

OPINION & FEATURES

Why it matters to be counted

LET'S imagine you being in a function or event with a dozen people. They're about to serve dinner and by the headcount, you just realized that you're not included. The problem—you did not confirm or register your information to be counted in. The food and service that has been allotted for a certain number of people has to be now shared to you, making it less in either quantity or quality.

That scenario goes the same for the 2010 Census. In 2010, every household in the country will receive a questionnaire. Every person or household will need to respond to the questionnaire to ensure an accurate and fair count of all populations at all geographic levels in the United States. Also, the information each person will provide is combined with responses provided by other households across the country, to provide a summarized statistical data that will be used by various local, state and federal agencies.

Maybe one would think that this simple data is not that important, but in reality, Census data affect how federal and state funding is allocated to one's community in terms of neighborhood improvements, public health, education, transportation and more.

Moreover, it is your voice -- your representative in state and local government to make sure that your community gets its fair share of federal and state funding.

So a few minutes of one's time is not so bad, after all. Take the time to fill out that form and be counted. (AJPress)

EDITORIAL



Kiyoshi Kurosawa: A source of wisdom, guidance and inspiration

“EVERYONE is spiritual, they are waking up to a dimension of their soul or their being, they bump into love, compassion, real peace, real joy and that is where they live their lives from, authentic! You have in your life what you are grateful for, you see potential, you see possibilities, you become a source of wisdom, inspiration, guidance” - Michael Bernard Beckwith

“In a decaying society, art, if it is truthful, must also reflect decay. And unless it wants to break faith with its social function, art must show the world as changeable. And help to change it.” - Ernst Fischer.



Kiyoshi Kurosawa, Director of Tokyo Sonata.

Photo by Bennie Salindong in Los Angeles.

RHIZOMES
Prosy Dela Cruz J.D.

Tokyo Sonata, opening in select theaters in Los Angeles this weekend, gripped me like no other and when I got home, I hugged my husband and my family members and thanked them for their presence. This was the movie's jolting effect on me. And my friend and I who watched it hugged afterwards.

To the readers of *Asian Journal*, I invite you to watch this movie and openly embrace the effects of this film in you, an artist, a genius piece of work that portrays accurately what is happening in Japan a year and a half ago, according to the director, Kiyoshi Kurosawa.

Until this interview, I did not fully grasp the genius of Kiyoshi Kurosawa, nor his evolution as a director, nor his sage, his wise insights as a director who observes life, who captures human conditions in film.

I admit I am not much of a horror film fan, perhaps because life is already a horror film in some regards to me, particularly when young, naïve and unable to navigate the challenges of what life has to offer in my early twenties. But, now, twice and half in age as the youth folks, sometimes the oldest amongst a cast of performing artists in *The Vagina Monologues*, I accept that I am an old soul, an old person now. In that regard, I watch films not so much to be entertained, but to fully understand the metaphors, the profound messages communicated by the director about human conditions.

When I saw *Tokyo Sonata*, the latest film of Kiyoshi Kurosawa, the film left me with an uneasiness that I could not understand. The film is about an ordinary Japanese family of four whose lives unravel after the father loses his job, a consequence of lies, deception and ultimate deterioration of family bonds, fragile at best, as they are barely connecting, and only held by evening meals at the table with no communication nor any expressions of love.

The barrenness of interaction illustrates an emotional desert where no one thrives. Not the mother, Megumi who prepares meals for the family, joyless, but manages to relate with her son, Takashi. Not the father, Ryuhei, who lost his job yet creates an illusion by going to the park, to the library, and to the soup line for lunch. Not the eldest son, Takashi, who finds an escape by enlisting in the Middle East, as a soldier for US Army. For in leaving his family, he just might find himself and his purpose. Not the young son, Kenji who furtively uses his lunch monies for piano lessons. And the film's insistent ending on hope, an optimism perhaps which synchronizes with President Barack Obama's insistence that our American economy will rebound, just as this Japanese family and its father rebounds in hope.

We asked the director, Kiyoshi Kurosawa if he realized the profound, lingering effect of his film, affecting the heart, a contemporary feel of a classic, and if he had an idea of how the audience would be interpreting this film. He humbly responded that he had no idea of how the audience will interpret or react. He designed the scenes with simplicity, with an intention to convey, but he had no idea what the film will evoke from the audience. Precisely because he had no predetermined outcome, then the audience is free to take from the film, interpret it and have a better sense of where it should be.

This message struck me like no other, that as an artist, he is allowing the medium to communicate itself, for itself, by itself, with the audience to determine what it would be for them, a true democratic space! In a sense, he is allowing his art to be what it needs to be, and in the respectful hands of the viewer, or the reader, a tool for social change or not, a tool for redemption even.

