition of] another world in which anti-hierarchism, relativity of values, questioning of authority, openness, joyous anarchy, and the ridiculing of all dogmas hold sway, a world in which syncretism and a myriad of differing perspectives are permitted."[30] For instance, the temporary caesura of invoking one's rank, profession or status is an important element in carnival, because it dispels the myth of a consecrated inequality among peoples by setting everyone on equal footing. Bakhtin allows our heroine *au pairs*, Aling Gloria and Manang Olympia, to celebrate their true identity, because the real etymology of the French *au pair* is – you'd be surprised – 'on-equal-footing'.

Thus, when Bakhtin talks about the 'suspension from reality' in carnival aesthetic he does not mean 'distancing from the ordinary'.

---

27. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 83.

28. Renate Lachmann, "Bakhtin and Carnival: Culture as Counter-Culture," in *Mikhail Bakhtin, Vol. II*, ed. Michael Gardiner (London: Sage, 2003), 65.

29. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 89, 276, 412.

30. Renate Lachmann, "Bakhtin and Carnival: Culture as Counter-Culture," 62.

"What is suspended [in carnival], first of all, is the hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror…connected with it – that is, everything resulting from socio-hierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people (including age). All *distance* between people is suspended, and a special carnival category goes into effect: *free and familiar contact among people.*"[31] 'Free' and 'familiar' here imply an area of resistance to unreachable transcendence or bloodless metaphysics, although one cannot always avoid the truthfulness of the dictum: 'Familiarity breeds contempt', which is Sennett's point in 'intimate societies'. In truth, Bakhtin does not deny the importance of aesthetic distance *per se* (as he employs it in his work on dialogism, 'surplus of vision' or the 'author-hero relation') but he severely criticizes the underlying paradigm that staticizes and naturalizes the status quo once a *certain form of distance* is established.

BAKHTIN'S AESTH-ETHICS OF RESPONSIBILITY. In essence then, Bakhtin rethinks aesthetics by transposing it to what may be intimations of a radically lived-out *aesth-ethics*: "I have to answer with my own life for what I have experienced and understood in art."[32] In Max's *Apir*, the gestural art-form becomes an informal stance or a fleeting modality of encounter. Yet its subtlety is that it conveys an art of friendship, like 'art for life's sake'. In it, the purity of language incarnates in bodily gesture; the Word is enfleshed, bestowing upon the word-made-act a 'non-alibi to existence'. This means that in 'appearing' – either in Max's or Bakhtin's sense – one cannot renege one's responsibility to be 'at the spot' of the encounter; otherwise, *Apir* does not happen *for them*. Yet even if it happens, it is only a mere 'appearance' until one responds to the other with much more clarity and intent. Despite its fleetingness, *Apir* then is a site of possible creation; a kinesthetic invitation to respond, to answer, to expand beyond self-enclosures.

Moreover, in carnival *aesth-ethics*, liberation and subversion converge. Bristol views liberation as "a positive critique: a celebration

---

31. Cf. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 123.

32 Mikhail Bakhtin, "Art and Responsibility," in *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 1.

and reaffirmation of collective traditions lived out by ordinary people in their ordinary existence [and an] articulation of the capacity of popular culture" to create and recreate the world in their own little ways. 'Subversion' is explained as a "negative critique that demystifies and 'uncrowns' power, its justificatory ideology, and the tendency of elites to undertake disruptive radicalizations of traditional patterns of social order, and to introduce novel forms of domination and expropriation."[33] The first denotes the freedom of a people toward creating a better world and giving kids a brighter future as witnessed by our 'appearing' *kabayans* in different jobsites in the world. The second element cuts off the dross of official 'misreadings' that caricature the self-determination, potentials and dignity of discounted peoples, inferiorized for their unaesthetic, grimy 'appearances' in a cosmopolis of propriety and decorum. The Brechtian tactics of resistance employed by the dominated are invariably called by Scott as "weapons of the weak" or "infrapolitics of the powerless;…[they] insinuate a critique of power while hiding behind anonymity or behind innocuous understandings of their conduct."[34] Like the promise of carnival, the ordinary folks constantly hope and count on the coming of better times.

Unlike the stability of Arendtian *polis*, Bakhtin's carnival lives in relativity and ad hoc temporariness. There is no promise of classicism in Bakhtin; instead, carnival is limned in 'unfinalizability'. In Bakhtin's own words,

> The carnival sense of the world knows no period, and is, in fact, hostile to any sort of *conclusive conclusion*: all endings are merely new beginnings; carnival images are reborn again and again…. *[N]othing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future.*[35]

---

33. Michael Bristol, "The Festive Agon: The Politics of Carnival," in *Twelfth Night*, ed. R. S. White (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), 73 [72-81].

34. See James Scott, *Domination and the Art of Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

35. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* 165-66. [emphasis his]

BAKHTIN AND THE POSITIVITY IN POPULAR CULTURE? A good litmus test of carnival potential is to compare Max's *pistahan* with the folksy carnivals of the Stakhanovite movement during Stalin's time. It must be recalled that in the 1930s the Stakhanovite movement, under the leadership of their peasant leader Aleksei Stakhanov, led the exaltation rituals in Petrograd. Their festivity is a 'scripted' form of carnival serving the despots' vested interests. It does not draw from its own reservoir of native creativity and primal playfulness. Instead, its carnival aesthetic is choreographed in subdued laughter and measured movements.[36] The Stakhanovites' upturnings do not indicate the lowering of the lofty but only the re-legitimation of respectable position never subjected to question in the first place. Such kind of slippage and cooptation in the *kabayan's* carnival practices is not remote, and worth investigating under closer analysis, (but which I cannot develop here for reasons of brevity).

