Communal Homes and Heterotopic Contagion in *Trese*

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> The space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space.
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> Foucault, "Of Other Spaces"

An Overview

Trese is a Filipino comic book series created by Budjette Tan and Kajo Baldisimo. The series has seen six compilations between 2008 and 2017 and has garnered the National Book Award for Best Graphic Literature in 2009, 2010, and 2012. Generically identified as supernatural detective fiction, the stories are a mix of 'case files' or episodic investigations and extended narrative arcs that take on a mythopoetic scale. Most, though not all, stories are set in Metro Manila, the Philippine capital and the titular detective's 'jurisdiction.'

In previous studies, I have gone into detail regarding Alexandra Trese's relation to 'her city.' Both as mythic hero and resident Manileña, Trese can be said to embody the cultural hybridity also ingrained in her city. In this paper, I demonstrate how *Trese* enables specific cultural engagement not only through the deployment of local lore, a mix of lower mythology and urban legend, but also by building narratives upward from this definite geographic base. I focus on the way that living spaces are constructed within that city and how each space reflects particular valuations of human and inhuman life. By employing Foucault's concept of heterotopia (1986), attended also by Foucauldian discourse of power as discussed by Gerard Lico in *Edifice Complex* (2003), I analyze three spaces that replace the traditional home, highlighting the notion of communal and multivalent spaces in Philippine culture.

Trese's world is premised on the simultaneous presence and cultural evolution of the supernatural alongside the human: the relation between the underworld and the surfaces of Manila are not divided by time--Manila by day or by night, or ancient versus modern times—but by present day cultural politics, which is spatial in its obsessions with territoriality and social hierarchies, emphasizing the association between the 'underworld' and the criminal. This linkage, however, cannot be taken for granted: the supernatural underworld is not always the source of crime. Alexandra Trese's duties are to investigate crimes that cross this flimsily constructed boundary between sacred and mundane without prejudice as to which side harbors the victim and which the perpetrator. In fact, the first crime in *Trese* involves a human murdering a local ghost, while the most recent installment involves a power syndicate, run by both humans and supernatural beings, victimizing both terrestrial and aquatic citizens of Manila. Even the distinction between criminal and victim are often ambiguous, and the delivery of justice is often more poetic than legal.

This is where the concept of simultaneity and, later, heterotopia come in. Foucault claims that we have moved from the nineteenth century obsession with history into an epoch of simultaneity, that is «the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed» (1986: 1). Yet he also reminds us that space has its own history, and in Western history the concept of space has been complicated, at the least, by the displacement of concepts of medieval space—that is, of emplacement—by the concept of extension, and finally by the concept of site and siting.

In applying how «space takes for us the form of relations among sites» (*ibid.*: 2) to the reading of *Trese,* we must also keep in mind what sort of relations, what sort of cultural history, underlies the preference of the discourse of space over time. Such a relation, given the postcolonial context, can be explored theoretically with reference to Kumkum Sangari's concept of cultural simultaneity, which describes the heterogeneity of narrative voices and cultural practices as an effect of the "historical sedimentation" of diverse ideological and epistemological systems—myths, religions, superstitions, stories—carried by ethnic groups, just as diverse, within that culture (1990: 217). Philippine culture, though predominantly Catholic, is culturally heterogeneous in practice and thus open to 'making sense' of itself and its world from more than one point of view at any given time.

This is why the presence of the supernatural in *Trese* is best described as an open secret: humans find ways to communicate with the supernatural, to run to them for help, or hunt them for personal gain, and vice versa. Even the most fantastic of crimes in *Trese* are made credible from within a Philippine viewpoint by virtue of their being grounded in present circumstance and the diverse 'logics' of lived experience.

Finally, the role of the narrative imagination can also be emphasized through Doreen Massey's distinction between space as «a simultaneity of stories-so-far» and place as «a collection of those stories» (2005: 130). Within this frame, spaces, and the stories such spaces produce, appear to co-exist unrelated, but their relation or collection distinguishes them as place or site.

In its collected form, each episode of *Trese* opens with a 'ghost map', a road map of a section of Metro Manila presented in the style of a photographic negative, which denotes the location of the crime. This could be a street, a district, or a city: the larger the crime, the more characters involved, the more general the location indicated. It is thus that *Trese* redraws Metro Manila as narrative spaces within which human and inhuman elements are marked and defined—there is no space that is entirely human or entirely supernatural—and where their stories are thus collected. *Trese* begins to map out, in six volumes at present, the expanse of a greater Metropolitan Manila that goes beyond observable boundaries and measurements, a city described by cohabitation and conflict. To problematize in *Trese* the idea of 'living spaces' is certainly more than a matter of checking «whether there will be enough space for men in the world—a problem that is certainly quite important—but also that of knowing what relations of propinquity, what type of storage, circulation, marking, and classification of human elements should be adopted in a given situation in order to achieve a given end» (Foucault 1986: 2).

This is the sort of arrangement that requires critical attention in the analysis of the cemetery in "Outpost on Kalayaan Street" (Tan – Baldisimo 2008: 23-44), the cross-sections of the student dormitory in "Wanted Bedspacer" (Id. 2011: 49-72), and "The Association Dues of Livewell Village" (Id. 2008: 67-88) with its electrified perimeters. This selection in no way exhausts the discussion of the use of space in the series, but they do lay out a spectrum of interpretation that other 'settings'—other 'other' spaces: some of which are liminal, such as brothels, bars, mall parking lots, and metro rail stations and some expansive such as the seas plied by human traffickers, militarized jungles, and of course, the prison system—could be located. I have limited the scope to places where human life is 'at home,' where it is not in transit or literally held captive, giving priority to close-reading rather than exhaustive exemplification, and to highlight how these particular episodes build up to the final narrative to be discussed here. That narrative, one which encompasses the sixth and most recent volume *High Tide at Midnight* (Id. 2014), revisits these earlier plots and places, if only to drown them in the mythic narrative of the great 'cleansing' flood.

A Corpse-Eye View

Foucault historicizes the relocation of the cemetery from the center to the outer borders of the city in terms of a growing bourgeois, atheistic fear of death, wherein death is perceived as contagion that propagates itself to the living (1986: 6). A similar relocation cannot be claimed directly in relation to Philippine cemeteries, due partly to the strong cultural maintenance of the cult of the dead[1], and partly to the urban sprawl that engulfs whatever could be considered 'suburban'—a term not often employed locally. If one takes Metro Manila as a unit, then large cemeteries or 'Memorial Parks' clearly lie within that city's boundaries. The city of Manila, for example, is flanked by the Manila North Cemetery, La Loma Catholic Cemetery, and Manila Chinese Cemetery to the north, while to the south are Manila South Cemetery and the Makati Cemetery. Even cemeteries once deemed far flung have been engulfed by urbanization and now repose at the 'heart' of the greater city; such is the situation of Libingan ng mga Bayani[2] which, alongside the Manila American Memorial Park and the Heritage Park, line the main arterial highway known as C5.

In *Trese*, the titular Kalayaan Street refers to the road that runs alongside Manila South Cemetery. The situation within is borrowed, however, from the North Cemetery. It is there that informal settlers are perennial: such residents serve as care-takers of mausoleums and even tour guides to visitors to what is, after all, a historical site.

The plot of "The Outpost on Kalayaan Street" starts out simply enough: a dead body is found in the cemetery and the police must investigate. They uncover a painted 'buhay na bato', referred to also as a summoning stone[3], and soon learn what the stone summons: the dead. Zombies invade the police outpost, and eventually it is revealed that Raul Lazaro, a man recently apprehended for vandalism, had summoned zombies to exact his revenge on the sergeant. The sergeant had, according to Raul, allowed his thirteen-year-old brother, Benjamin, to be killed in a hold-up, responding only once the murderers had fled. Trese destroys the stone, apprehends Lazaro, and advises against the reinstatement of the sergeant in order to avoid a backlash from the underworld, which could easily finish him off by doing «what Lazaro wasn't able to do» (Tan – Baldisimo 2008: 44).

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[1] The days of the dead, collectively called 'Undas', include a commercialized Halloween (Oct. 31), and traditional holidays: 'Todos los Santos' or All Saint's Day (Nov. 1), and 'Undas' or All Soul's Day (Nov. 2).

[2] The Cemetery for Military and National Heroes, where recently the remains of the dictator Marcos were interred despite public outrage.

[3] 'Living Stone'; This culturally-informed motif popularized in Philippine comics by Darna, whose powers are 'summoned' by swallowing such a stone. *Trese* pays tribute to this local superhero in an earlier narrative.

