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PEOPLE POWER AS IMMANENT COLLECTIVITY:
RE-IMAGINING THE MIRACLE OF THE 1986 EDSA REVOLUTION
AS DIVINE JUSTICE

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Abstract
The Philippine People Power Revolution (EDSA) was remarkable for its non-aggressive overthrow of the Marcos dictatorship. The spontaneity and creativity of the people to answer the summons to defend dissonant army troops contrasts with the administrative efficiency and armed might of the military army. The people acted as a collectivity, with its own collective power, opposing the military. This non-aggressive collective power was rooted in a distinctive Filipino culture and religiosity that hailed the EDSA Revolution as a miracle of divine justice.

Keywords
agency, bodies, revolutionary movements, violence

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INTRODUCTION
The deep silence of the February night was suddenly rent by an impassioned plea over the bandit airwaves:

I am deeply concerned about the situation of General Ramos and Minister Enrile. I am calling on our people to support our two good friends at the camp. Go to Camp Aguinaldo and show your solidarity with them in this crucial period ... I wish bloodshed will be avoided. Pray to Our Lady that we will be able to solve our problems peacefully. I am sorry to disturb you at this late hour, but it is precisely at a time like this that we most need your support for our two good friends. (Qtd. in Mercado and Tatad 105)
It was voice of the Archbishop of Manila, Jaime Sin, polite yet resolute, exhorting Filipinos to protect the Armed Forces Vice Chief of Staff and the Minister of Defense, who had barricaded themselves within the army headquarters and were now withdrawing their support for the regime of Ferdinand E. Marcos. Before long, hundreds of thousands of people belonging to a diversity of classes, ages, and professions began to converge at the nearby stretch of Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (EDSA), the huge highway that bisects Metropolitan Manila. Through four days, they would remain; singing, dancing, praying, chatting and sharing food with one another, setting up barricades, and blocking the path of tanks with their bodies. When this event finally succeeded in ousting Marcos from the Presidency he had held for twenty years, it was unlike any revolution that had occurred before. A spontaneous, fleeting, and bloodless exercise of popular collectivity--it was perceived by many to be a miracle.

My aim in this paper is to examine more closely the phenomenon of the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution in theoretical terms. I intend to look at how it was imagined in first-person accounts written during or right after the event by ordinary citizens, and explore what these assorted narratives can reveal to us about the relationship of collectivity, violence, agency, and contingency in an exceptional moment such as the EDSA Revolution. Using ideas borrowed from Walter Benjamin and Jacques Derrida, I will attempt to conceptualize People Power as an instance of divine justice. The performance of spontaneous, dynamic collectivity in disrupting legal and social relations without physical violence seemed to represent something new and incomprehensible given the prevailing schemas of understanding at the time such that it could only be perceived as a miracle.

To accomplish this, I will follow the framework of Allen Feldman in seeing agency not as a robust intentionality that controls thought and action but as the product of material practices situated in a particular time and place. For him, “no such agent exists; there is no ‘being’ behind the doing, acting, becoming; the ‘doer’ has simply been added to the deed by the imagination--the doing is everything” (Nietzsche qtd. in Feldman 3). In this way, power does not emanate from a transcendent source but is immanent--“the simultaneous site of origin and effect” (Feldman 3). Instead of dealing with the rationale that binds the doer to the action, I will therefore focus on the means or the performance. Accordingly, I will work with the concept that bodies are formed into political subjects through their performance in a spatio-temporal continuum (Feldman 8). Agency can similarly involve a “communicative activity” between bodies (Feldman 7) by which codes are transferred through somatic, affective, and symbolic interactions.
THE MARCOS DICTATORSHIP

Before his last term as President of the Republic of the Philippines could end, Ferdinand Marcos declared Martial Law in September 1972. He explained that it was necessary to address the growing unrest of students and militants who were protesting his governance. According to the mythic history that had been crafted about him, he was always destined to lead the Filipino nation. On the back of Martial Law, he would found a new society or Bagong Lipunan in order to transform the old political and social order. The media was shut down, and opponents and dissenters were arrested and tortured by the military. To further legitimize his hold on power, a new Constitution was ratified. Marcos then used the new absolute scope of his rule to pack political institutions with allies and cronies. This allowed them to accumulate wealth for themselves.