Such cooptation of carnival leads us to ask some crucial questions. For instance, Is Bakhtin correct in avidly defending the positive competence of carnival, the way Max 'sings out' to our laboring *kabayans*? The truth of the matter is that the carnival aesthetic may be a little bit too fantastic and idealized. At face value, it seems to offer historicity to ontologized structures but when rehearsed in actual life, the alternative carnival, according to Young, comes at the price of being 'dehistoricized'.[37] One indication is that Bakhtin's appraisals of 'the people' seem too generalized and devoid of socio-historical constitution.[38] Unlike Max's casts in *Apir*, which provoke realistic scenarios in the Pinoy imaginary, Bakhtin's carnival is crowded with an abstract *Volkgeist* or a conglomeration of eternal humankind.[39]

---

36. Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Massachussetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), 309.

37. Robert Young, "Back to Bakhtin," *Cultural Critique* 2 (1985/86): 84 [71-92].

38. See Richard Berrong, *Rabelais and Bakhtin: Popular Culture in 'Gargantua and Pantagruel'* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986); Richard Berrong, "The Presence and Exclusion of Popular Culture in 'Gargantua and Pantagruel' (or Bakhtin's Rabelais Revisited)," *Etudes Rabelaisiennes* 18 (1985): 19-56.

39. Leonid Batkin, "Smekh Panurga i filosofiia kul'tury," *Voprosy filosofii* 12 (1967): 114-23, cited in Caryl Emerson, *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 99.

So the question then arises: Why do critics think that Bakhtin's carnival is actually *de*populated? It is because Bakhtin fails to acknowledge that in real-life carnival, the underclass, in all its unrecognized potentials, can be the origin of dreary and unaesthetic impulses – fanaticism, depravity, rancor, severity – as archived in the many unfortunate stories of our *kabayans* at home and abroad. Or the corollary is equally true: that the privileged elite may in fact qualify as the true aficionados of the carnival spirit or act as truer clienteles of the public square in Arendt's and Sennett's sense. How many times has 'up-here' amicability turned into petty fisticuffs, party brawls or national plunder? How many times does steam go off, venting seething antagonisms and philistine tribalism underneath the veneer of carnival joviality?

At least Max's poetics do not hide reality, as exemplified in the blind blundering in their *Apir*, poking the others' faces, because in actuality, nothing 'appears' to them. For his part, Bakhtin's utter confidence in the common sense of the people typically leads him to understand it as a 'good sense', without taking into account that in fact, popular culture is infiltrated and suffused by the far-reaching ideological contents of the dominant, the dominated and the many in-betweens.[40] It is in this sense that carnival's discourse of 'free and familiar contact' or respect of alterity remains a pie-in-the-sky fantasy precisely because it cannot account for the actual distribution of power-differentials in society.[41] It is for this reason that we turn to another social thinker, by the name of Jacques Rancière.

RANCIER'S APPEARANCE OF THE POLITICAL AND MAX'S '*AU PAIR*' DEMES

Like Bakhtin's carnival, which collapses and democratizes binary fields, Rancière advocates an "aesthetics of equal intensities." By this he wants to embrace Balzac's "anonymization of the beautiful…that allows

---

40. Michael Gardiner, *The Dialogics of Critique: M.M. Bakhtin and the Theory of Ideology* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 187. For the 'non-pure' reading of 'the people', see Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular'," in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, 227-240.

41. Ken Hirschkop, "Introduction: Bakhtin and Cultural Theory," in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, eds. Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 2.

us to see the beautiful everywhere,"[42] even in the most ordinary words or events. There is an immanent poeticity in everything, waiting for their day in the sun. The basis of this reflection is his notion of *equalitas*, which is a radicalization of Bakhtin's *momentary* carnival. For Rancière, the 'radical equality of all' is not a destination or an end-goal; it is rather an *ontological constant* of all human situatedness, "a point of departure [and] a supposition to be maintained in all circumstances."[43] Here, Rancière takes his inspiration from a philosopher of pedagogy, Joseph Jacotot (1770-1840), from the University of Louvain. For Jacotot, everyone shares the same intelligence; the difference lies in the will to exercise it and the circumstance of its application. To apply Jacotot via Rancière, Max's *komiks* is a 'full literature'[44] in itself, derivable from the richness of the smallest word, the shortest sentence, the slightest sense or intonation, and the potentialities of inventions and contextualizations inherent in its 'appearing'. This is an important launching pad for Rancière's understanding of the *demos*.

RANCIÈRE'S PARADOX OF THE 'DEMOS'. In Thesis 3 of 'Ten Theses on Politics', Rancière elaborates on Plato's seven qualifications for 'ruling' and 'being ruled' in the *polis*. The most notable are the four qualifications based on natural difference (i.e., difference in birth bestowing the warrants for parents to rule over children, elders over youth, masters over slaves, and nobles over serfs). The other two are based on knowledge in which the strong rule over the weak, and those who know more rule over the ignorant. The least known of the qualifications is the seventh rule, which pertains to the "drawing of lots (*le tirage au sort*)."[45] Rancière claims that Plato does not

---

42 Jacques Rancière, "Politics and Aesthetics: An Interview," 205.

43 Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (California: Stanford University Press, 1987/1991), 9, 229.

44 Of course the critical reader may discover in this move the danger of a Western 'reading' of Max's *Apir*, thereby losing the value of reading him 'in his own terms'. The point, however, is not about the content, but about Jacotot's *méthode panécastique* that sees and reads 'everything in each' thereby, emancipating 'realities' out of their tight semantic enclosures.

45 See Thesis 3 in Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics," *Theory and Event* 5 (2001). muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v005/5.3ranciere.html.

elaborate on this, but in reality this area is the realm of democracy. From the beginning, then, democracy is already a liminal field that falls under the domain of the gods and their choice manifested in a game of chance. Unlike all the other qualifications, democracy is the 'absenting of both qualifications and qualifieds' because at its core is pure chance. Rancière explains further: "Democracy is that state of exception where no oppositions can function, where there is no pre-determined principle of role allocation…. Democracy is the specific situation in which there is an absence of qualifications that, in turn, becomes the qualification for the exercise of a democratic *archę*."[46]