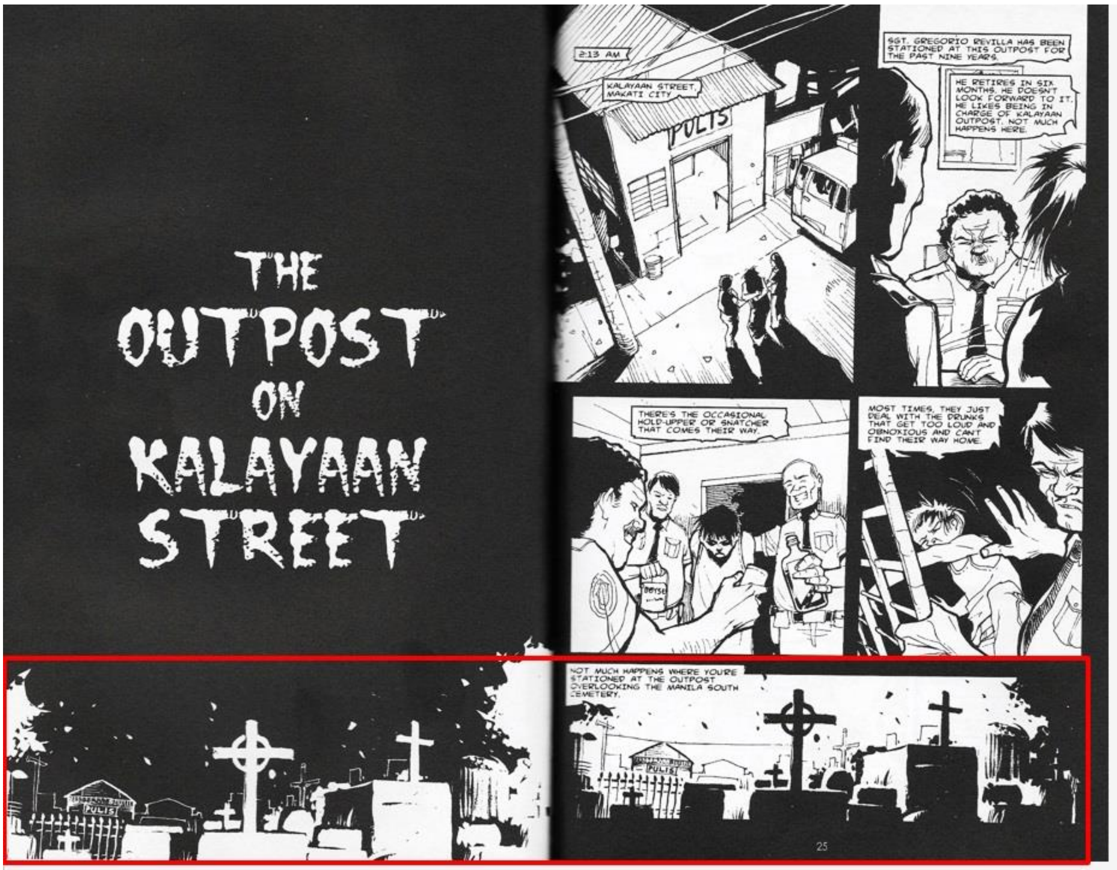
THE OUTPOST ON KALAYAAN STREET
2:13 AM
KALAYAAN STREET, MAKATI CITY
POLIS
SGT. GREGORIO REVILLA HAS BEEN STATIONED AT THIS OUTPOST FOR THE PAST NINE YEARS.
HE RETIRES IN SIX MONTHS. HE DOESN'T LOOK FORWARD TO IT. HE LIKES BEING IN CHARGE OF KALAYAAN OUTPOST. NOT MUCH HAPPENS HERE.
THERE'S THE OCCASIONAL HOLD-UPPER OR SNATCHER THAT COMES THEIR WAY.
MOST TIMES, THEY JUST DEAL WITH THE DRUNKS THAT GET TOO LOUD AND OBNOXIOUS AND CAN'T FIND THEIR WAY HOME.
NOT MUCH HAPPENS WHERE YOU'RE STATIONED AT THE OUTPOST OVERLOOKING THE MANILA SOUTH CEMETERY.
POLIS
25

Figure 1. The lowered point of view hints at a reversal of power. (Tan – Baldisimo 2008: 24-25; red marks added for emphasis)

The zombie outbreak—death become contagious—can easily be read as a comment on police irresponsibility and the consequences of justice delayed and denied. Though Raul Lazaro's plot is eventually foiled, the reversals of power and the panoptic gaze, played out as domination and invasion of space, is played out visually across the scenes in the cemetery.

In the opening spread, the title page mirrors the bottom 'establishing' panel. Captions give primacy to time: denoting the hour, the sergeant's years of service, the time before his retirement, the infrequency of arrests, and what does transpire “most times” (*ibid.*: 25). The mise-en-scène of the title page and its double suggests the policeman’s view: if the sightline is not at level with the sergeant’s gaze, it comes from above, looking down at the newly apprehended miscreant. This is momentarily but irrevocably reversed by the bottom panel. The ‘PULIS’ sign, which marks the outpost, ‘overlooks’ the cemetery, and yet the outpost does not hold a panoptic gaze. The field of vision is lowered sufficiently to the point that the crosses on the graves rise above the buildings across the road.

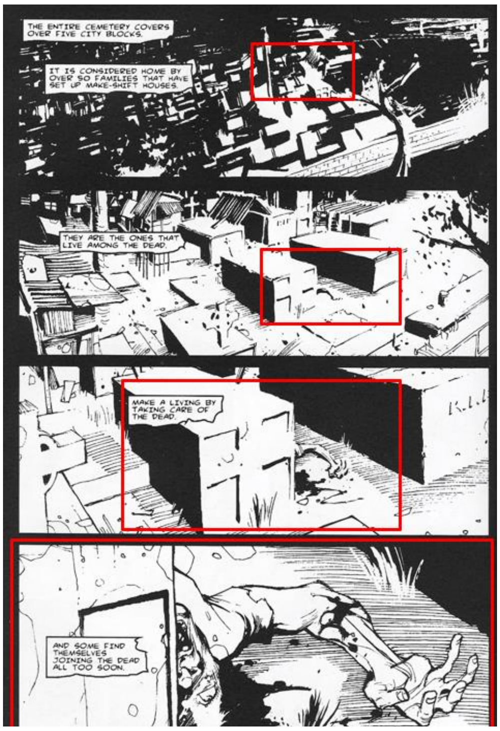
THE ENTIRE CEMETERY COVERS OVER FIVE CITY BLOCKS.
IT IS CONSIDERED HOME BY OVER 50 FAMILIES THAT HAVE SET UP MAKE-SHIFT HOUSES.
THEY ARE THE ONES THAT LIVE AMONG THE DEAD.
MAKE A LIVING BY TAKING CARE OF THE DEAD.
R.I.I
AND SOME FIND THEMSELVES JOINING THE DEAD ALL TOO SOON.

Figure 2. A corpse provides focalization for previous pages. (Tan - Baldisimo 2008: 26; red marks added for emphasis)

This worm’s eye view can be called a ‘corpse-eye view’ with little irony as the sequence of panels on the next page assume the view from the other side. The view is now over the wall, and the near abstract illustration suggests the inability to distinguish makeshift houses from graves. The sequence of panels then clarifies the scene that is being set.

The cinematic effect of 'zooming' in, accompanied by verbal directions of what to seek out in the panel, highlights the inability to distinguish house from grave; then, the difficulty of distinguishing the presence of a body among the graves although the shanties have become more conspicuous; and finally, to distinguish that there is a body, and it is a corpse—the living «joining the dead all too soon» (*ibid.*: 26). The rolled-up eyes provide that upward gaze that, poetically if not literally, provides a point of focalization for the first page.

As heterotopic space, the Philippine cemetery is not only described by synchrony as historical site and sacred space of the dead, but also by its simultaneous use as a communal home space. Foucault, after all, indicates that the notions that «everyone has a right to her or his own little box for her or his own little personal decay» alongside the growing fear of death as contagion, are «bourgeois appropriations» of the cemetery (1986: 6). Here we see a refraction of that fear: to live in poverty is to live close to death.

The cemetery not only remains sacred and immortal to a degree, it is other than Foucault's «other city, where each family possesses its dark resting place» (*ibid.*). The material reality of extreme poverty, homelessness, and informal settlements in Manila, alongside the cultural concepts of familial piety, complicate the situation. The cohabitation of the living and their dead describes a portion of society that cannot afford to remove itself from this contagion of death. The poor are not assured of their own little boxes, so they shelter amongst the boxes of others; their personal decay, as it were, begins even as they live, under the public gaze, and in public spaces.