The assassination in 1983 of Senator Ninoy Aquino, Marcos’ leading critic and opponent, aroused the previously dormant middle classes and mainstream Catholic Church and worked to consolidate opposition towards his rule. An estimated two million Filipinos joined his funeral procession (Schock 73-4). Opposition grew more overt through regular mass demonstrations christened “the parliament of the streets” and a version of the general strike or welgang bayan that involved not only the striking of workers but the closing of stores, shutting down of public transportation, the barricading of roads (Schock 75). An extensive boycott was also organized of companies and banks owned by cronies. These collective protests were unsuccessful, however, due to the lack of unity among the different groups in the opposition (Parsa 264).

With the economy deteriorating and pressure from the United States government increasing, Marcos was forced to call for a snap presidential election in February 1986, but through bribery, intimidation, disenfranchisement of voters, and manipulation of results, ensured victory for himself. A series of symbolic events quickly followed one another: first, there was an unplanned walkout by several computer technicians who were tabulating the results. A team of multinational observers likewise declared the elections fraudulent. The influential, traditionally conservative Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines issued an unequivocal statement condemning the election. Furthermore, Cory Aquino, Ninoy Aquino’s widow who had run against Marcos, announced that she would lead a nationwide campaign of civil disobedience. However, it was a failed coup d’état by two of Marcos’ closest lieutenants that precipitated the spontaneous gathering of a multitude of Filipinos, which brought his regime to an end.
Jacques Derrida conceives of Walter Benjamin’s notion of *divine violence as justice*. According to Derrida, in referring to violence, Benjamin uses the German word *Gewalt*, which does not only mean physical violence but “legitimate power,” “justified authority,” and “public force” (Derrida 6). An awareness of the semantic richness of this term enables us to grasp Benjamin’s description of divine violence as being simultaneously bloodless and forceful. Instead of “exerting its power or a brutal force to obtain this or that result,” violence could therefore consist of “threatening or destroying an order of given right” (Derrida 34). In other words, violence need not be coercion towards an end but rupture as pure means. Benjamin explains that this form of violence, divine violence, not so much involves a passive non-cooperation or non-participation than an active withdrawal from the logic of hierarchy and domination. “It is true that the omission of an action, or service, where it amounts simply to a ‘severing of relations,’ can be an entirely nonviolent, pure means” (Benjamin 239). He adds, “such conduct, when active, may be called violent if it exercises a right in order to overthrow the legal system that has conferred it” (240). Divine violence acts as an expiatory force that annihilates laws, institutions, hierarchies, boundaries, social relations and modes of existence not “for its own sake” but “for the sake of the living” (250). For Derrida, this force is nothing other than the workings of justice, which he contrasts to law. Unlike law, which is rigid and repressive, “there is no justice except to the degree that some event is possible which, as event, exceeds calculation, rules, programs, anticipations, and so forth” (Derrida 27). Instead of being tied to the laws of the state or the rules of retribution, it is a cataclysmic moment that smoothens or sweeps away striations and boundaries that impose limits on the possibilities of existence without returning to the logic of hierarchy and domination.

Accordingly, the EDSA People Power Revolution was something new and extraordinary. It could be seen as the enactment of a spontaneous and transitory collectivity that was constituted according to the contingency of the situation. Instead of being organized by the logics of rationality and intentionality, it was unplanned, even accidental. Driven by the urgency of the occasion, the size of the multitude that comprised this collectivity could shrink or swell depending on the circumstances. As exemplified in this first account, the narrator has no training or conviction to become a hero, and yet her fears, while cogent, are subsumed within the inescapability of the moment.

That was scary. You realize that people become heroes unintentionally. Because when human barricades are formed and somebody clutches your arm, you cannot
just struggle out, you simply are locked-in in three, four, five layers of people, and at
that moment you’re scared. (qtd. in Santiago)

The demands of the moment shape the decision to participate in the event. Likewise,
the unemployed man who narrates the following account has no plans of actively engaging
in collective political action but his attitude is suddenly transformed by unexpected
changes to the situation and the passionate participation of others.

I went to the area ... just for curiosity and some excitement. But when a 6 x 6 truck
full of soldiers arrived with two jeep escorts, the people ran away shouting: “These
are Marcos loyalists!”