Democracy is, in its origin, a border territory or a rogue concept in the early Attica, invented by those with credentials to rule (read: 'qualified') by virtue of their "seniority, birth, wealth, virtue, and knowledge". The term 'democracy' is spoken in jest and ridicule, to signal "an unprecedented reversal of the order of things: the 'power of the *demos*' means that those who rule are those who have no specificity in common, apart from their having no qualification for governing." Rancière traces even further the origin that "[b]efore being the name of a community, *demos* is the name of a part of the community: namely, the poor." The poor, in this case, should not be seen primarily as a general description of the impoverished people or those lacking in material possessions (although it does not discount it). Instead, "it designates the category of peoples who do not count, those who have no qualifications to part-take in *arche*, no qualification for being taken into account."[47]

Max's *Apir* is a cognate of this paradox – an '*Apir*' that does not 'appear', an '*au pair*' that both counts and is unaccounted for; an 'up-here' that is numinously *là-bas* and nowhere else. In other words, Max bears witness to the paradoxical appearance of "'the people' [as] the supplement that inscribes 'the count of the unaccounted-for' or 'the part of those who have no part.'"[48] Rancière's axiom is transposable to his poetics, namely, the fingers or hands that count, don't count; they 'appear'.

---

46. Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics," Thesis 3.
47. Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics," Thesis 4.
48. Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics," Thesis 5.

Rancière's Triad: *Le Politique, La Police, La Politique.*
Politics is a key term for Rancière, because the *demos* inhabiting
democracy exist right at the heart of politics. This is consistent with
his claim in Thesis 1 that politics is not about power games but
about "a mode of acting put into practice by a specific kind of
subject [*le sujet politique*] and deriving from a particular form of
reason." In fact, to correlate "politics with the exercise of, and struggle
to possess, power is to do away with politics." The central political
act, as Thesis 5 expounds, is to trace that supplemental link of "'the
part of those who have no-part' (namely, the *demos*) with the whole
of the community (namely, *democracy*)".[49] It is supplemental because
there is no actual accounting of the *demos*, no actual accounting of
their qualifications (as they have none), or no accounting of 'shares
and proceeds' emanating as fruits of their (non-existent) qualifications.

For Rancière there are two kinds of (ac)counting in the
community: the first is the actual accounting in terms of parts,
functions, and roles in the social body; the second is the accounting
of those 'parts that are no-part'. Rancière calls the former *the police*,
which is actually the arrest, the domestication and the organization
of the 'parts with no parts' into a reconcilable whole (e.g., registration
of population or record of citizenship). Meanwhile, the latter, which
Rancière calls *le politique*, interrogates whether these paradoxical parts
exist at all.[50] Concretely, politics deals with two foundational questions.
First, it wants to verify the validity of the police's claim – that is the
validity of equality in the social space of inequality. Second, it attempts
to disclose the 'constructedness' of the social space that installed its
hierarchies as inherently and naturally given. In the first instance, *le
politique* identifies those hidden behind the margins; in the second, it
identifies those who construct the margin. Both are apologia for the
appearance of *le politique*.

Right at the heart of *le politique's* questions are clashing problems,
which Rancière elaborates in his "logic of the tort." It is the kind of
oblique thinking that deals with the contradiction between the call to
radical equality, on the one hand, and the recognition of the
hierarchized, socio-economic inequalities, on the other. In this tort,

---

49. Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics," Thesis 5.
50. Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics," Thesis 6.

politics and political philosophy (*la politique*) are at odds. The latter is like the national treasury; it carries the rational reserves of the *polis* – its established principles and tenets, its organization, rationalization and rules of operation. Political philosophy's relation with politics is like any other areas in the *polis*. In other words, it presumes that "there are rational ways of accounting for the existence, structuring, and functioning of political communities. This in turn means that there are underlying logical or ontological principles that give rational justifications for the social and political order."[51] In short, political philosophy's aim is to rationalize democracy in its own terms. In Rancière's reading, such attitude has been the rule of the thumb for the powers-that-be since time immemorial. For example, Plato's *Gorgias*, the *Republic*, the *Law* and the *Politics* are all rigged with attempts to erase the scandal of the 'seventh qualification', by making democracy a simply commensurable government of the strongest. Such a move necessarily entails placing the social body in determinable partitions and "expelling the empty part of the *demos* from the communal body."[52] Here is the genesis of 'consensus' – a move by political philosophy that, for Rancière, is the attempt to cancel out politics. Serving as the overarching *archç* that connects individuals (*politçs*) to the community in governance, *la politique's* greatest drawback, for Rancière, is that it never takes into account the work of the people; that in fact, the *polis* is constructed by the people's concerted action. The rationalist justification of the social order says nothing of the truer constitution of the *polis* other than a presentation of the "justification of social hierarchy, and a justification of the projection of this hierarchy into the political; in other words, a justification of domination. By defining its object in relation to social hierarchy, political philosophy ends up defining a nonpolitical object,"[53] accounting populace in highly discriminatory counting methods, such as when communities are patently described as a system or a machinery or in terms of zones and grid lines.

---

51. Jean-Philippe Deranty, "Jacques Rancière's Contribution to the Ethics of Recognition," *Political Theory* 31 (2003): 142-143 [136-156].

52. Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics," Thesis 9.

53. Jean-Philippe Deranty, "Jacques Rancière's Contribution to the Ethics of Recognition," 143.

The authority that regulates and controls the management of roles and functions in the social order is, of course, the police. In Thesis 7, Rancière argues that the police cannot tolerate gaps and voids; everything has to be accounted for. It is in this sense that it is opposed to politics, because in politics, everything does not always add up; there will always be supplements or remainders emanating from the foundational questions. The demeanor of the police (*la police*) is comparable to the aesthetic *horror vacui*, that is, a phobic fear of the empty space. For the police, everything 'occupies' a *topos* in terms of roles, occupations, and functions in society. In the police's logic, there is no such thing as 'no part'. Part-taking spells the fittingness of part-takers in spatial and ontological locations. In contrast, politics is recalcitrant because it points out to the police that what it takes into account are *only* the visible parts. The truth of the matter is that there is the unwieldy supplement in society, which consists of 'parts of the no-part'. The best description for these remainders is not visibility but 'appearance' because of the paradoxical embrace of their seemly status and their actual presence. Politics therefore is an interruptive mode to what is claimed by the police as visible and said – on official record. It is in this sense that Rancière locates *le politique* within the realm of aesthetics because "it produces a rearrangement of social reality for a refreshed perception, where bodies and voices that were neither seen nor heard can be included in a communicative context."[54]