We inquired about the theme of *Tokyo Sonata*, of fragmentation to healing. Kiyoshi by the way is responding in Japanese with a translator and there were four in the panel: *Asian Journal*, Agency France Press, Honolulu Advertiser, a freelancer, and Bennie Salindong, a photographer. He shared that he made several films with either the father or the son as protagonists. In taking an ordinary family, four protagonists have their stories, and he can include his own observations about the human conditions.

► PAGE A14

Holy Week's quantum of silence

WE must take the Hollywood out of Holy Week. The Filipino “*Semana Santa*” [Holy Week] has become the total opposite of what it ought to be—a time of “silence, solitude and simplicity”—because if that's what you're looking for, you must go as far away from the beaches, tourist attractions, and the crowds, including (without meaning to be irreverent) those in chapels and cathedrals. We must restore both sanity and sanctity to this season of faith, but to do so we must reflect on why *Pinoy* Catholicism itself is increasingly distant from our daily lives.

First is the matter of ritual and language. In what language do you pray the *Our Father / Ama Namin*? In what language do you feel its meaning most deeply? Perhaps it is unique to my generation which was taught predominantly in English, but I find that English is most efficient only because it is mainly intellectual—and that is a problem. Prayer is more than just about thinking. It is about reaching into the depths of one's soul and reconnecting with some ineffable presence out there. Personally I feel that English ties me down to praying with the mind when one should be praying with his entire being. To use classroom analogies, one “recites” in English but speaks in Filipino, and prayers ought not to be merely recited but uttered from the heart. English intellectualizes worship when the point of the whole exercise is to humble the mind and transcend its limits.

Second are the metaphors of the Catholic faith. Frankly, I wonder what Filipino Catholics visualize when they recite *Lamb of God*. The lamb as a metaphor may have been heartfelt and meaningful to pastoral communities who ate and lived among sheep. But Filipinos see lambs only in zoos and on their dinner plates as lamb chops. Of course worshipful verses are meant to be figurative, never literal, but metaphors work only if they bear some link to the reality that we live. We have to evolve our own imagery for worship.

I'm sure someone will argue that Catholicism has thrived in the Philippines for over three centuries despite bizarre scenarios, starting from that of brown-skinned natives worshipping white-skinned “*santos*” [saints], as if to be holy, one had to be alien. Yet now we must come to terms with new political attitudes and new theologies. The Mass used to be celebrated in Latin, no matter that no one but the priest understood what on earth he was saying. It used to be that hymns were likewise in Latin, composed by “dead white men” to be sung by choirmasters. It used to be that the priest turned his back to the faithful for most of the Mass—after all, he was there to talk to God, so what's the point of facing God's people? Today the Mass is celebrated in the language of the common folk. They sing their own songs. And the priest actually talks to us the whole time.

But while these sacred rites have been re-structured, the words have remained largely unchanged except for modernizing the archaic English expressions (“who art in heaven”).

Third, I do not know how well the old forms of worship resonate with the younger generation. If the goal is to relieve the agony at Calvary, does

PASSION FOR REASON

Raul Pangalangan

it help to add newer Stations of the Cross? Or maybe it's better for the kids first to watch Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*? Even more deeply, inherited dogma worked on the psychology of guilt and the logic of debt. In other words, the proposition was essentially: We the beneficiaries of the sacrifice at Calvary must take our turn to stand our post.

Do you imagine that the same psychology will work with the current generation of high school and college students? I propose that for the modern Filipino, dogma must instead emphasize the element of love and self-meaning, to focus not on Christ's dying but his choosing to die rather than live—not the divine but merely the existential Jesus.

To do that, we must teach them the historical context and cultural milieu of biblical narratives, for them to see how the characters rise above their human flaws and frailties. The goal is not to induce feelings of guilt (“*mahiya ka*”) or pity (“*maawa ka*”) but to foster the will to live a life of meaning (“*mabuhay ka*”), or in Thoreau's words, “to live life deliberately.”

And finally, on an eminently practical note, we must find ways to make the churches more comfortable despite the summer heat. Going into a crowded church in April is the best way to remind oneself about the proverbial “fires of hell” and feel Blake's “eternity in an hour.”

The new architectural designs for churches mercifully have been friendlier for tropical climates. The pioneer of all is the open-air Church of the Holy Sacrifice at the University of the Philippines, which was built on the path-breaking design of a young Leandro Locsin, who would become a National Artist. Also, whoever thought up those outdoor Stations of the Cross in shaded gardens really deserves a few papal indulgences.

You might ask: Christ was crucified on the cross and we can't even stand one hour without air-conditioned comfort? Well, the Christian calendar is universal, and that is why Easter is a spring holiday for the northern hemisphere when their weather is at its most glorious, while for us at the equator, it coincides with the onset of the summer when the heat is most oppressive. If the Pope lived in Manila, he would schedule Easter in November and celebrate Christmas in February.

I imagine that those capable of the purest forms of meditation can actually pray without words. Surely there was The Word before words were invented by mortals like us, and the aim of this season is for us simply to be still and to know that God is here. (*Inquirer.net*)

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