What would otherwise be vague dialogue is contextualized by the heterotopic function of the cemetery within this particular Philippine reality: the detectives' first command is to «evacuate the place of all civilians», the response to which is that the «people don't want to leave! They think we're going to demolish their houses» (Tan – Baldisimo 2008: 29-31). Indeed, before the zombies cross the road, they increase their numbers by chewing on some of the living. The presence of a crowd of civilians within the cemetery, of possible victims seemingly waiting around to be attacked by zombies, is not a contrivance of plot inserted to provide maximum action. It is based on the reality that informal settlers do not see the police as their friends and the threat of demolition and displacement is more real than a call to evacuation due to a zombie attack.

Lazaro's vengeance for his own defenseless dead is a revenge fantasy that requires not only a reversal of power from the police to the poor imprisoned man, but an unearthing of the sacred so that it may redress the oversights of secular justice. The concept of resurrection, signaled by his surname, extends even to the stone that comes to life, that which in turn brings the dead back to life.

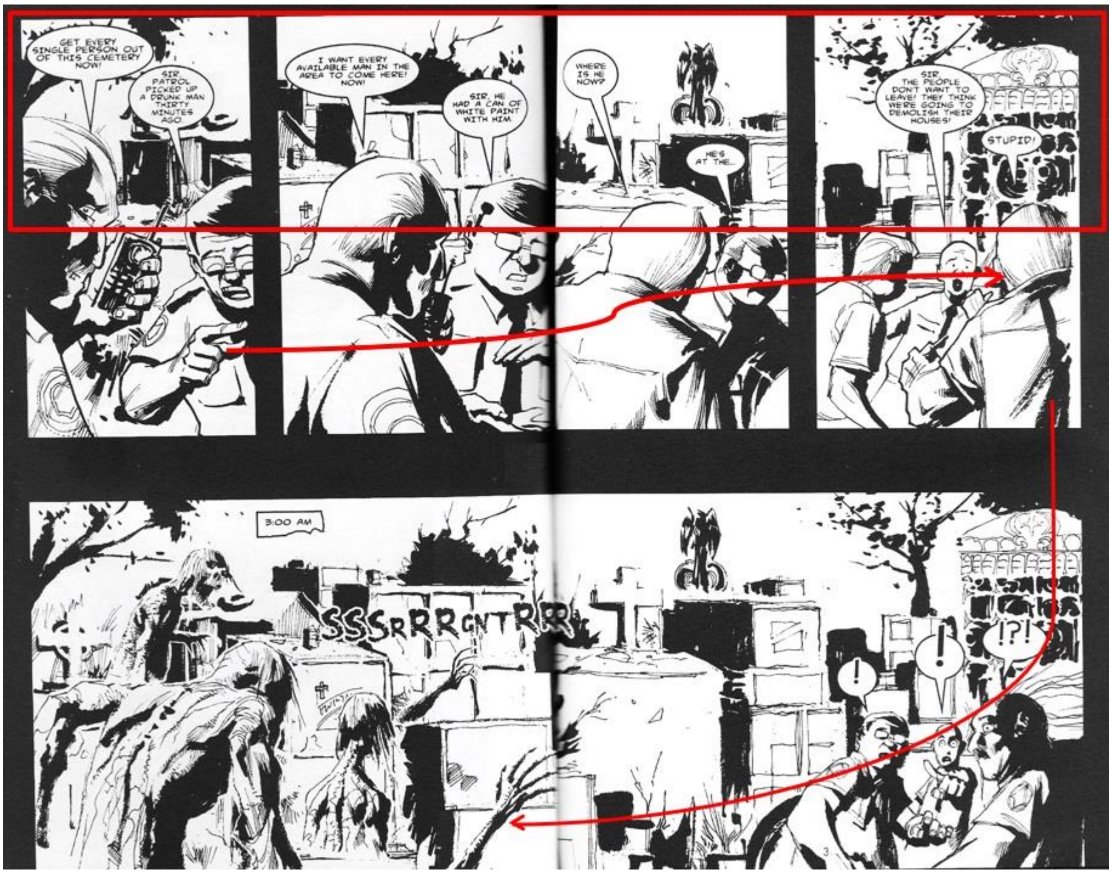
GET EVERY SINGLE PERSON OUT OF THIS CEMETERY NOW!
SIR, PATROL PICKED UP A DRUNK MAN THIRTY MINUTES AGO.
I WANT EVERY AVAILABLE MAN IN THE AREA TO COME HERE! NOW!
SIR, HE HAD A CAN OF WHITE PAINT WITH HIM.
WHERE IS HE NOW?
HE'S AT THE...
SIR, THE PEOPLE DON'T WANT TO LEAVE! THEY THINK WE'RE GOING TO DEMOLISH THEIR HOUSES!
STUPID!
3:00 AM
SSSRRRGNTRRR
!
!
!?!

Figure 3. Hierarchy of motifs is reversed as the dead come to life. (Tan – Baldisimo 2008: 30-31; red marks added for emphasis.)

Throughout these pages, the mausoleums always tower above the police. This may be objectively true for some of the larger monuments, but the visual hierarchy is primarily symbolic—an example of this can be seen when the crucifixes dominate the panel establishing its relation to the police station.

Given a typical hierarchization of motifs[4], in which the policemen are assumed to be the "central" objects of the diegesis—moving plot with their action and dialogue—and the graves as "secondary" by virtue of being a redundant background, the rising of the zombies shifts our interpretational attention entirely. What is dead or inanimate becomes central to the reader's attention, and the invasion of the dead can be seen as having begun as a visual domination of sacred over secular forces, even before the corpses resurface.

The presence of the sacred, dressed in Catholic symbolism, is further emphasized by the presence of the guardian angel silhouetted in the background. These angels and crucifixes exist as ironic reiteration of the failed guardianship of the outpost itself. The significance of this motif is reiterated when a stone cherub gazes out of the closing panels of the episode: in the same panel, Trese's voice transforms from dialogue—in balloons—to unboxed captions, in quotation marks, further obscuring the source of the verbal warning that «The underworld is not as forgiving as others» (*ibid*.: 44). The invocation of the sacred dead is thus represented as the final recourse for justice within a dysfunctional society where the living are unable to protect themselves. There is irony in the notion that the dead are more willing to evacuate their homes to help out in a cause not their own. Neither the police, safe in their outpost, nor the tenants, perennially at risk among the graves, heed the call when it is raised.

This dysfunctional relationship between authorities and citizenry is exposed by the zombies uprising, which becomes a seemingly indisputable crossing over of meaning: the delivery of one man's grievance. Indeed, after the zombies rise from their graves and threaten to cross the binding, the simplicity of their purpose is further emphasized when they cross the road—a panel in which the bird's eye view renders them indistinguishable from living human bodies (*ibid.*: 39)—and invade the outpost, where their summoner sits safely behind bars.

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[4] As employed by Groensteen in *System of Comics* when he discusses the concept of redundancy in the work of Michel Tardy (2007: 116).

Lazaro's story, after all, is also a tale of the criminalization of poverty: that Raul is more akin to and more sympathetic to the dead than to the living lends a sour note to the resolution of the case. The poor man's need to resort to myth, in the sacred, in the underworld—a need premised on the inability of human authorities to provide justice—is plagued by the insecurity of that institution even to the end of the story. It is both sad and prophetic, when Trese asks the relatively capable 'good cop' Captain Guerrero whether he thinks covering up the incident as a gang war would be believed. She asks: «How will you explain all the unearthed graves?» to which he replies that «we can always say they were high on drugs, that always works» (*ibid.*: 44).

Bedspace and Bathwater

Foucault describes crisis heterotopia as «privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis» (1986: 4). As examples, he identifies spaces where adolescent sexuality can be negotiated outside of the immediate view of censorious society. While the boarding houses described by Foucault's are situated in a different historical and cultural milieu, the boarding houses in *Trese* can still be read as crisis heterotopia for the youthful, transient 'middle-class' that are students.

Student dormitories are rented spaces, temporary homes, often shared with others. "Wanted: Bedspacer" is a colloquial vacancy sign for boarding houses wherein bed-space—the smallest unit of privacy in what is otherwise a communal home—is rented out; 'bedspacer' is the person taking up that space. What marks residents of such spaces are their status, seemingly reducible to the categories of 'young' and 'student', from which we can imagine what sort of crises they must undergo. "Wanted Bedspacer" is a story of heartbreak infecting 'dormers' via water consumption, that is, through the plumbing.

The opening panels of the episode establish some of the important narrative sites: the building's façade in one panel, with its rooftop water tank, where we spy the silhouette of a character whose significance will be revealed later (Tan – Baldisimo 2011: 51). The next spread establishes the mystery around which the case revolves, presenting a cross-section of the building, as is made clear by the addition of the building's façade in the inside border of the page (*ibid.*: 52-53). Here the formal functions of the frame[5] invites us, in Groensteen's words, «to stop and scrutinize» (2007: 54).