In Thesis 8, Rancière mentions politics as the site of "two worlds in one," echoing Bakhtin's carnival description. Let us take, for instance, the erstwhile EDSA rallies or the current Occupy Wall Street protests. For Rancière the police are not there primarily to interrogate people, but to make the people 'move along' because its enforcers see the street or a park lane as a typical, functional space: a passageway. These spots, for the police, are already predefined, so there can be no void in their application and interpretation. In contrast, politics see the street or the park lane differently. Instead of an innocent passageway, they now see it as a passage for appearance from 'invisible' individuals to subjectivities with visible causes and audible

---

54. Jean-Philippe Deranty, "Jacques Rancière's Contribution to the Ethics of Recognition," 146.

pathos. Politics start to reconfigure the perceptions of space and bodies by reclaiming or renaming the police's neat 'partitioning of the sensible'. Bakhtin's abstract carnival zone is given a concrete analytical body.

However, Bakhtin's carnival aesthetic and Max's benign poetics are subjected to a sterner, more sober mood, as Rancière installs *mesentente* (disagreement) – that is, the problematization of understanding in every speech event – as the founding credo of street politics, or for that matter, the political institutions. This is the main reason why Rancière, *pace* Habermas, rejects all uncritical theories of understanding. For him the search for recognition is struggle-driven. The aim of every search is like Sennett's appearance of the public individual but this time, it is a Sisyphian, uphill climb by the dominated underclass to reach a modicum of exposure, to emerge out of the official protocols of effacements and curtailments as well as attain respectability.

There are certain convergences between Max and Rancière here. Max's 'up-here' approximates Rancière's 'suspensive logic' where political subjects clasp hands together to question the hierarchic arrangement of polity on the basis of people's radical equality. If, for Max, '*au pair*' is both symbolic of unequal status and 'on-equal-footing'; for Rancière, 'to appear' is captured in the liminal French word, *partager*, which means 'to separate' and 'to share'. In both instances, the struggle for recognition strives to arrive at a fellowship, yet such fellowship is purchased at the steep price of its denial. That is why Habermas's "ideal speech situation" is retranslated in Rancière as a 'real situation' where "the object of dialogue is nothing but the very possibility of dialogue, since some of the partners are not recognized as valid speakers by the others. Thus, understanding can only be reached through misunderstanding."[55]

In Arendt, politics is denied access to the social (*oikos*) because the latter is a domestic and domesticated space. It is a space of nurturance and sufferance where 'invisible' people – women, workers, slaves, children, serfs – reside. In Rancière these are the 'parts of no-

---

55. Jean-Philippe Deranty, "Jacques Rancière's Contribution to the Ethics of Recognition," 150-151.

56. Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics," Thesis 8.

part', emerging out of the void into an open polity as "participants in a common aesthesis." These people's potential worth consists in "making what was unseen visible; in getting what was only audible as noise to be heard as speech; in demonstrating to be a feeling of shared 'good' or 'evil' what had appeared merely as an expression of pleasure or pain."[56] Here is Rancière's aesthetic of 'proletarian dream' where he obviously departs from an abstract Althusserianism in order to announce his solid advocacy of the poor's emancipation.

For Rancière the well-ordered partitioning of roles and parts by the police can be traced back to Plato's anti-theatrical stance. It must be remembered that Plato abides by the 'one artisan, one craft' principle. This goes against the grain of the multitasking capabilities of this age. In Platonic thought a craftsman deals with crafts and farmers deal with crops; they don't interchange functions. Therefore, mere slaves have no business poking their nose into politics or aesthetics. Conversely, democracy is the field of deme-artisans who perpetually pose a threat to the *polis*, for two reasons. First, without knowledge of the intricacies of politics, they acquire their status as a 'noisy crowd', that constantly insists on being heard; and second, with their doxic knowledge and knack for imitation, they indiscriminately try to dabble in fields outside their expertise. For the police guards of the *polis* then, theater is the aesthetization of the threat, which perilously "gathers the demos as a crowd, encourages them to judge poetry and music (for which they are not qualified), and presents them with poetic imitations that themselves violate the rule of one artisan, one craft."[57] It ultimately upends the normal count in the *polis* by transgressing the boundaries of Plato's One and the multiple. Its danger lies in staging "the dangerous miscount of democratic politics" appearing and reconfigured, "as it were, into aesthetic display".[58]

---

57. Richard Halpern, "Theater and Democratic Thought: Arendt to Rancière," *Critical Inquiry* 37 (2011): 565 [545-572].

58. Richard Halpern, "Theater and Democratic Thought: Arendt to Rancière," 566; see also Jacques Rancièr *The Philosopher and His Poor*, trans. John Drury, Corinne Oster, and Andrew Parker (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 3–53.

RANCIÈRE'S POLITICS OF AESTHETICS. According to Halpern, Rancière stays with the Platonic model of Greek theater but "transvalues its values" by seeing in it a pattern of democratic community.[59] In fact, the value that was outlawed by Plato becomes, in Rancière, democracy's most important component – that is, mimetic multiplicity. It gives a public face and an outside stage to confined, private practices because it is redoubled many times over in recognizable multiplicity. Such is the phenomenon of *Apir*, despite the fleetingness of its visibility. It removes the *kabayans* from the rigid unicity of their private tasks and face-to-face with another, enacts an appearance that redoubles the mimetic act. Rancière calls this the 'redistribution of the sensible'. The *au pairs* still work, but they 'appear' to play. They therefore wedge an exit out of Arendt's constrictive worldview. Halpern, appropriating Rancière's reflections in The *Politics of Aesthetics*, states:

> By staging a poetic "work" in a public manner, theater moves the activity of production from the private, domestic space of the *oikos* into the political realm and thereby provides an exact correlate to the movement of the artisans themselves from the invisible purlieus of workshop or household into the Assembly. In repartitioning the sensible, theater enables the insurgent demos to witness their own emergence into political daylight – not through the plot of drama or through dramatic characters who represent them but rather through the status of the play itself as artifact granted a dazzling visibility.[60]

What they see in each other's *Apir* is a mimetic, low-key representation of their own appearance, and a defiance against hands or palms perceived as *solely* and *functionally* geared towards production and productivity. For Arendt, this may be construed as the infiltration of the social field into the public realm but for Bakhtin and Rancière, this is the carnivalization of the democratic space that allows the dominated their place in the sun. Such 'collapse of space' and eventual

---

59. Richard Halpern, "Theater and Democratic Thought: Arendt to Rancière," 566.
60. Richard Halpern, "Theater and Democratic Thought: Arendt to Rancière," 566.

