From the Editor

Last July 28, I gave a lecture presentation to a class at the University of Philippines-Diliman (UP-D) entitled, “Science and Technology and Society.” I was invited by its director, Benjamin Vallejo, who told me to discuss with the students the question: “How medieval is Philippine society?” This question needs a lot of clarification, but the real question we need to ask is, “How modern are we?” It seems that Dr. Vallejo, an esteemed environmentalist, considers the Middle Ages as the root of modern science. I am struck by this experience for several reasons, namely: (1) my sister studied Chemistry at UP-D’s College of Science, so it was an opportunity to give that institution something in return; (2) it was rather strange for me to be invited to speak at the College of Science or to speak in a class on Science and Technology. My discipline is Philosophy, and my interest is the cultural understanding of cities, specifically, the Quiapo district of Manila; (3) the Dean of Academics of UP-D, Fidel Nemenzo, sat in and stayed the whole time, and so I really had to watch what I was saying. But there was hardly need for caution for I was in UP, where academic freedom was not only advocated but practised. I hope the willingness of the Math and Science people to listen to Humanists, and even more strangely to medievalists, is a sign of a growing understanding that society cannot be changed simply by privileging science and mathematics. Society stands to lose more from such a mindset. The financial crisis is ultimately the handiwork of a mathematics without ethics. Nevertheless, an interest in the Middle Ages is alarming for many because they fear that a religious and conservative agenda lurks behind it. But, as the Jesuit historian and humanities scholar Horacio de la Costa already propounded, only an earnest study of the Middle Ages would bring to fore important concepts that continue to plague Filipino society. Examples of such would be clericalism (in its Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim forms), feudalism, and patronage.

The lecture made it possible for me to see the spanking-new Science Complex built with the 20 billion pesos Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo allocated to the University of the Philippines. Greatly gratified by the whole experience, I told Dr. Vallejo, “I didn’t realize people would still want to listen to what I had to say. As you know, I am a department of one.” Truth to tell, many urban scholars are using the medieval, or the more neutral term pre-modern, to understand our post-modern cities. Each time we speak of the modern, we are necessarily interrogating our own definition of it, and thus, we immediately distinguish it with the pre-modern. One of the most
important traces of the pre-modern in our “modern” cities is informality. A modern city defines what is formal through zoning laws and nuisance laws. And yet many obviously fall through the cracks. Informality truly is one of the enduring traces of the medieval in our so-called global cities.

Two weeks after I delivered that lecture, the whole of Manila was struck by non-stop monsoon rains leaving most of the city underwater. Heavy rains had been falling doggedly since May. Needless to say, most of those affected were the urban poor who have settled on river banks, estuaries, and floodways. Talk about operating with a different form of rationality. The veritable fortresses that are our gated communities have forced water to empty out into low-lying areas where the poor normally live. My research into new forms of medieval studies made me realize that the constant threat of annihilation suffered by the informal sector should inform medieval studies in the Philippines. Economists have stated many times that our economy is not yet modern but rather is just transitioning to modernity. We see that some parts of our cities are modern, but they are not downright so since building constructions revolve around religious structures (see also Iglesia ni Cristo communities). Residents in gated communities adhere to rules of homeowners’ associations rather than the Constitution. The same thing happened in the Middle Ages, which saw the expansion of empires. Back then people routinely lived in camps; our natural calamities would also force us to live in evacuation camps, where the rules are different.

Contested sovereignty marked medieval forms of citizenship. Some followed the king, some the bishop, some the guilds—“C’était bordel,” as the French would say. It is the same thing with us: there is no comprehensive land use law, and people seek exemptions from zoning laws. Let us not name names, but the culprits know who they are.

Netizens have blamed the massive flooding on climate change, informal settlers, polluted rivers. Very few clamor for urban planning that takes into consideration the future of humanity. Ultimately, how we plan our cities is at the very heart of the Humanities. This is what Paulo Alcazaren pointed out a year ago when we interviewed him. We feature this interview in a section entitled “Relationale: Conversations with Culture Changers.” Mr. Alcazaren believes that if we make plans based purely on profit and market demands, we would really miss out on what makes a city good. Borders will not keep out floods from your jurisdiction. The ideal of cost-effectiveness will not lure the monsoon rains away.

But apart from engaging those that affect our cultural life today, our journal wishes to honor the scholarly legacy of the late Doreen Gamboa.
Fernandez as a way to find direction for Filipino Arts and Humanities scholarship. In this issue, we publish a short article by C. Horatius Mosquera entitled “Codename: ‘Wet’ Pancit” to coincide with the publication of a book of essays that have been awarded the Doreen Gamboa Fernandez Food Writing Award. Fernandez was also one of the pioneering scholars of Philippine Theater. In this issue we have three articles on theater (“The Epic Theatre as ‘Dialectic (at-Play)’: Badiou, Brecht and the Dubious Mask of the Storyteller,” by Brian Desmond, “Shakespeare on the Ateneo Stage: A History of Post-colonial Shakespeare in the Ateneo de Manila University” by Missy M. Maramara, and “Acting Lessons from Rolando and Ella,” by Ricardo G. Abad). Few more are coming in the next issue which can mean that we may actually be turning into an arts journal!