Then someone from the crowd yelled: “Don’t be afraid. I will lead you. Let us use
people power.” The people came back and joined him. I joined too even if earlier I
did not really care about what was happening. (qtd. in Mercado and Tatad 232)

Having visited the scene of conflict not out of nationalist fervor but perverse
enjoyment, he carries a carefree detachment to the event. However, the codes of
participation are transferred to his body through the gestures and actuations of the bodies
he encounters at that very instance. With this mode of collectivity and praxis, the intention
appears to be less significant than the performance. The dynamic character of this performed collectivity could be better understood
according to the opposition Hannah Arendt draws between power and strength. Diverging
from conventional notions of power, Arendt does not see power as a force of repression or
subjugation. Instead, she attributes this quality to the concept of strength. Whereas strength
is demonstrated by a single “entity” acting alone, power is exercised by bodies acting “in
concert” (44). While strength is maintained univocally through forms of hierarchy and
coercion, power is absolutely immanent and open, existing in the bonds and exchanges
among individuals. When Arendt asserts that “[p]ower is never the property of an
individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps
together”(44), she is in fact valuing a configuration of power that is transitory. Power
occurs when unique individuals convene as a collectivity in order for something to be
accomplished and disband immediately once that something has been accomplished. In
this way, the collectivity does not stay together long enough for it to solidify and fossilize and for power to mutate into domination. Such an understanding of power is reflected in the observation of an anonymous citizen:

Watching them, listening to them, feeling them, I suddenly realize that these millions have already transcended Cory, Enrile-Ramos, and Marcos. Cory, Enrile-Ramos, and Marcos have, in fact, become incidental to the situation. (qtd. in Mercado and Tatad 238)

The account highlights how the power that had congealed in the personalities of leaders or even vanguard parties has yielded to the power of anonymous bodies acting in concert. This opposition between a *transcendent constituted power* imposed from above and an *immanent constituent power* formed through the relations among active bodies could be equated to the opposition between regulatory law and divine justice.

**COLLECTIVE POWER**

Because the constitution of collectivity during the People Power Revolution was indeterminate and precarious, actions performed collectively were spontaneous and creative. Instead of being constrained by the conventional rules of combat, the participants could easily modify their methods according to the demands of the occasion. When tanks and armored personal carriers were sent to disperse the crowds, the civilians who were traveling in vehicles alongside them on the highway quickly overtook them and used their vehicles to form barricades (Santiago). In this example, the urgency of the circumstances instantly turns civilians into participants and vehicles into barricades. What was built to function as a means of transportation and movement is transformed into a weapon of blockage and struggle. The sturdiness originally meant for passenger safety and product durability reinforces the barricade that will obstruct the passage of the government troops.

One of the leaders of the rebel forces, General Ramos, recognized this contrast between the state’s rigid strategies of war and the rebels’ flexible tactics of engagement:

The other side had a lot of guns but, because the particular situation was a little different from what they had been expecting, they weren’t able to respond right away; they took a while adjusting to the new situation. *De kahon kasi kung mag-isip*
[It’s because they can’t think outside of the box]. Kami naman dito, como very fluid ‘yung situation namin [In our case, our situation was very fluid], we had to think fast, plan fast, and act fast. (qtd. in Santiago)

Despite the superior machinery and firepower of the government troops, who had been trained to follow orders strictly, the rebel forces possessed an advantage in their capacity to improvise. Within the relations of the law, according to Derrida, there is an overriding undecidability. Since things are prescribed and certain, individuals have no autonomy to decide for themselves. With the intervention of justice, however, codes and prescriptions are annihilated such that individuals are compelled to make a just, autonomous decision specific to the moment: “justice ... doesn’t wait. It is that which must not wait... a just decision is always required immediately, ‘right away’” (26). While the law is the norm, justice is a singularity, an exception (17).