"redistribution of the sensible constitute [the subalterns'] noxiousness, even more than the danger of simulacra weakening souls."[61] It is borne out of Ms. Alta's tacit question: 'Do the poor think that way…or can they even think at all?' This betrays a social location or a bias, unquestioning its own question.

For Rancière the hero/ine in his aesthetics is not the dissenting folkloric laborer among the proletariat. He shares Bakhtin's critique of the Stakhanovite movement. Such romanticism only serves to bolster the ideological divide between the laboring class and the dominant elites. Instead, Rancière pins his hopes on those men and women – the "proletariat philosophers and poets" – who can articulate in literary works the plight and experiences of the dominated. These breed of people embody the "logic of the tort" in that "they voice the universal claim for equality as singular voices, as true example of political subjects,"[62] while not forgetting the structures of inequality from which they poetize and perform.

To test Rancière's framework, does PacMan qualify as an example of a 'proletariat poet', being that he is schooled from the sub-academia of Max and another deceased guru, Yoyoy V, in karaokizing *kabayans* out of their miseries and woes? If we just abide Rancière's criterion, PacMan may qualify, as he does not just give voice to the ordinary people but also joins the *masa's* vocabulary of emancipation and lives out in actual public appearance the long-forgotten political imaginary among the dominated, namely, the story of David and Goliath. There is a difference between 'giving a voice' and 'joining voices and living out' the halted dreams of the marginal people. The former is a form of patronization; the latter falls prey to patronization itself, yet, does not allow Fate to beat them to the ground. According to Deranty, their poetics and "dreams of emancipation reveal much about the logic of domination and the fight against it."[63] PacMan's 'appearance' to power and to Congress may prove unaesthetic to

---

61. Richard Halpern, "Theater and Democratic Thought: Arendt to Rancière," 566.

62. Jean-Philippe Deranty, "Jacques Rancière's Contribution to the Ethics of Recognition," 141.

63. Jean-Philippe Deranty, "Jacques Rancière's Contribution to the Ethics of Recognition," 142.

many parvenus of aesthetic sensibilities but his aesth-ethics of (dancing) jab and (pidgin English) gab puts enemies to submission and puts food on the poor man's plate. Most of all, in hearing him speak openly, the *kabayans* are hearing through him their own voices echoing beyond the constraints of their social destiny. This scenario does not *anesthesize* reality, like most classic works of art; instead, it *aesth-ethicizes* the proletarian dream into a livable reality. Yet this characterization is too schematized and too simplistic, for it does not address, among others, the difficulty of a PacMan to even speak or truly 'appear' in the public halls among respectable equals.

The reason why the demes have a hard time finding their voice or struggle 'appearing' in public spaces is because most prevalent models of communicative action "presuppose the partners in communicative exchange to be pre-constituted, and the discursive forms of exchange imply an [aesthetic] speech community whose constraint is always explicable."[64] Our diagnosis should not limit us to linguistic causes, Bourdieu cautions.[65] I admit the *aporia* is complicated by the interplay of power differentials and other nexus of socio-political relationships. It is the crusade of the police, however, to uncomplicate matters. In the police's worldview, the partitions of parts are neatly stacked and uniformly organized, which stunt politics and "render compulsory a blindness to those who 'do not see' and have no place from which to be seen."[66] Under this regime, *Apir* comes as an unaesthetic intrusion that carries with it no logic or pragmatic content; hence inadmissible, not counted. If ordinary *kabayans* 'appear' at all, it is with much pain and litigiousness, only because it is perceived as distant and disjointed from the sublime *archç* of pure science or philosophy. Unwittingly, this makes for great politics, which is true in PacMan's case.

In Rancière's sense, Max stands for "the equal capacity of anybody to be for anybody else a cause of learning." This makes Max an unwitting tutor, a proletarian professor in the *pluri*versities of the

---

64. See Thesis 8 in Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics".

65. Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Pierre Bourdieu and Löic Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), to name a few.

66. See Thesis 8 in Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics".

undersides. This means his medium may be *bisdak*, but his message is universally and gesturally accessible. In a way, Max carries within himself the "egalitarian power of language,"[67] which he himself learns without the schooled benefits of the gurus of *langue* (from Saussure to Chomsky). There is in Max the potential of an "ignorant schoolmaster," the mentor who teaches everybody else, for he too imparts "a 'lesson' since he is the cause of somebody else learning something."[68] At times the master guru speaks in tongues, imparting lesson of non sequiturs indecipherable to the uninitiated.[69]

All professors understand the tentativeness of their lessons. Max's main course on *Apir* is no different. It is a discourse of dissimulation. It recognizes its tentativeness by its own abdication. In *Dis-Apir* one finds in Max a flexibility, "its share of play, of doubt about what it says." It marks a deeper awareness, to cite Rancière's insight, "to show that workers' utopian discourse always also knows at a certain point that it is an illusory and ironic discourse, which does not entirely believe what it says."[70] This is the point that many theologians, political philosophers and classicists miss – the forgetfulness of classic's own genesis and 'createdness'. After all, in the entire Creation *only Adam did not have an umbilical cord*, a point that even Titian, Dürer, Cranach, Masaccio and others, forget to account in their paintings, by making it 'appear'.