Finally, one other opportunity for doing scholarly work in the arts and humanities is the connection with leadership. Can the arts and humanities (AH) be useful for educating people in leadership? One could understand why traditional corporate thinking would not connect AH to leadership education. AH people are depicted as being lost in a dream world, while leaders always need to be in touch with reality. AH people, for whom elegance of expression is always key, often bicker about which language to use, instead of just using any language. Aesthetic concerns often mean more costs, whereas leaders must keep the bottom line in mind all the time. Would you entrust your millions to someone who plays with color? Finally, AH people are critical of the “corporate world,” while corporate types abhor AH people when the latter talk about ethics all the time. Corporate types would say, “Ethics cannot be eaten, if you haven’t noticed. Most of the time, people cannot afford to be ethical.” And yet, Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile, a very busy man indeed, finds time to memorize poetry. “He reads in order to relax, though his advancing age necessitates his use of a magnifying glass. And he reads poetry, particularly that of Rudyard Kipling and Omar Khayyam. He reads the latter to help him understand the Bible.”

A cutting edge idea in Leadership theory is known as “poetic leadership pedagogy.” A stunning example of the relationship between the arts and education in leadership is the life of Winston Churchill. When he was in semi-retirement and before becoming the prime minister of Great Britain, Mr. Churchill passed his time painting. What did he learn from

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this hobby? The most important quality in a leader, namely, *audacity*. He describes his first attempt to paint, at a relatively late age:

At that moment the loud approaching sound of a motor-car was heard in the drive. From this chariot there stepped swiftly and lightly none other than the gifted wife of Sir John Lavery. “Painting! But what are you hesitating about? Let me have a brush—the big one.” Splash into the turpentine, wallop into the blue and white, frantic flourish on the palette—clean no longer—and then several large fierce strokes and slashes of blue on the absolutely cowering canvas. Anyone could see that it would not hit back .... The canvas grinned in helplessness before me. The spell was broken. The sickly inhibitions rolled away. I seized the largest brush and fell upon my victim with Berserk fury. I have never felt any awe of a canvas since. 2

This episode reminds me of the enchanting and discombobulating strokes of Jackson Pollock’s paintings at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. The witness of Churchill is one other good reason to set up a National Museum of Modern Art. Learning to paint is a journey of the conquest of personal inhibition. This is the quality Churchill needed the most if he would lead Britain victorious in the Second World War. In our time, the self-same quality is found in the first black American president who campaigned on the basis of an “Audacity of Hope.” As such, one wonders what would happen to institutions which choose “leaders” based on their capacity to implement the word from above rather than to conquer audaciously limitations at each level.

Many more reasons can be given for a prima facie case for the capacity of art to foster leadership qualities, not the least of which is that the power works of art have arises from the grave seriousness that artists invest in making them. One other important reason management experts give is that in our digital age the notion of reality has become contestable. Effective organizations need people who could discern reality even in a hyper-real world. What better people than Literature majors who are used to traversing these labyrinths (see in the current issue, “Ang Poetikong Filipino: Isang Penomenolohikong Paggalugad sa Pagpapakahulugan ng Pitong Pangunahing Kritiko,” by Louie Jon A. Sanchez). Not only that, a great artist like Kiri Dalena is one of the very few people who can guide us through the climatic devastation that regularly batters our nation. We feature her exhibition “Washed Out” to demonstrate the need for greater

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representation, if not non-representation, of weather (as Tony Perez said in one of his Facebook posts, “one cannot paint the rain.” [see his Facebook Timeline]). The point is simple: if the people you hire are used to seeing reality in the usual sense, one’s organization will end up with those people who will impose their “reality” on the situation. It is the veritable Procrustean bed all over again. For this reason, self-proclaimed realists are normally bad leaders.

Furthermore, “reality” in the corporate setting has changed so much that self-centered and reactive forms of leadership have become passé. Instead, innovative learning methods are being used to train people to anticipate possibilities and participate in them. What better way to teach people to participate than theater arts and choral music? Rodgers, Bradley and Ward clarify their notion of the poetic forms of leadership:

As mentioned previously, the real joy of being a performance artist is found not in the production itself but in the process of bringing the production to life. Through choral participation, for example, musicians learn to offer and accept feedback honestly. In rehearsals, students and directors together openly evaluate the sounds that each section makes, listen to recordings, and set goals for the next performance. Leadership grows out of honest feedback and deeply earned trust. Successful musical participation, theatrical performance, and artistic creation possess these qualities as well.3

Unlike performing groups, weak organizations think that criticism means one seeks the destruction of the institution and force those who criticize it to resign. AH scholarship must seize the opportunity that the need for new ways of seeing the world offers to leaders. The late Fr. Jose Cruz, S.J. insisted as early as the 1970’s that an education in the Humanities is not only knowing whether a piece of art is Rococo or not. For our time, it is about forwarding and privileging the cause of Humanity in urban planning, in political and corporate leadership, in addressing climate change.

Those in the arts and humanities can no longer see themselves as merely part of the “core curriculum.” They must see themselves as part of the solution. We are doing the most important task in development, that is, we are doing the work of criticizing our culture (see in this issue, “Habermas and the Universe of Cultures,” by Shierwin A. Cabunilas).

But alas, we also have to do the second part of the project, the veritable “song and dance number.” We need to construct a new culture as well. We understand cultural change as evolution in mental models and social enactments. We need to make incremental changes ourselves. We cannot teach cultural change if we in the AH are not willing to enact it. Firstly, we must cease viewing the arts and culture as a musical interlude to keep the audience awake. We must wake up and realize that we in the AH have the skill and knowledge that are most necessary for our time.

As societies become more unjust, as the climate becomes more extreme, our situation becomes even more “nebulous.” This is what Octavio Paz calls “tiempo nublado.” Recall the darkness of skies in those days of August when it rained incessantly for three days. Each day, disaster confronts us to reality. It is almost that medieval obsession with death. As we move out of our condominium units into evacuation camps, we realize that what we, just like vampires of old, need to remember the taste of human blood.

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August 10, 2012, Makati

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