Panels on this page demonstrate a doubly separative function: formally separating panels while also denoting rented rooms. The interstitial spaces or gutters—clearly outlined and white—serve as figurative walls, ceilings, or floors. Only the bleeding out of furniture from each room keeps us from assuming that the walls are literal or properly scaled; it remains ambiguous whether the captions—a radio broadcast with canned laughter—indicate narrative time or simultaneous action throughout this section of the building.

Chronological narration does move across the spread, however, and the third page shows the action of the three friends that serve as central characters to the mystery's prologue. This is made clear by the rhythmic repetition of their 'room'—a frontal action to action panel sequence that shows the result of their activity in and around the bathroom—which is then followed by a series of tilted perspectives moving them out to the balcony. We notice the change in mood and helplessly watch as, after an extended gutter, a structural sense of needless displacement, the three boys jump off the page in an unmotivated act of suicide.

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[5] Following also Groensteen's discussion of the spatio-topical system, 2007: 39-57.

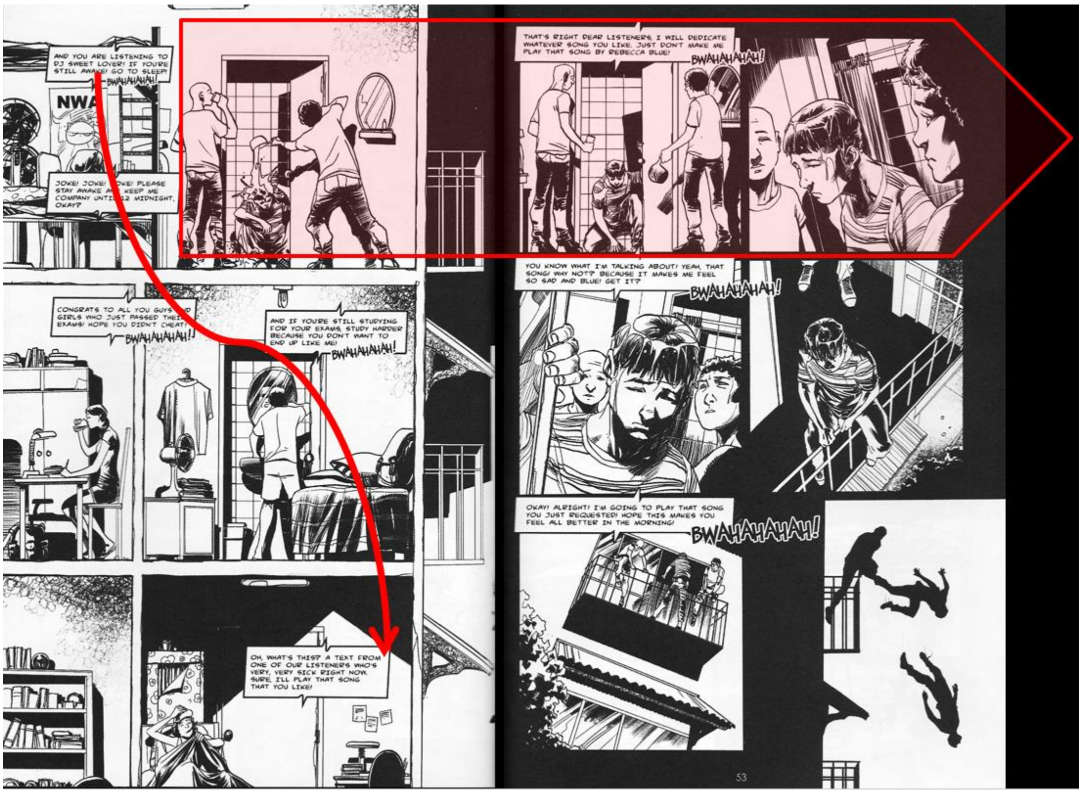
AND YOU ARE LISTENING TO DJ SWEET LOVER! IF YOU'RE STILL AWAKE! GO TO SLEEP!
BWAHAHAHAH!
NWA
JOKE! JOKE! OKE! PLEASE STAY AWAKE A KEEP ME COMPANY UNTI 12 MIDNIGHT, OKAY?
CONGRATS TO ALL YOU GUYS D GIRLS WHO JUST PASSED THEI EXAMS! HOPE YOU DIDN'T CHEAT!
BWAHAHAHAH!
AND IF YOU'RE STILL STUDYING FOR YOUR EXAMS, STUDY HARDER BECAUSE YOU DON'T WANT TO END UP LIKE ME!
BWAHAHAHAH!
OH, WHAT'S THIS? A TEXT FROM ONE OF OUR LISTENERS WHO'S VERY, VERY SICK RIGHT NOW. SURE, I'LL PLAY THAT SONG THAT YOU LIKE!
THAT'S RIGHT DEAR LISTENERS, I WILL DEDICATE WHATEVER SONG YOU LIKE. JUST DON'T MAKE ME PLAY THAT SONG BY REBECCA BLUE!
BWAHAHAHAH!
YOU KNOW WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT! YEAH, THAT SONG! WHY NOT? BECAUSE IT MAKES ME FEEL SO SAD AND BLUE! GET IT?
BWAHAHAHAH!
OKAY! ALRIGHT! I'M GOING TO PLAY THAT SONG YOU JUST REQUESTED! HOPE THIS MAKES YOU FEEL ALL BETTER IN THE MORNING!
BWAHAHAHAH!
53

Figure 4. The cross-section allows interstitial spaces to serve as panels borders and walls. (Tan – Baldisimo 2011: 52-53; red marks added for emphasis)

The story later reveals, in an elaborate disputation between Trese and a doctor, that all those in the boarding house who were exposed to tap water were thus infected by the 'bangungot', a creature of Philippine mythology whose typology Alexandra explains in great detail (Tan – Baldisimo 2011: 55-59). In the world of *Trese*, the bangungot is a fair, sorrowful, paralyzing creature of nightmare: it clings to a man who suffers, feeding off his misery until he dies, and she dissipates as an effect of the death of her host. In this specific plot, a heartbroken boy—the same one texting his ex-girlfriend while sitting atop the water tank—succumbs to the bangungot, who in turn melts into the water supply, effectively becoming the untraceable drug that infects all other residents with sorrow equivalent to their exposure of tap water. The students either go into a comatose state or commit suicide.

The tale ends with Trese conducting a séance to exorcise the bangungot in the hospital ward, the comatose students laid out in a circle around her, each laid out on their own individual hospital bed (*ibid*.: 70). This is comparable to Foucault's psychiatric ward (1986: 5) where youthful heartbreak and depression become ultimate signs of deviance and withdrawal. Here the detective switches to her role as 'babaylan' or priestess whose work is not individualized, but rather takes the form of communal ritual, restoring each victim to his or her rightful place in living society.

The plot here emphasizes how a personal state of crisis, a boy's being jilted, becomes a communal condition. The dormitory is an adolescent crisis heterotopia which serves also as a cultural microcosm of the alienation of modern urban life[6], where personal achievement—"We passed our exams!" (Tan – Baldisimo 2011: 51)—seems walled off from another's personal despair. But the walls only seem impermeable. These emotional and academic crises and victories exist simultaneously and interact as parts of the common lived experience of student life—a life lived away from home, where the social linkages between peers who live proximal lives have more impact on the student that his or her own familial relations or social standing.

The use of the term gutter is thus fitting. The use of space, diegetically and extra-diegetically, through mise-en-page, likewise emphasizes the permeability of the walls or panels, and how the plumbing or gutters in fact serve as conduits rather than separators. Just as Scott McCloud uses the term gutter to denote spaces between panels, his use of the term closure—the phenomenon of "observing the parts but perceiving the whole" (1993: 63)—is particularly appropriate to this narrative. What is concealed by the gutters in and of the comic is the shared plumbing which links back to the same water supply. More than perceptual closure between panels on the page, it is this perception of the building as a whole, rather than the observation of particular rooms and unrelated occupants, that allows the mystery to be resolved. This 'invisible' network is exposed as the relation between people who seemingly live unrelated lives, but who in fact draw life not only from the same water reservoir on the roof, but also from the same reserve of narratives of personal crisis that many young people think they must, paradoxically, bear and suffer alone.

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[6] As described by Georg Simmel in "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (2002: 11-19).

Water tanks are common installations around Metro Manila. They are necessitated by the scarcity or inefficiency of city-wide water supply and distribution in a city that is, paradoxically, prone to flooding. This installation is meant to supply clean water to spaces such as kitchens and bathrooms, spaces where the discourses of cleansing and contamination, sustenance and survival, reign supreme. One such space would be the shared bathroom. In the two episodes that feature the dormitory, the dipper or 'tabô' makes its appearance, hinting not only at the lack of a decent shower or water pressure, but also at the rationed consumption of clean water. There is a need to displace clean water from one part of the bathroom to another, or over specific body parts in isolation, so as not to waste one's limited share.