DERRIDA'S 'MESSIANIC DIS/APPEARANCE' AND MAX'S ACT OF DIS*APIR*

If *Apir* is the phenomenology of proverbial hand clasps, the gesture par excellence would be Dürer's *The Praying Hands* (1508) and the 'appearance' of *kabayans* in places of worship, at home and

---

67. Jacques Rancière, "Aesthetics against Incarnation: An Interview by Anne Marie Oliver," *Critical Inquiry* 35 (2008): 178 [172-190]

68. Jacques Rancière, "Aesthetics against Incarnation: An Interview by Anne Marie Oliver," 172.

69. Listen to Max Surban's *Gon E Sian Se* (his translation of 'titser' or 'maestro') on YouTube.

70. Jacques Rancière, "Politics and Aesthetics: An Interview," 208.

abroad. The symbol of two palms – one hand not knowing what the other is doing (cf. Mt. 6:3) – meet half-way in a single breath. One presence yet, More. The meeting of two palms point to a divine Thirdness, a holy Presence *within and beyond*. This prayerful hand-clasp seems to exceed more than what Max could offer. For, while Max's *Apir* mostly applies to friends, Dürer's iconography offers to love more than just friends, even as to love one's enemies' (cf. Lk. 6: 27). In the Louvre, around the time I met Max, I vividly remembered Anthony van Dyck's painting of *The Appearance of Christ to His Disciples* (1625). It is a powerful masterpiece of post-Resurrection 'appearance', especially to Christ's supposed 'detractors'. Here, the appurtenances of Max's trope – the encounter, the seemliness that is real; the open-palm gestures; the disciples' on-equal-footing (*au pair*) with the Resurrected Christ – all, converge in the narrative appearing-disappearing act in the Resurrection. With 'appearance', of course, is the temptation to touch, just as in Max's case. Without the touch, there is no such thing as *Apir*.

DERRIDA ON FRIENDSHIP. If we go back to the van Dyck painting, the doubting Thomas is invited to touch the side of the Resurrected Christ. To touch is an invitation to friendship; in Derrida's term, a special form of hospitality. To elaborate on the politics of friendship, Derrida talks about a Nietzschean tale about the encounter of the Macedonian king and the Greek philosopher. It is striking that Nietzsche sets these interlocutors in the proverbial posture of a "face-to-face" or a 'face-off', like Max's *Apir*. It must be noted that in Athenian antiquity, the "feeling of friendship was the highest" value among other values. It is "more elevated than the most celebrated pride of the sages, who boasted of their independence, autonomy and self-sufficiency". For sure, the "unique" possession of such virtue is the source of their hubris, which is an exercise in "self-determination" itself. Hence, since time immemorial, there exists the rift "between this proud independence, this freedom, this self-sufficiency that claims to rise above the world, and a friendship [as a form of self-abdication] which should agree to depend on and receive from the other." Now, when the king offered to hand the philosopher a gift, the philosopher vehemently refused it, showing his contempt

for the world. The king was disturbed and insulted: How can the philosopher refuse a gift? "Has he no friend?" Nietzsche, through his mouthpiece in Derrida, declares:

> The king meant that he certainly honored the pride of a sage jealous of his independence and his own freedom of movement; but the sage would have honored his humanity better had he been able to triumph over his proud self-determination, his own subjective freedom; had he been able to accept the gift and the dependency – that is, this law of the other assigned to us by friendship, a sentiment even more sublime than the freedom or self-sufficiency of a subject. The philosopher discredited himself in his ignorance of one of the two sublime sentiments, in truth 'the more elevated' of the two.[71]

In Max's *tinamban* reasoning, if it happens among kings and philosophers, it could happen all the more among the uncrowned and the untitled. To salve the 'incurable tear' (*entame*) caused by the rift, Derrida offers a reflection on the logic of the gift, which commits to a kind of 'impossible friendship' in the form of an acceptance of the Other's irreducible precedence and arrival.

As I attempt to expound this last point, namely, the notion of the 'coming of the Other', let me identify a tinge of discomfort in Derrida. His seeming passive endorsement of '*oui, oui*' to the Other – be it a friend or a stranger – seems problematically self-legitimating when set in the perspective of Bakhtin's and Rancière's poor who are left helpless and subject to the predatory incursions of a statal or superpower o/Other; thereby, fettered in domination and colonization under the pretext of donatory and hospitable gestures.[72]

DERRIDA'S NON-ARRIVAL OF THE *TOUT AUTRE*. Derrida, in the attempt to elaborate on 'impossible friendship', puts it in the context

---

71. Jacques Derrida, "This Mad 'Truth': The Just Name of Friendship," in *Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collin (London: Verso, 2005), 63. [49-74]

72. Although I must admit that Derrida's 'social roots' (i.e., a Jew from Arab Algeria living in a French intellectual circle and later, in American academia) make him aware of this dynamic. His critical reading of 'hos(ti)pitality' bears this out. Cf. Jacques Derrida, "Hostipitality," in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), 358-420.

73. Hugh Rayment-Pickard, *Impossible God: Derrida's Theology* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 151.

of the paradox of the Incarnation.[73] His reflection on the 'messianic' connotes the appearance of Someone whose arrival is snagged in an impossible possibility, of a coming that is not actually arriving. It therefore celebrates "a certain structural openness, undecidability, unaccomplishment, non-occurrence, noneventuality, which sees to it that, in contrast to the way things transpire in ordinary time, things are never finished, that the last word is never spoken."[74] The appearance of the Messiah – were One to come – only demolishes the inherent messianism that conflates the messianic time with the ordinary weight of presence. In contrast, Bakhtin believes in the inevitability of the Messiah's homecoming, which is his way of owning up the faith of the *anawim* that indeed the 'last Word has not yet been spoken'.