Moreover, the multitude that participated in the EDSA Revolution was not motivated and unified by traditional ideologies, a condition that enabled the formation of a collective, which was open and inclusive. “[U]nlikely groups” joined the revolt (Parsa 263). They included housewives, street vendors, businessmen, children, and taxi drivers—civilians who typically did not act out their politics through street protests, and most of whom, once Marcos had been ousted, resumed their lives as ordinary citizens without ever engaging in any form of collective political action again. One account is of a businessman who unbuttons his long-sleeved shirt to reveal a yellow shirt underneath with the face of Ninoy Aquino, a scene that is likened to Clark Kent unbuttoning his shirt to reveal his Superman costume. The analogy captures the air of unreality that accompanies the shifting of social roles when a businessman moves out of the circumscribed work-time of the office and into the revolutionary time of historical alterity. Another account describes the scope of participation in terms of dichotomies that are suspended:

The crowd truly represented a cross-section of the people, the rich and poor, the devout and the frivolous, the man on the street and the big-time executives. All were there, probably fearful, resigned to prayer, excited, with only one thought in mind: to help the revolution succeed in each one’s small way. (qtd. in Mercado and Tatad 109)

The vanguard party or the guerrilla unit no longer necessarily determines the logic of revolution. Instead of relying on armed struggle, civilians can become revolutionaries by
carrying out small, seemingly insignificant acts such as contributing food and providing numbers. In this way, the revolution truly becomes the work of the multitude as grand narratives are abandoned for micro-political tactics.

The People Power Revolution was performative in the sense that the inclusive participation of a multitude of Filipinos from different sectors of Philippine society generated the impression that the Marcos government had lost the consent of the majority. The images of the crowds gathered at EDSA elide the fact that the revolt was merely limited to Metropolitan Manila. Similarly, the estimated population of the Philippines at the time was sixty million, and yet only two to three million Filipinos actively participated. For Arendt, the legitimacy of a state and its political institutions depends on the consent of its citizens (41), which is expressed by their obedience and cooperation to the laws and decrees of the state (Sharp qtd. in Schock 37). Instead of overpowering the state, which would require machinery and firepower, a revolution could succeed by targeting the sources of consent (37). In contemporary revolutions, which are covered by the local and international news media, the performance of a widespread withdrawal of consent through the spectacle of a multitude of citizens amassing in the city center can undermine the legitimacy of the state.

EDSA AS A FILIPINO RESPONSE

Unlike the period of Martial Law, in which a curfew had been imposed on the population and thousands were apprehended, tortured, and disappeared, the EDSA Revolution represented the failure of the Marcos regime to control the movement of bodies and isolate them from collective action. Individuals, who are formed into political subjects by the pre-coded narratives of social conventions and political institutions (Feldman 13), subvert the circumscribed space and time of their bodies by amassing on the streets. Amid the narrowing of public space due to the censorship of the media and the imprisonment of dissenters, EDSA is transformed from a highway into a new public space where resistance can be articulated outside the bounds of the state’s laws and institutions (Schock 15). Through the occupation of “a new sociotemporal continuum” (Feldman 225), a new law is founded on the performance of bodies.

Far from following the classic model of a revolution, the People Power Revolution more resembled a carnival or a fiesta:
It was revolution that seemed more like a barrio fiesta--people honoring its saint with Masses and song: colorful and prayerful scenes full of comings and goings of friends and strangers who easily became smiling acquaintances because of a common cause. And there was plenty of food. Cardinal Sin called it a laughing revolution. (qtd. in Mercado and Tatad 250)

Although the safety of the multitude assembled at EDSA was always under threat, the feeling of danger did not succeed in oppressing the atmosphere of the event. Parents brought their little children with them. Next to the waving Philippine flag, people would raise statues of the Virgin Mary. Instead of being emblazoned with dogmatic slogans, placards announced the names of the provinces from which groups of people had journeyed. Other placards read, “RAMOS-ENRILE, WE ARE PROUD OF YOU,” “GEN. RAMOS, MIN. ENRILE, AND COMPANY: YOU ARE HEAVEN SENT!” and “CORY IS MY PRESIDENT” with a large heart in place of the letter ‘O.’ When people would encounter photojournalists covering the event, they would smile at the camera and pose, flashing the L-sign that was a symbol of the anti-Marcos opposition. Foregrounding the exceptional character of the EDSA Revolution, the succeeding account portrays anonymous individuals as being either awed by the newness of the event or indifferent to its gravity, their responses incongruous with the danger of the situation.