In *High Tide at Midnight*, where another set of students live in a different boarding house[7], the difference between flood water and bath water is emphasized. The former is the source of leptospirosis—infection, disease, death—the second is used for cleansing oneself of the risk of such infection. It is considered common sense to wash one's legs and feet after wading through a flood—that is, to get oneself wet again soon after getting out of the water—and this is what Janjan does as soon as she gets home. Similarly, it is common experience that produces the informal 'tawiran' or bridge that allows Janjan to cross the flooded streets.

As a home, the in-betweenness of the dormitory space is rendered at once as a middle class "privilege"; a home away from home, not as desirable as the family home, but better than homelessness; a space which affords the student a degree of privacy, but not much ownership or entitlement. Janjan does carry such insecurities with her, but the narrative only suggests its greater relevance later on: when the commentary in Janjan's head describes how «the rats come scampering out. Desperately swimming for their survival. We ignore the rats and never notice how they slip underwater and never resurface. Swallowed by the dark waters of the city» (Tan – Baldisimo 2014: 4) what slips out of sight are three boys who must have thought it safe to swim in the flood. When the captions tell us of Janjan's longing to graduate, which would allow her to «move out of this place» (*ibid*.: 5), it describes her longing for a proper home that is not ritually invaded by floodwaters. It does not mean that she would rather be rid of her roommates, who die while she is in the bathroom.

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[7] Students in "Wanted Bedspacer" reside along Katipunan avenue, in a boarding house that probably caters to Ateneo de Manila and University of the Philippines, in Quezon City; this much is made clear by the ghost map. Students in *High Tide at Midnight* are from The University of Santo Tomas, in Manila, the location of which is notoriously prone to floods.

Janjan, with her adolescent crises and fear of rats and leptospirosis, almost ends up sacrificed to the dark waters of Manila, a cruel plot twist enabled by the sort of privileged entitlement linked not to the real experiences of the "elsewhere" of crisis heterotopia, but the unreal expectations projected towards the "nonplace" of utopia.

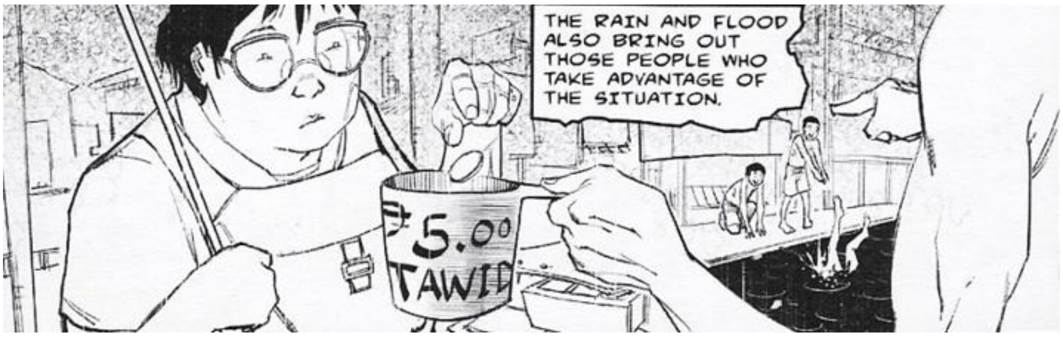
THE RAIN AND FLOOD ALSO BRING OUT THOSE PEOPLE WHO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE SITUATION.
₱5.00
TAWI

Figure 4. Janjan's misgivings reflect, to lesser degree, the same ideology that would condemn even her to becoming fish food. (Tan – Baldisimo 2014: 4)

Electrified Fences and Power Outages

The third living space is actually a collection of homes into the 'exclusive subdivision', a Philippine colloquialism referring to gated residential communities. Subdivisions are often upper-middle to upper-class areas. They are 'developed' private lands which are walled in and gated up. Again, these are not necessarily suburban, as they take up prime spaces both within and outside urban centers. The subdivision is the typical formal residential marker before the rise of luxury condominium living: it has a gate, a guard house, requires sticker-passes for access, and usually has a 'club house' where amenities such as pools, conference halls, playgrounds, and a chapel or church are available for community use.

The conflict in "The Association Dues of Livewell Village" revolves around such a hyper-exclusive culture, and the concepts of home security and human sacrifice that inform it. Of all the cases discussed so far, this story lends itself best to classical notions of mythic relations between gods and men, the sacred and the profane. It echoes the continued relevance of so-called sanctified or 'blessed' space that is the typical, or ideal, home as well as the concept of utopia, against which Foucault primarily defines heterotopia. It also carries with it the sort of delineation that defined an older colonial Manila, one that was divided between the inclusionary space, called «*Intramuros*—within the walls—and, conversely, […] the exclusionary space called *Extramuros*—outside the walls» (Reed in Lico 2003: 22).

The plot is revealed thus: the residents of Livewell Village have agreed to offer up periodic human sacrifices to Bagyon Kulimlim[8] to ensure that they literally 'live well', protected from power outages and ravages of typhoons. These residents eventually ascribe all good fortune to the patronage of the deity; meanwhile, the coroner and Trese must deal with the series of scorched corpses the bargain produces.

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[8] A member of the Storm or Bagyon clan, his name translates roughly to 'overcast'. There is also Bagyon Lektro, his father, whose name is derived from electricity, and Bagyon Yente, derived from 'kuryente', also meaning electricity.

The black and white, high-contrast style of *Trese* in general and the arrangement of graphic motifs in this particular case give emphasis to the dichotomy between light and darkness. In this episode it follows the logic of 'power' and 'power outage', but motifs, characters, and indeed themes established in these earlier volumes are in fact braided all throughout the series, despite even Kajo Baldisimo's evolving style.

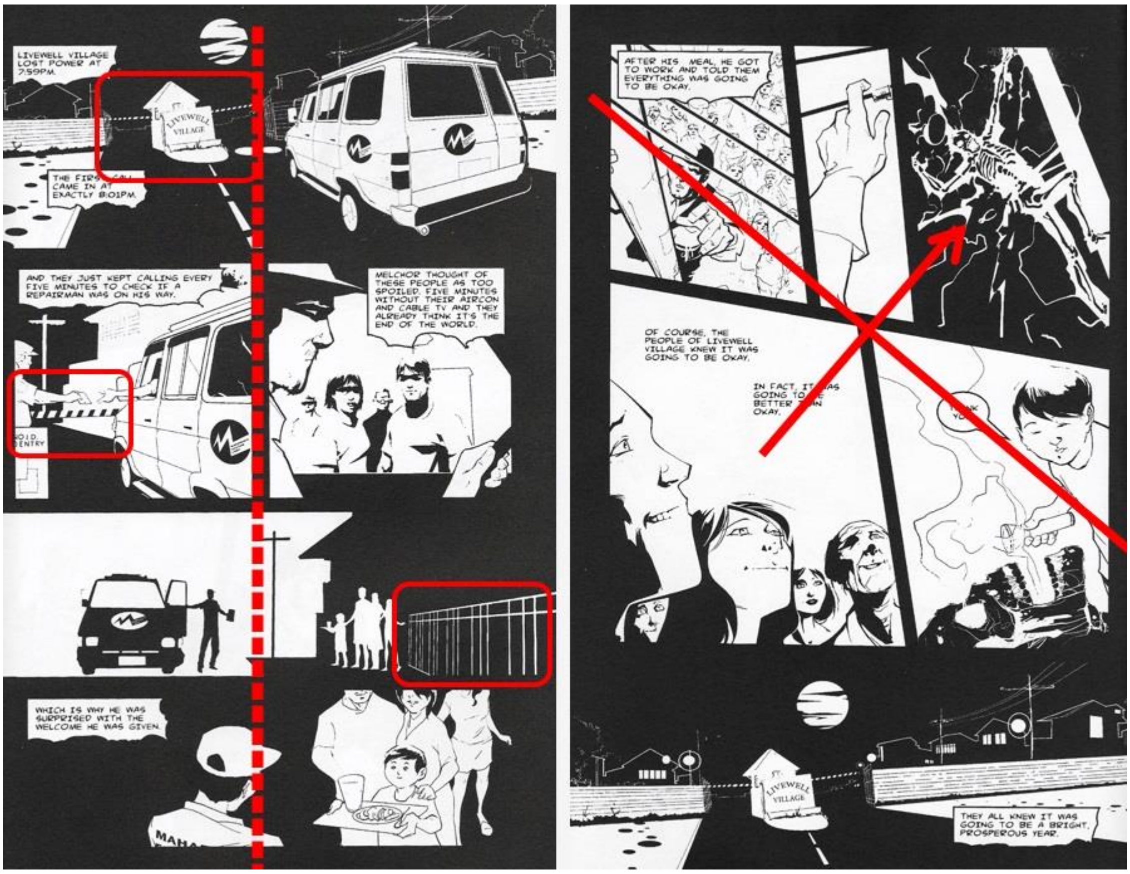
LIVEWELL VILLAGE LOST POWER AT 7:59PM.
LIVEWELL VILLAGE
THE FIRS CALL CAME IN AT EXACTLY 8:01PM.
AND THEY JUST KEPT CALLING EVERY FIVE MINUTES TO CHECK IF A REPAIRMAN WAS ON HIS WAY.
MELCHOR THOUGHT OF THESE PEOPLE AS TOO SPOILED. FIVE MINUTES WITHOUT THEIR AIRCON AND CABLE TV AND THEY ALREADY THINK IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD.
OID. ENTRY
WHICH IS WHY HE WAS SURPRISED WITH THE WELCOME HE WAS GIVEN.
MAHA
AFTER HIS MEAL, HE GOT TO WORK AND TOLD THEM EVERYTHING WAS GOING TO BE OKAY.
OF COURSE, THE PEOPLE OF LIVEWELL VILLAGE KNEW IT WAS GOING TO BE OKAY.
IN FACT, IT AS GOING TO E BETTER AN OKAY.
LIVEWELL VILLAGE
THEY ALL KNEW IT WAS GOING TO BE A BRIGHT, PROSPEROUS YEAR.