Taking inspiration from Blanchot, Derrida narrates the story of the Messiah appearing one day, near the gates of Rome, disguised as a pauper or a street bum. The 'concealment' is intended to 'restrain' his 'arrival', to emphasize that the "whole order of *venir* and *à-venir* belongs to an other, messianic time and an other language, so that nothing coming (*venue*) could ever actually occur or come about, or have occurred or have come about, in ordinary time. The Messiah's 'coming' can never actually correspond to an actual-historical appearance in ordinary time."[75] To continue the story, Blanchot triggers the dilemma in the plot when someone among the crowd recognizes the Messiah and asks about His coming. The question: *Viendras-tu?* is apt, for the fact of the Messiah's physical presence does not constitute his coming. To reduce Blanchot's 'come' to 'being present' is to reduce the messianic advent to the constraints of ordinary temporality and categories. There is more to 'appearing' than just visible palpability.

Now, what happens if in the story, the Messiah responds: 'Today!'? The 'today' that the Messiah means might bring us to how Derrida re-reads the 'now' not only as the 'presentness of being' but

---

74. John Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 78.
75. John Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*, 79. Blanchot's narrative is cited in Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 141-42.

as an eternal flux embedded in temporality. "The messianic 'today' means: if you will begin, now, to respond to the call that the Messiah himself addresses to you, begin to answer the demands he places upon you, if, in other words, you are willing now to say *viens* as a response to the Messiah's call, and to call for the Messiah not with hollow words but with virtue." This further means that "there is a way of waiting for the future that is going on right now, that begins here and now, and places an urgent demand upon us at this moment."[76] The messianic time (or 'absolute future') described here is akin to prophetic time or the time of justice. It is prophetic because it shatters and disturbs the present dispensation that claims the incumbency of justice by a faith in a 'present beyond itself'. For Derrida, one's posture of passivity and patience is both an attitude of extreme trust in the messianic coming and a passionate receptivity (or receptive passion) to the current demands 'now' that such 'coming of the other' vaguely entails or exacts from us.[77]

For Blanchot, the Messiah is not an incarnate God. To admit so is to submit to the end of history and to (fore)stall the coming. Derrida claims something similar, as he too is perpetually disturbed, according to Caputo, "by the Hegelian-Christian model of incarnation, the phenomenalization of the infinite in the finite, making the infinite palpable, visible, letting it shine as the *Erscheinen* and *Schönheit* of infinite *Sein*."[78] And Derrida's hesitation to admit the oxymoronic finiteness of the infinite is "not because he is against the body or flesh or finitude or carnal life, but because he fears giving finite forms an infinite warrant." The implication is the domestication of the infinite in the same, the apprehension of "a determinable infinity, somebody's infinite, somebody's God made man...a very finite Infinite that is definitively defined."[79] We cite Caputo at length:

---

76. John Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*, 80, 81.

77. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 31-33.

78. John Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*, 244.

79. John Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*, 245.

> For it never seems to fail that when God becomes man he becomes man among *us*, right here. Whenever he speaks, he speaks to *us*, in our language, in Greek or Hebrew or Arabic, which endangers everybody else. Then the world divides into those who happened to be standing in the right place, or living in the right time, or speaking the right language, when the God came. The world divides into the 'faithful', who are blessed by luck or providence, *o felix culpa*, and the gentiles, the goyim, everybody else, the unlucky and unblessed, those against whom the community fortifies itself.[80]

The claim that the *tout autre* has already arrived implies, for Derrida, a subtle politics of primacy that destroys the logic of the gift of 'impossible friendship'. This is so because by then, a people or a religion would have insinuated a legacy of "private property," of being "chosen" apart from the rest[81] – *as if* the 'arrival of the Messiah' marked the division of the excluded from the included, and not the salvation of *all*. Indeed, part of Derrida's discomfort about Incarnation is its attendant claim that the world's transformation into a more peaceful, freer and more humane place for humanity – starting with the vision of a Christian Europe – can be achieved *only* when all become Christians.[82] Derrida's distantiation of the *tout autre* does nowise imply the abdication of 'impossible friendship'. Far from abandoning the ethic of loving the other, what Derrida intends to do is first to rescue the totally other from the all-out Hegelian-Christian hostage. Then he invests his *différance* with a messianic function to allow the totally other to come not as a guarantee of the present but as an absolute rupture and surprise *beyond the present* – in friendship and love.

If I put myself in Max's headphones listening to Derrida, I would be lost myself, or I would be asking the question: How are we able

---

80. John Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*, 245.

81. John Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*, 246.

82. Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 100. See also Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: the Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," in *Religion*, eds. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 43.

to speak concretely about friendship at all? It seems that his purist insistence on the thoroughgoingness of 'impossible possibilities' bears less on what 'appears' in real life than just a sophisticated flair for the language of othering. For Bakhtin the adaptability of language bears witness to the unique truth of incarnate flexibility, rather than to its desire to preserve the logical necessity in its pureness.[83] That Max croons *Apir* is a testament to the porousness of the language that allows it to be 'touched' by both guilt and forgiveness or failing and healing. The value of appearance lies in its modesty, as not 'everything' appears in its showing. That *fact* justifies its character as *appearance*, but that also spells its openness for second chances. This inexhaustiveness can go the other way, giving appearance the eschatological expanse to appear differently in another setting. Hence, Derrida's problematizing of the *definitive* arrival of the futural Messiah into the present can be tempered by an explanatory 'appearance' that allows 'Someone to appear' without fixing a vulgar determinacy or tainted presentness to the Messiah's existence. Such is the flexibility underneath the appearances in Rembrandt's *Supper at Emmaus* (1648) or Laurent de La Hyre's *Apparition de Jesus aux trois Maries* (1646). Again, to rally Max's *tinamban* logic in reading Derrida, it would go like this: If the Messiah has indeed 'finally appeared', (*finito!*), then the poor and the marginalized of this world cannot help but read their sorry circumstance as a perpetual 'post-party depression' or the remnant of unredeemable despair. Yet no religion broaches that type of hopelessness. In Christian eschatology, there is a difference between a Messiah who has 'already appeared', which it claims, and One who has 'finally come', which it does not claim at all. To use Derrida's words against him, appearance is indeed one of the "possible plurivocities in a saying of friendship."[84]

Still, we sympathize with Derrida because he is coming from *a fear*, a gnawing fear, a phobic fear of the perpetuation of onto-theological structures in which gaps, cracks and blanks - an instantiation of which would be the perilous friendship with the Strange One – are not taken into account. This fear is expressed in

---

83. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, trans. Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 31.

84. Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, 6.

Max's one word – *Afir* – coming from the gay science (whether Nietzschean or otherwise) of a nation's repressed libidos or a people's unrequited angst. It all surfaces in our questions: 'Why is someone *different* 'appearing' in the club of the like-minded' – say, of an Arendt or a Rancière in theology or a Dadaist paper of sorts among classic writings?

BAKHTIN'S AND MAX'S ADDRESS TO DERRIDA…IN FRIENDSHIP. The epiphany of 'appearance' finds full force in *Apir* as instantiated by the unfinalizable encounter with the other, or what Bakhtin calls a 'surplus of vision'.[85] The phemonenological richness of such face-to-face encounter erases the tributary cheapness attached to this practice, for at its core is the instantiation of the 'excess of seeing' – that is, the paradoxical 'blindness' that we cannot truly see ourselves as others see us, and vice versa. This is the belief that there is no way for us to exhaust the knowledge of ourselves (as others see us), as there will always be a deficit of knowing in the process of any self-objectification. It is the mutual yet, non-coinciding exchange between the unique position of the self in existence and the unique places of other selves in existence. The exchange from both polar ends does not annul each other in *aporia*. Rather, deeper and more creative understanding and friendship are gained by the exchange of 'surplus'. *Apir* then becomes a bridge of friendship, of proximity, of presence, of reciprocity and of bodily contact and attraction; in one word, friendship. Yet, like all friendships, it can only be brokered in recognition of an irrevocable separation, distance or independence.

The 'I' and the alter ego, the friend and the stranger, the hostess and the guest – all arrive at an intersection where consciousness yields to "the fact that I, in my most fundamental aspect of myself,

---

85. This is a principle which, according to Brandist, Bakhtin obtains from Husserl's analyses of human corporeality, distinguishing between "the (living) body as experienced from within *Leib*) and the (physical) body perceived from without (*Körper*), noting that the individual's experience of the latter is possible only through the eyes of another. Each person thus has a certain perceptual 'surplus'. This reciprocity of seer and [being] seen is then generalized into a theory of the mutual dependence of subjects in society for a sense of their individual unity." Craig Brandist, *The Bakhtin Circle: Philosophy, Culture and Politics* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 45.

still am not. I live in an 'absolute future.'"[86] The self must embark on a 'project' of achieving oneself. It is a surplus that is at once, a 'lack' that serves to protect the self and other's transgredient potentials from being sublated into a unitary consciousness or definitive authorship. This lack purports "a certain deficiency, for precisely that which only I see in the other is seen in myself, likewise, only by the other."[87] This 'lack' is not only an affirmation of the 'surplus' the other gives but also a guarantee of a 'thirdness' that gently cracks open the oftentimes closed circularity of the self-other relations.

This 'lack' is allegorized in the figure of the 'community of the blind' in Max's poetics whose *Apir*, instead of the proverbial meeting of palms, lands on, in Levinas's words, **le visage** *de* **l'autre**. 'The blind touching the face of another blind' in the context of 'appearing' is almost a mystical statement. An 'Otherwise of Self' appears even to the blind! The *Dis-apir* gesture, often accompanied with guffaws and laughter, is either a parody of itself or an attempt to efface fear in solidarity with the 'unseeing'. Either way, in Max's frame of mind, blindness does not stop one from contact or touch with the o/Other, trusting that beyond this dark configuration is the reassurance that friendship still happens. With firm belief in the 'third addressee', "poets who feel misunderstood in their lifetimes, martyrs for lost political causes, quite ordinary people caught in lives of quiet desperation – all have been correct to hope that outside the tyranny of the present there is a possible addressee who will understand them."[88] The superaddressee, therefore, addresses *a fear*, 'appears in its disappearance' as the custodian of hope that "frees my existence from the very circumscribed meaning it has in the limited configuration of the self/other relations available in the immediate time and particular place in my life. For in later times and in other places, there will always be other configurations of such relations, and in conjunction with *that* other, my self will be differently

---

86. Mikhail Bakhtin, "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," in *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*, 122 [4-208].

87. Mikhail Bakhtin, "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," 12, 22-27, 166.

88. Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* (London: Routledge, 2000), 38.

understood."[89] What the 'thirdness' actually hedges against is not so much that one will be misunderstood, but that one will be misunderstood *permanently* and *forever*.

The superaddressee 'appears' to be the unseen horizon in either the longed-for forgiveness for the atrocities of unfriendliness *out there* or a trench against perpetual misrecognition of anonymous friendship *here and now*. The first is a topic that recuperates Arendt's aesthetics of *amor mundi* and the latter reinstates Rancière's *aesth-ethics* of recognition of the disenfranchised and the marginalized – both of which I elaborate in my forthcoming book. Suffice it to say, Max concludes his poetics with understanding *Apir* as the antidote against hubris and distaste. *'Kung mangluod ang usa, ingna lang: Apir!'*

Just as I thought I would end this paper on that note, I could not, without putting forward the final agenda of dragging Max into this conversation. You see, Max instructs us that in *Apir* there is a 'sign' ('*mosenyas lang*'). This is another big word! In Derridean logic, a sign only exists if there is a simultaneous 'countersign' that creates its condition of possibility. This is where Max's *kontrasenyas* points to a fearlessness in the face of blinding negativity; a will to live amidst life's besetting problem; a negotiation that admits to reconciliation and embrace. For my part, I have been looking forward to writing this reality of a fiction, or better still, fiction of a reality, to mark the 'sign of our time' in which Max, the 'Pinoy proletarian poet', is able to 'appear' before, and join the spirit of, other Maxes – that is, the company of Weber, Ernst, the Confessor, Scheller, Horkheimer and the one with an 'R' – in a gathering of reasoned discussions, and is accorded a respectable hearing…*for the first time*.

Lope A. Lesigues
Graduate School of Religion & Religious Studies
Fordham University, New York, U.S.A.
Email address: lops_lesigues@yahoo.com

---

89. Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World*, 38.