I saw an old woman hugging a dumbfounded Marcos loyalist soldier who had defected. She was saying, “I love you, I love you.” The poor man did not know how to react. I saw a young man caressing a helicopter and saying: “So this is what a Sikorsky is like.” Another man was jubilantly holding up his right hand: “I’ll never wash this hand. It pushed back a tank.”

[...]

Right at the middle of EDSA, while taking chances that they would be safe from tanks and artillery fire, some young people were taking chances at cards. They were playing Crazy Eight and Cara y Cruz. (qtd. in Mercado and Tatad 252-3)

These random instances illustrate how bodies that are not trained for war or revolution can transform the conditions of the situation by performing actions and attitudes that are not suited to the conventional logic of revolution. Nonetheless, in spite of
the festival atmosphere, the invisible, lurking presence that death assumed could suddenly materialize as a concrete threat to life and freedom.

People talk of the “carnival revolution” when they remember the lighter moments of the four-day confrontation with the Marcos government: the Ati-Atihan dances, the impromptu talent shows and performances outside Crame, the popcorn and dumpling vendors, the traffic at the barricades. All these disappeared instantly when the danger was signaled with the cry: “Tanks! Tanks! The tanks are coming! Hurry up, line up, the tanks are coming!” (qtd. in Mercado and Tatad 251)

Because their bodies were not coded with ideologies, strategies, or expectations, the multitude could quickly adapt itself to the fluidity of the circumstances by switching in and out of the logic of the situation.

The intervention of divine justice, which ruptures regimented space and time and prescribed legal and social relations is experienced as a moment of revolutionary transformation, an event of historical alterity. The historicity that was suppressed by a linear, monolithic construction of history (Feldman 2), in this case the mythic history of Ferdinand Marcos as the leader of destiny, is unleashed “as a radical and critical force” (225) that transforms the conditions of existence. Privileging the intrusion of historical alterity into the present time, Derrida distinguishes the ‘to come’ of justice from a future that merely replicates the present: “Justice remains, is yet, to come, à venir, it has an, it is à-venir, the very dimension of events irreducibly to come. It will always have it, this à-venir, and always has” (27).

THE NON-AGGRESSIVE NATURE OF EDSA

The revolutionary tactics of People Power involves the performance and exchange of somatic codes of non-aggression and kinship in which the gestures and codes of civilians and non-combatants are transferred into the space of protest and struggle. At first glance, it may appear that the practice of non-aggression during the EDSA Revolution was intentional and concerted. At EDSA, nuns and priests would deliver inspirational talks, reminding people not to resort to violence (Santiago). The president of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines made the same entreaty over the radio:
I heard about the latest happenings and I understand that the situation is not so good. I would like to appeal to the people not to use violence to solve our problems. If possible, let us not give each side a chance or opportunity to use force... I just hope that no Filipino blood will be spilled. So I appeal, once again, let us not use violence. Let us use a peaceful and orderly solution. (qtd. in Mercado and Tatad 104-5)

As evident in this statement, however, the principle of non-aggression was not adopted by the crowds who congregated at EDSA as a calculated strategy of resistance. The participants of the event had no formal training in non-aggression (qtd. in 134). Instead, the performance of non-aggression was dictated by the demands of the occasion.

The revolt’s bloodless character was entirely unexpected. Because Filipinos had long suppressed their indignation at the Marcos government and the military and many people had brought guns with them as a contingency, the situation could have easily erupted into violence. The troubling unpredictability of the event is vividly expressed by an anonymous writer’s account of his ride home with his wife:

When we finally realize what is happening, we shout with joy inside the car. Triumphantly, I exclaim that Marcos is finished, we have won. But after the initial thrill, a dreaded thought chills me and I try to suppress it: civil war. Lolly trembles with fear, uncertainty. (qtd. in 103)

There is initial jubilation at the thought that the Marcos dictatorship would finally be toppled, but this is quickly supplanted by a sober realization of the brutal cost required to achieve such an outcome. Individuals did not know how to comprehend what was happening. As it was altogether new to them, not having happened before, they expected it to follow the trajectory of past revolutions. The first announcement over the radio by the oppositionist brother of Ninoy Aquino calling for volunteers echoed the uncertainty of the moment when he instructed them simply to meet at a nearby department store since he still was unsure about their next course of action.