Figure 5. Bars and sightlines reiterate the theme of division and sacred offering. (Tan – Baldisimo 2008: 69 -70; red marks added for emphasis)

The blocking, or indeed gridding, complements this thematic opposition in at least two ways: first, it reflects notions of the home as bright, harmonious, and secure, while the outside world is dark, overcast, and hostile. Second, it emphasizes moments of division between people: those who offer and those who are offered, the living and the would-be dead. In the fourth panel of the story's first page, we see the repairman on one side of the panel, black on white, and the family on the other, white on black against the backdrop of their homes (Tan – Baldisimo 2008: 69).

In the same panel there are two important motifs—the electric pole as crucifix, black on white, and the sidewalk fence, white on black. Such motifs appear across the episodes of *Trese* discussed in this paper: the use of vertical bars in the form of fences and of prison bars, pointing to concepts of segregation both as a matter of security and of isolation, depending on what it keeps in or out, but always—like the walls and gutters—a supposed keeping apart.

In this episode, the fences denote the sanctified space that requires securing. But electric poles and electric lines also divide or strike across panels to reinforce divisions and hierarchies across society. Livewell village presents a utopic vision of the good family life, but it is also heterotopic space where the village reimagines itself as a cultic temple within which ritual sacrifice can be offered to a patronizing god. We realize that Livewell village is particularly inhospitable, precisely because it has no respect for its guests, disposing of one every year. This does not always occur publicly: the coroner describes two previous electrocutions, one from a blow-dryer and another involving a short-circuited water heater, that happen during private moments when victims are going about their private ablutions, again, in the bathroom. It is the outsider who is sacrificed for the greater good; this is, primarily, what makes the residents' relations with the typhoon lord criminal, and thus brings the whole affair into Trese's jurisdiction.

Like in "Wanted Bedspacer" there is also a sense of verticality here, but not a structural verticality that allows the social 'cascade' in the former. Rather this is the mythic vertically that links the heavens with the earth via the lightning bolt. There are at least two references to celestial intervention: lighting striking the tree and lightning striking the electrical post upon which the repairman is mounted, after the same post is set up as a crucifix by previous panels. These vertical relations can thus be related to sacred ritual, particularly ritual sacrifice, that mediate between the upward gaze of the residents of Livewell Village—«We are so blessed, we must say thanks» (*ibid*.: 73)—

and the downward gaze of Typhoon Lord Bagyon Kulimlim. This is reiterated by Kulimlim's own rhetoric:

> On the fourth night, I heard the people of Livewell. I heard their wishes, their prayers. […] They pleaded to have their airconditioned rooms back, their 24-hour cable TV, and their ice cold softdrinks. Then I saw one man climb a tree. I took it as an offering. (*Ibid*.: 81)

On the printed page, the lightning bolt is not clearly directional: it moves downward to 'hit' an object, but moves upward to 'take' a life, which has been offered up as the human cost of utopia. It is worth noting that it is the residents' idea to sacrifice an outsider once a year, as Bagyon Kulimlim notes that he is not «a picky god» (*ibid*.: 82*)*.

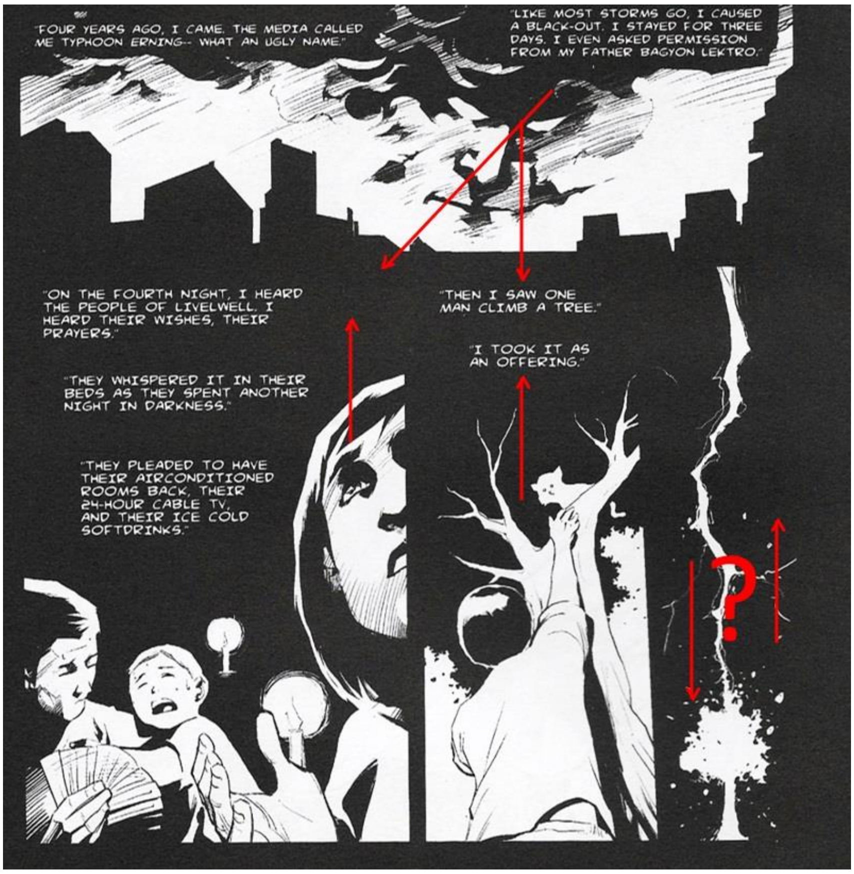
"FOUR YEARS AGO, I CAME. THE MEDIA CALLED ME TYPHOON ERNING-- WHAT AN UGLY NAME."
"LIKE MOST STORMS GO, I CAUSED A BLACK-OUT. I STAYED FOR THREE DAYS. I EVEN ASKED PERMISSION FROM MY FATHER BAGYON LEKTRO."
"ON THE FOURTH NIGHT, I HEARD THE PEOPLE OF LIVELWELL. I HEARD THEIR WISHES, THEIR PRAYERS."
"THEY WHISPERED IT IN THEIR BEDS AS THEY SPENT ANOTHER NIGHT IN DARKNESS."
"THEY PLEADED TO HAVE THEIR AIRCONDITIONED ROOMS BACK, THEIR 24-HOUR CABLE TV, AND THEIR ICE COLD SOFTDRINKS."
"THEN I SAW ONE MAN CLIMB A TREE."
"I TOOK IT AS AN OFFERING."
?

Figure 7. Gaze and Directionality (Tan - Baldisimo 2008: 81; red marks for emphasis)

Alexandra Trese exposes Bagyon Kulimlim as false god, a truant son-of-a-CEO that has struck an under-the-table arrangement with Livewell Village. The typhoon lords—the underworld syndicate behind typhoons—have as their front a corporation known as the Maharlika Electric Company. This is a clear reference to Meralco, the monumental façade of which is identified quietly on page 76. Indeed, the referents of most underground powers in *Trese* are corporations and crime syndicates—comprising both black market and the legitimate fronts or large private enterprises. On the comic page, this iconic façade also translates into a series of vertical bars. This is but a glimpse of a larger social issue: the privatization of public utility services.