Instead of being explicitly roused to revolt against the Marcos government, Filipinos were called to congregate at EDSA in order to protect the rebel soldiers: “The people were there to defend the camp. They were not aggressors. We cannot pray and be violent at the same time” (qtd. in Mercado and Tatad 257). The defense of the camp and the performance of prayer are contrasted with the exercise of violence as though to protect and to pray were
non-aggressive and bloodless activities that nonetheless entailed active engagement. This observation reflects the subsequent announcement of Ninoy Aquino’s brother calling for more people to gather at EDSA:

If they are attacked by Malacañang, we will support them ... We will give them moral support. We will surround the camps and protect them with our bodies. We will do this because Enrile and Ramos wish to follow the will of the people. Anyone who respects the will of the people deserves our help. At this moment, we are still conferring. I call on all our countrymen to join us and increase our number so that we can prevent a bloody confrontation. (qtd. in Mercado and Tatad 106)

The protection that the amassing of bodies will provide is taken to be an affirmation of “the will of the people,” from which the rebel forces are said to derive their legitimacy. Less a call to arms than a call for support, the plea for the multitude to participate in the event expresses as its purpose not the overthrow of the government but the avoidance of a violent outcome because “[l]arge groups are a deterrent to violence” (Santiago). It is as if the performance of non-aggression in which the mere presence of bodies acts as a weapon has a direct causal relationship to the situation of bloodlessness. Additionally, the admission of the speaker that the organizers “are still conferring” shows that the performance of non-aggression is a tactical decision made at the spur of the moment. Actions are constantly being improvised according to the circumstances.

In these different first-person accounts and public announcements, the call to non-aggressive collective action is based on an appeal not to transcendent ideals but on pragmatic grounds. Its potency comes not so much from a belief in the power of principled submission, which invokes the image of the suffering Christ on the cross that has much significance to Filipinos, than a pure, practical means that intervenes in a chain of violent circumstances.

People prayed and held rosaries, their non-aggressive actions the outcome of spontaneous decisions determined by the demands of the occasion. They would offer the government soldiers smiles, food and drink, and flowers. One series of photographs features a marine officer, who has been ordered to disperse the crowds with tanks, being gifted with a cutout paper heart, which reads, “Mahal Namin Kayo [We Love You].” After tucking it in his vest, he receives candy and flowers, to which he responds with a handshake and a smile. The grammar of non-aggression and kinship coded in the bodies
of the multitude is transferred to the bodies of the military. Moreover, nuns, housewives, female vendors, and businesswomen were asked to be in the frontline of the human barricades since the crowds believed that the soldiers would not harm women (Santiago). Through the performance of gender, the subject-position of docility to which women had been reduced by patriarchal society and with which the Marcos regime had subjugated the Filipino nation is transformed into a figure of non-aggressive resistance.

The performance of non-aggression during the People Power Revolution was based on the affirmation of kinship relations. Bodies exchanged codes of non-aggression by enacting bonds of kinship. For example, the commander of the troops sent to disperse the crowds at EDSA hesitated from ordering the dispersal when he learned from an appeal by his uncle over the radio that his family was part of the crowds (qtd. in Mercado and Tatad 138). Kinship relations in the Philippines typically encompass the family or linguistic community to which a Filipino belongs, but in the instance of People Power, it extended to the entire Filipino nation. Interactions among strangers were performed as bonds of kinship as the people assembled at EDSA would share food with each other and sing songs together. Government soldiers were accordingly treated like kin to prevent them from exercising violence such as in this account of an elderly government employee:

We talked to one of the soldiers, and he told us that they did not have food. We gave him coffee and bread and he told us that there were many other loyalist soldiers in that area. They had three tanks.

I told myself that maybe, I could convince them not to be oppressive to the Filipinos keeping vigil. I contacted the Mother’s Club, our organization, and asked the members to collect food from the neighbors and bring them to the soldiers. I called more people so that we could persuade the soldiers not to hurt anybody.

We told them that we were all Filipinos and that shouldn’t be fighting each other. We told them not to follow the command of their officers because they were loyal to only one man, Marcos. What they should be following instead is the command of the people who were keeping vigil in Crame. They told us they couldn’t do anything, because they were trained to follow orders. (qtd. in Mercado and Tatad 109)
Unlike the narrator, who is able to break out of her circumscribed social role in doing something small to help the revolt succeed, the soldier is constrained by his training as a soldier. The best he can do is to hesitate before pulling the trigger of his gun. The call to solidarity of the many as opposed to the command of the one is articulated as the urgency of kinship among Filipinos. In this way, a new law is founded whereby the multitude and the military no longer relate to each other according to the terms of war as combatants but according to the relations of kinship as countrymen. Likewise, in the following account, a debilitated elderly woman insists on being brought to EDSA despite her infirmity:

I heard about Mrs. Monzon, the owner of Arellano University. She is 81 years old and bedridden. She has to use a wheelchair to go anywhere.

She had herself brought to EDSA and there she met the tanks. With a crucifix in her hand, she said to the soldiers: “Stop. I am an old woman. You can kill me, but you shouldn’t kill your fellow Filipinos.” The soldier came down and embraced her: “I cannot kill you. You are just like my mother.” (qtd. in 127)

The performance of non-aggression on the terrain of struggle is accompanied by the transgression of circumscribed social roles. Instead of the elderly woman’s appeal to solidarity and compassion, it is the resemblance of the elderly woman to the mother of the soldier that generates bonds of kinship between the soldier and other Filipinos and keeps him from exercising violence on the crowds at EDSA. Such kinship relations serve as the affective force that binds Filipinos together, as evident in the bonds of community formed among strangers who have migrated to other countries in search of better opportunities the Philippine government cannot provide. Existing beyond the legal norms of the state, kinship relations become the condition of possibility for a spontaneous and dynamic constitution of collectivity that ruptures the limits of the social order.

THE RESPONSE OF THE MILITARY

The refusal of the government troops ordered to disperse the crowds and rebel forces at EDSA to obey their orders made the People Power Revolution bloodless in character. It was the gap between the transcendent center of rule from which the Marcos regime’s force of law issued and the concrete sites of instantiation in which the validity of
the law was preserved that allowed for the insubordination of soldiers to occur. Because the exceptional, unpredictable circumstances of the event exceeded the rigid circumscription of the law, the soldiers struggled to fit the contingent demands of the occasion into their prescribed frameworks of understanding. Unaccustomed to making their own decisions, they easily succumbed to the inertia of hesitation and indecision.

Anyone who had been there would know that this was a moment that chilled the soul. At this point, shooting could have started—if not from the armored carriers then from the air, hitting the crowd or armored carriers, depending on whose side the helicopters were. But the people stood their ground ... Non-verbal communication happening at that instant revealed the following in slow-motion: The people pressed their bodies against the armor. Their faces were pleading but they were clothed in nothing but raw courage. In that decisive and tense moment, the soldiers atop the armored carriers pointed their guns of every make at the crowd but their faces betrayed agony. And I knew then, as the crowd, too, must have discerned: the soldiers did not have the heart to pull the trigger on civilians armed only with their convictions. (qtd. in 207)

Despite the threat of violence and death, the courage and conviction of the civilian crowds instantly transform them into revolutionaries. The codes of non-aggression inscribed on their bodies are transferred to the bodies of the soldiers who refuse to fire their guns at them, such as in this brief observation: “this was the first time that they were confronted with prayers. They did not know how to react” (qtd. in 257). Through the performance of prayers, the exhibition of non-aggression and piety compels the soldier to respond to a situation for which his body has not been trained. He is unable to act in the ruthless, violent manner his circumscribed role as a soldier has conditioned him to act. The non-aggression of the multitude is met with the non-aggression of the military in a reciprocal exchange of codes of non-aggression and kinship that results in general situation of bloodlessness. In the succeeding account, the crowds are supposed to be violently dispersed with tear gas and truncheons but the soldiers hesitate, their bodies now inscribed with the codes of non-aggression and kinship of the participants of People Power:

We stood there until the soldiers were able to form a line again. The sergeant had a hard time convincing the soldiers to line up. They were reluctant. Nobody wanted to be in front to form a solid and they moved ever so slowly...
From under their helmets, I could see that they were smiling, they were hitting their shields instead of hitting the people. Even when I stopped running, they went past me. Nobody raised his stick to hit anybody, they were mocking it. (qtd. in 197)

The insubordination of the soldiers derives its legitimacy from the performance of collectivity by the multitude amassed at EDSA. The tension between their refusal to obey and the obligation to obey their orders drives the soldiers to subvert the law by feigning obedience. In this way, the attempt to preserve the legitimacy and authority of the state is interrupted by a new, immanent law being founded on the bodies of the multitude, a law that does not harden with the logic of domination and hierarchy due to the dynamic and transitory character of the collectivity constituted.