Power, manifesting as the electricity that enables the ideal use of the home space, functions as an allegory of Power, now as ideological construct. Here lies exposed how the control of public utilities, the modes of production, of capital, masquerades as the sacred relations between celestial authority and earthly mortals. The story exemplifies the dangerous understanding that the provision of basic needs 'naturally' involves private companies making exclusive deals or contracts with private homeowners or individuals. The interest in profit is disguised. The notion that people have the "right to light"—that is, to be provided basic public services—is revoked when public utilities are made to serve the needs of a privileged few. The bargain with Bagyon Kulimlim—illicit human sacrifice—serves first of all the desire of the provider rather than the select consumers, who would not require such a loophole if they were sufficiently provided for in the first place. Even then, the chasm between the rich or the insecure upper-middle class—who lament the loss of their air-conditioning—and the working and impoverished classes—whose lives are lived close to the grave—defines to whom such additional privileges are offered and who, in the final computation, is made to pay the price. When Trese exclaims that people are dying, Kulimlim responds with familiar rhetoric: «People dying? You make it sound like an epidemic. Only one person dies every year» (*ibid.*: 80-81).

The concept of the primacy of family in its bourgeois formulation, foundation even to oligarchic nepotism, is exposed as a brand of communal selfishness: it is through such narrow views of social success that people justify their disregard of the lives of others.

The utopic space of Livewell Village, which offers itself as «present society itself in a perfected form» (Foucault 1986: 3) is thus exposed in *Trese* as a dangerous fantasy of the easy life. It is a distortion of the concept of community, inasmuch as it is premised on exclusion rather than inclusion. Utopia is at once desirable and dangerous to society at large because it elides its own exclusive nature, thus serving to conceal the power structures on which it is borne. As a living space, it designates itself as the space that must at all costs be maintained, and its human elements as those whose lives are valuable a priori and who thus deserves to live well, while simultaneously offering up as equivalent value the lives of those it deems dispensable.

City as Synthesis

The city, Metro Manila, embraces all these home spaces. *High Tide at Midnight* brings together such meaningful structures—narratological, semiotic, referential—to a climactic and indeed epic scale, exploding the confines of private spaces to deal with the city as home. The story is grounded in the rhetoric of mythmaking during the Martial Law era as it is eloquently broken down by Gerard Lico, in his landmark work *Edifice Complex* (2003).

High Tide at Midnight features the literal flooding of Manila, the figurative outpouring of the supernatural criminal underground onto human reality, and the ideological concept of social cleansing. It also features Trese's most formidable nemesis to date: the Madame, ambassador of Manila, a thinly veiled reference to the late dictator's wife, Imelda Romualdez Marcos.

Here is one version of the conflict: during the yearly ordeal that is the monsoon season, aquatic monsters invade a flooded Manila, indiscriminately murdering and consuming hapless citizens. These monsters are 'Taga-dagat'—from the sea—who are supplied with a dangerous drug called "shift" which allows them to metamorphize into more powerful creatures. In its culmination, they "shift up" into a monster, Datu Rakuda, who rises from the sea that was once Manila (Tan – Baldisimo 2014: 116).

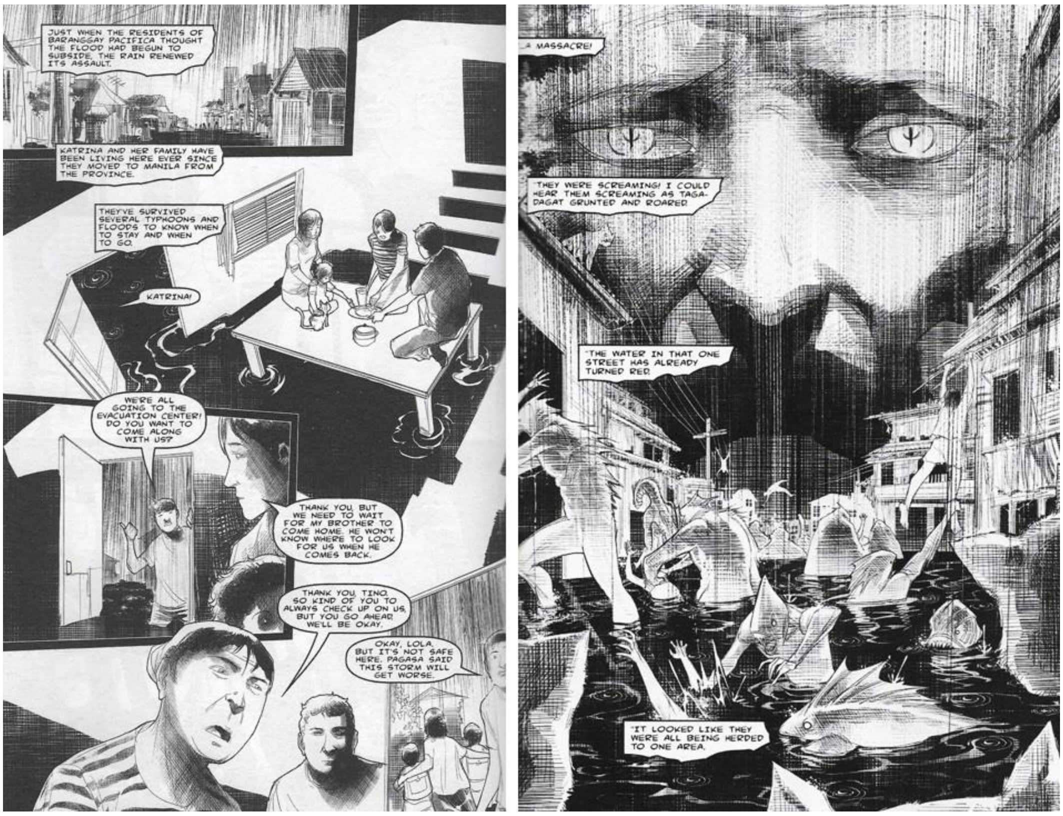
JUST WHEN THE RESIDENTS OF BARANGGAY PACIFICA THOUGHT THE FLOOD HAD BEGUN TO SUBSIDE, THE RAIN RENEWED ITS ASSAULT.
KATRINA AND HER FAMILY HAVE BEEN LIVING HERE EVER SINCE THEY MOVED TO MANILA FROM THE PROVINCE.
THEY'VE SURVIVED SEVERAL TYPHOONS AND FLOODS TO KNOW WHEN TO STAY AND WHEN TO GO.
KATRINA!
WE'RE ALL GOING TO THE EVACUATION CENTER! DO YOU WANT TO COME ALONG WITH US?
THANK YOU, BUT WE NEED TO WAIT FOR MY BROTHER TO COME HOME. HE WON'T KNOW WHERE TO LOOK FOR US WHEN HE COMES BACK.
THANK YOU, TINO. SO KIND OF YOU TO ALWAYS CHECK UP ON US. BUT YOU GO AHEAD. WE'LL BE OKAY.
OKAY, LOLA. BUT IT'S NOT SAFE HERE. PAGASA SAID THIS STORM WILL GET WORSE.
...A MASSACRE!
"THEY WERE SCREAMING! I COULD HEAR THEM SCREAMING AS TAGA-DAGAT GRUNTED AND ROARED.
"THE WATER IN THAT ONE STREET HAS ALREADY TURNED RED.
"IT LOOKED LIKE THEY WERE ALL BEING HERDED TO ONE AREA.

Figure 6. Inside and outside of homes, as conflict escalates.

The flooding, which invade the dormitories and the private homes, reflect the violent incursions into daily 'private' life. Reprising "Wanted Bedspacer" the constructed nature of the walls set up to delineate home spaces are exposed as flimsy, as permeable, forcing a redefinition of the use of spaces in as they force people to sit atop tables or to climb up rooftops and to flee from their own homes.

Again, here is a graveyard without boundaries, taking over the realm of the living. Furthermore, it is a watery grave, even more fluid and indiscriminate. The underworld overflows onto Manila, and we are met with a city whose streets are literally inundated in the blood of the innocent.

Despite this infestation, this fear of infection, however, a boat of immunity makes its way into the story, ushering in a plot twist and a political allusion. Not only does the Madame ride past such destruction with impunity and a show of her own bleeding heart, in the climax of the story Bagyon Yente reveals how exactly this storyline resembles that of bargain struck by Livewell Village: the Madame, as ambassador of Manila, has offered as ritual sacrifice to Bagyon Yente all of the criminal taga-dagat, after they have pillaged the living world of Manila (*ibid*.: 126, 129).