THE “MIRACLE” OF EDSA

Experienced as something entirely new and exceptional, the EDSA People Power Revolution was perceived as a miracle. When it first began to unfold, the participants of the revolt struggled to comprehend what was happening: “The word ‘anarchy’ comes to mind, but I prefer to be more positive and think ‘people power’ instead. Still, it arouses more hope than conviction” (qtd. in Mercado and Tatad 122). Uncertain of its outcome, they vacillated between different affective responses. On the one hand, the event was incomprehensible because the series of episodes that transpired and the eventual outcome that it produced appeared to be accidental. What became the People Power Revolution occurred only when Filipinos were spontaneously called to assemble at EDSA due to the failure of a coup d’état that had originally been planned. Correspondingly, its success as a bloodless overthrow of government was completely unexpected. This success was brought about by small, concrete incidents of seemingly good fortune, such as when the tear gas that was supposed to help disperse the crowds during a major assault was blown by the wind back in the direction of the government troops. Also, when attack helicopters flew over the camps, the crowds at EDSA were expecting them to fire their rockets, but they landed instead, their pilots defecting to the rebel forces.

On the other hand, the People Power Revolution did not conform to predominant schemas of revolutionary struggle. Instead of being rigidly organized and hierarchical, the collectivity constituted was spontaneous, transitory, and dynamic, inherently open to adaptation and transformation. As its configuration was not imposed by ideology
and strategy, its composition and means were shaped by the immediate demands of the moment. It did not rely on military technology for its power but on the performance of bodies coded with non-aggression and kinship.

Having been beset by years of despotic rule, in which dissent was brutally suppressed and public funds were remorselessly plundered, the multitude of Filipinos desired justice. The prevalent notion of justice, however, conformed to the conventional logics of heroism, in which a savior would liberate the nation, and retribution, in which the oppressors would be punished for their offenses.

We were hoping for justice. That whoever killed Ninoy and could do it to anybody else in the country could be brought to face the music. But I did not expect people power. I thought something would happen— that maybe individual acts would bring about certain things— but not the way it happened during the four days, of whole groups, millions of people coming. That was something completely new and unexpected. (qtd. in Santiago)

Divine justice instead intervened into reality as a rupture—as a revolutionary moment of historical alterity that involved the founding of a new law on the collective performance of bodies and the annihilation of regimented space and time and prescribed legal and social relations. Exceeding calculation, it could not be grasped as justice, only as something entirely other.

Justice is an experience of the impossible. A will, a desire, a demand for justice whose structure wouldn’t be an experience of aporia would have no chance to be what it is, namely, a call for justice. (Derrida 16)

The inherent tendency of the human mind to rationalize the interminable flux of ontological reality drives it to compensate for the absence of coherent meaning through a process of semantic substitution that fills this void with a presence. Because the symbolic excess generated by the divine justice of the People Power Revolution could not be imagined or comprehended through prescribed frameworks of understanding, it had to be named in language as something else, as “the sign and seal … of sacred dispatch” (Benjamin 252).
Gonzaga
People Power

It really felt like a miracle was happening. Soldiers not firing even when ordered to, my own children and wife out in EDSA and actually enjoying it, and the weather so nice and cool throughout the four days. (qtd. in Santiago)

Due to its singularity as an event, it could only be perceived as a miracle.

If seen as an instance of divine justice, revolution becomes a dynamic, incalculable event of historical alterity in which a pure means annihilates the ruling transcendent law while simultaneously founding a new immanent law.

*This moment always takes place and never takes place in a presence.* It is the moment in which the foundation of law remains suspended in the void or over the abyss, suspended by a pure performative act that would not have to answer to or before anyone. The supposed subject of this pure performative would no longer be before the law, or rather he would be before a law not yet determined, before the law as before a law not yet existing, a law yet to come, *encore devant et devant venir*. (36)

The revolutionary moment is the opening up of reality to infinite possibility.