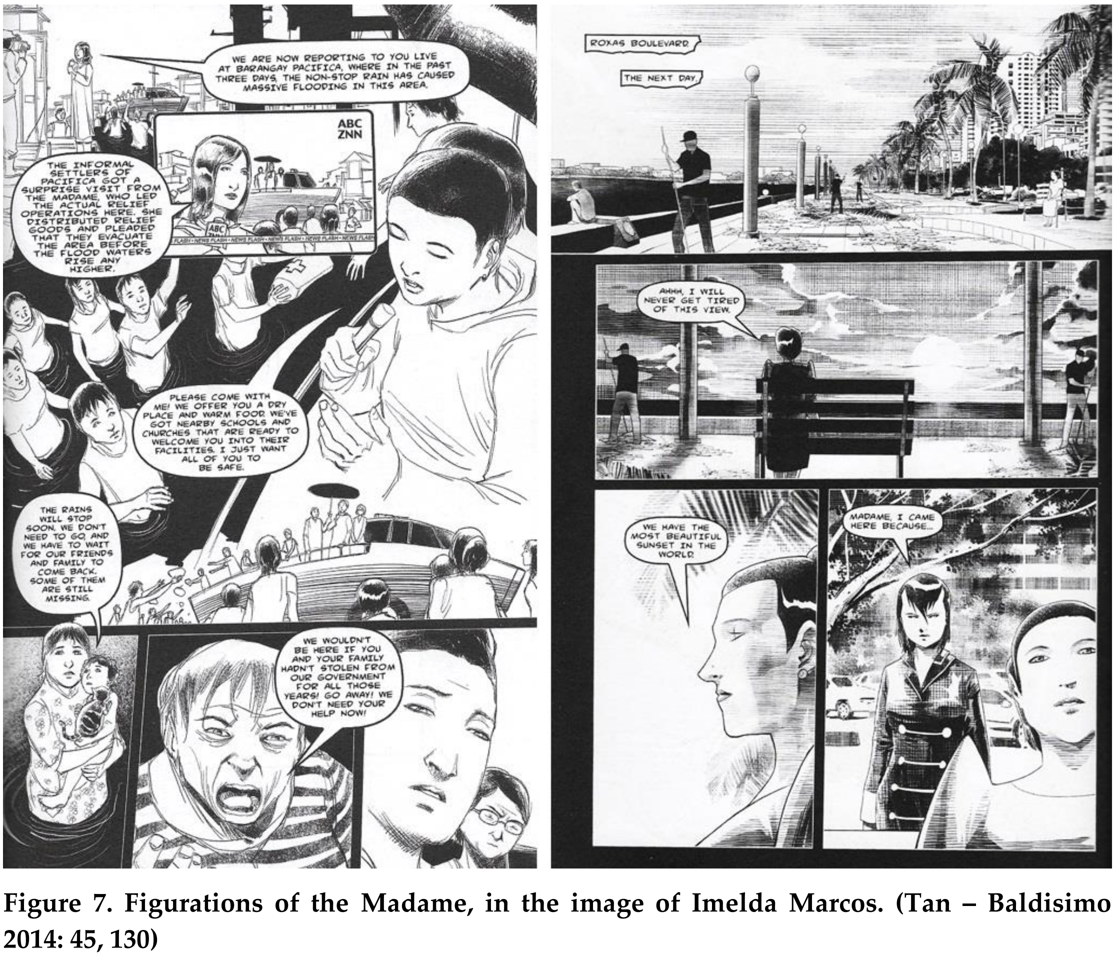
WE ARE NOW REPORTING TO YOU LIVE AT BARANGAY PACIFICA, WHERE IN THE PAST THREE DAYS, THE NON-STOP RAIN HAS CAUSED MASSIVE FLOODING IN THIS AREA.
ABC ZNN
THE INFORMAL SETTLERS OF PACIFICA GOT A SURPRISE VISIT FROM THE MADAME, WHO LED THE ACTUAL RELIEF OPERATIONS HERE. SHE DISTRIBUTED RELIEF GOODS AND PLEADED THAT THEY EVACUATE THE AREA BEFORE THE FLOOD WATERS RISE ANY HIGHER.
NEWS FLASH • NEWS FLASH • NEWS FLASH • NEWS FLASH • NEWS FLASH
PLEASE COME WITH ME! WE OFFER YOU A DRY PLACE AND WARM FOOD. WE'VE GOT NEARBY SCHOOLS AND CHURCHES THAT ARE READY TO WELCOME YOU INTO THEIR FACILITIES. I JUST WANT ALL OF YOU TO BE SAFE.
THE RAINS WILL STOP SOON. WE DON'T NEED TO GO, AND WE HAVE TO WAIT FOR OUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY TO COME BACK. SOME OF THEM ARE STILL MISSING.
WE WOULDN'T BE HERE IF YOU AND YOUR FAMILY HADN'T STOLEN FROM OUR GOVERNMENT FOR ALL THOSE YEARS! GO AWAY! WE DON'T NEED YOUR HELP NOW!
ROXAS BOULEVARD.
THE NEXT DAY.
AHHH, I WILL NEVER GET TIRED OF THIS VIEW.
WE HAVE THE MOST BEAUTIFUL SUNSET IN THE WORLD.
MADAME, I CAME HERE BECAUSE...

Figure 7. Figurations of the Madame, in the image of Imelda Marcos. (Tan – Baldisimo 2014: 45, 130)

This turns out to be a crucial step towards a utopic vision: on one hand, it is a social cleansing of Manila, the taga-dagat and their drugs;

on the other, it is a securing of the Bagyon clan's promise to spare Manila any more typhoons that year. In her final appearance, the Madame watches the sun set on Manila Bay. It is all too painfully ironic.

The sea reclaiming Manila is its own mythic commentary on Imelda's project of reclamation: to be specific, this refers to her expanding the city of Manila—or the "City of Man"—onto Manila bay, producing the CCP complex (Lico 2003: 85). It was a project as grand in both scale and folly—incurring incredible debt for the nation, involving "slave-driving mechanics" and so many construction workers buried alive in cement (*ibid*.: 123–6)—but stand to this day as the monuments to the infrastructural achievements of that Regime. Imelda reclaimed land not only from nature, however, but also from people. Projects such as the Tondo Foreshore and Dagat-dagatan urban development projects (*ibid*.: 65) were meant to cleanse and beautify such sections of Manila—slums and 'depressed' areas—that did not contribute to the vision of the "New Society"; and this trope, too, finds its way to the closing scenes of *Trese*. After the blood and death has been swept away, the Madame can admire the sunset from Manila Bay and exclaim: "Clean Air! Don't you just love that!" (Tan – Baldisimo 2014: 131).

One may ask where the heroes of the comic series are, and how they address this conflict. When *Trese* is episodic, it is most clearly supernatural detective fiction involving lower mythology, but every few volumes it explodes into the realm of the epic, exposing its relations to the superhero genre. In this volume, Trese and the team of heroes assembled around her fight to save citizens at the ground level: throughout the comic they engage in battle played out under a merciless curtain of rain—a reprise of repressive vertical bars which resemble and sometimes alternate with motion lines—and the backdrop of night. They are, for now, relatively helpless in this grand scheme, even as though they do defeat the monstrous Datu Rakuda.

The visual style of *High Tide at Midnight* could be described as visually tiring, especially in comparison to the clean chiaroscuro of previous volumes. This visuality of both storm and stress—in the text, perhaps in the reader—renders the reading at once poignant and unsavory, as such fatigue is the price of that constant battle required of such heroes within and beyond the comic: how could so many heroes team up to fight so great a threat and still secure no real victory? Like the common citizen, Trese's team earns only enough respite to have a round of drinks with like-minded individuals at the end of a long day of struggle. The crime narrative—which *Trese*, after all, remains—can never have a truly happy ending. Always we must ask, when a vision of utopia is proposed, what Alexandra asks the Madame: «At the cost of how many lives?»

It is Alexandra who enunciates the problem of this grand-scale ritual sacrifice. It is power-hungry, fascist, populist rhetoric that assumes as fitting payment for social security and "clean living" the sacrifice, not of the self, but of others.

The narratological function of spaces go beyond the establishment of setting: in *Trese* all living spaces are portrayed as public spaces where private lives unfold, intertwined with the life of the community. They describe a kind of home life that is particularly contagious, spreading laterally or cascading vertically, across the units of private lives, through meaningful social structures—such as, plumbing, electrical lines, or graves—thereby allowing the fantastic and the criminal to contaminate and reconfigure the delineations that human society imposes upon itself as ordering structure.

When, finally, these spaces are seen in panorama—in the embrace of the construct of the city—we must wonder what utopic illusions enable us to imagine human experience as individual and thus separate from the suffering of others, our homes as closed systems and thus safe and secure, and our lives as intrinsically valuable and thus owed to us by the powers that be. Even such literature as this provides us no such comfort, no clear escape, allowing us instead to see the struggle of narratives against each other—of even the smallest stories of heartbreak and familial fears against grand myths of nature, nation, and power. We are not meant to 'feel at home' in them or with them, if being at home is to submit to the delusion that a space is only another space, or a life only another life, and nothing more.

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