

Bodies of Work: Sexual Circulations in Philippine Cinema

Patrick D. Flores

The Board shall delete scenes and disapprove film prints which are immoral, indecent, contrary to law and good customs, those which are damaging to the prestige of the Republic of the Philippines and its people or its duly constituted authority, or those which have a dangerous tendency to encourage the commission of a crime, violence or of a wrong . . .

Implementing Rules and Regulations, Movie and
Television Review and Classification Board (MTRCB),
Presidential Decree No. 1986

The most recent skirmish between the MTRCB and certain sectors denouncing the slew of soft-pornographic films circulating during the second half of 1999 takes us to the heart of the problem of sex as a “regulatory ideal,” a norm that renders material the limits and differences embedded within such contentious categories as morality, decency, customs, the “prestige” of the State, and, indeed, the commission of error in custom. This mode of enforcement reiterates itself over time and through bodies at work in the constitution of the politic underwriting the said categories. And because of such sufferance, sex can only serve as a means to generate power to produce the image and likeness of its naturalized condition as well as the strange articulations of repression. The ways in which in the most recent “word war” involving the Chief Censor and a moral crusader, who used to preside over the same office, would exchange heated words pertaining to the “homosexuality” of the latter and the “prostitution” of the former have, in fact, sexualized the debate, and so channeling all energies to the problematic of sexual regulation in society.¹

TRAGIC SEX

In Celso Ad. Castillo's *Burlesk Queen* (1977), a star stripper's last dance on stage, inside a cavernous but decrepit vaudeville palace, constitutes her fall from grace: a performance of suicide through auto-abortion and a death born in blood and bleeding.

The tragic narrative through which a woman's body is ravaged by the industry of patriarchy and sex takes a different spin in Joey Gosiengfiao's *Bomba Star* (1978) in which an aspiring actress transforms into a bold star, and in the course of stardom gets entangled in the corruption of show business. This motif of swift success and bitter failure attending a bold star's life had been presaged by Ishmael Bernal's *Pagdating sa Dulo* (1971) in which the heroine at one point contemplates the morality of professing sexual vocation in the movies against the background of Imelda Marcos's cultural abode, the Cultural Center of the Philippines.

The sadness suffusing the suicide of a woman gestures toward the crux of what could be the most controversial film of the fin-de-millennium Philippine local industry, *Sutla* (1999). It recounts a classic story of sibling rivalry between two sisters; the elder, Dalisay, had throughout her life wished the younger Sutla ill. This desire to deprive the other of happiness is carried through to the present: she manages to seduce her sister's boyfriend who impregnates her, and so gives her the privilege to demand marriage. They wed, raise a child, and in a way find bliss in this stability at the expense of Sutla, the name of the younger sister which refers to silk, the family's business. Sutla, on the inspiration of her father, gets past her anger, concedes yet again to her sister's malice, and decides to marry a worker of their textile workshop. But the two sisters' love interest, Orlando, suddenly makes claims on Sutla, prompting Dalisay to kill him and then kill herself. Undercutting this keen exploration of human relationships, written by Lualhati Bautista, is an excess of soft-pornographic scenes which exploits the bodies of the actresses and also the milieu of the province as edenic paradise of sexual liberation. In the end, after the film goes through the usual carousel of melodrama and trysts in the most unusual places and under the most forbidden conditions, Sutla finds her place in the patriarchal system as wife: her hymen restored.

The staging of this mode of tragedy reveals that “sex in Philippine cinema,” to use a heuristic category, evokes the rhetoric and sensibility of “loss” of “substance,” of violation that celebrates prurience but denigrates the agency of its source. This drama assumes more palpable effect if we are to dwell on the lives of “bold stars” who had taken their own lives in the face of such loss and violation. Pepsi Paloma and Stella Strada, the biggest bold stars of their time, would so shock the industry when they committed suicide at that moment when their careers had begun to wane.

The discussion of “sex” in Philippine cinema takes us to certain fields of complex concern: the history of sex films and the themes implicated by these texts, the political economy of the Philippine sex industry in film and its current “slow death” induced by the excess of Hollywood and lack of local initiative, and the key players in this business of selling and transacting sex. It is best to construe all these not solely as structures, but rather as “careers” or “lives” whose “turns” assume presence and reality in specific practice, and in a network of encounters among technologies, audiences, and texts.

In this task, the essay reflects on sex not as object of study or desire, but as subject shaped and shaping, enacting and enacted in social practice. Inasmuch as sex is never to be reduced to psychology or even reified in the cosmos of a psychoanalytic essence, it has to be regarded as discourse (Butler 1997). We reference the notion of discourse not merely in the sense of structure of signification, but of exchange, political economy, and transactive relations. Sex as issue in these terms assumes “agency” as it reveals the bruises of subjectivity and subjection in the very struggle which underwrites power relations. We take the cue here from Michel Foucault who has properly advised us how to deal with sex: to “discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions which prompt people to speak about it and which store and distribute the things that are said. What is at issue, briefly, is the over-all ‘discursive fact,’ the way in which sex is ‘put into discourse’” (quoted in Donaldson 99).

What this essay finally claims to contribute to the description of sex as category in Philippine social life is a discussion of the overdetermination of its embodiments through a preliminary

survey—or art history—of bodies of work, a catalogue raisonné, as it were, of texts and textual relations that has come to carve the oeuvre of sex in Philippine cinema. This is an oeuvre that cuts across the investments of industrial capital, labor of bodies, and the politics of repressing and unleashing “sex” as everyday reality. The latter has seen interesting twists through time as producers, censors, legislators, activist filmmakers, the clergy, media-based sex counsellors or advise columnists have contested the notion of sex as an idea—including its idiom—whose time has come.² This turn of events has, indeed, tampered with the constitution of sex as taboo and brought to our senses the sexualization of society across a range of articulations: rape, sexual harassment, and certain forms of visibility and visualization. The latter item, for instance, could be wildly exemplified by the presentation to the public of video footage showing a gay talent manager molesting his wards and engaging in sexual couplings with male sex workers as a matter of course—all in a day’s work, so to speak.³ This condition of presence and publicness, by way of cinematic technology and contravening the protocols of privacy, that renders “sex” real as collective affect and effect demonstrates how Philippine culture has cracked itself open in the face of sex and trans-sexual changes and operations.

TENDENCIES: FROM STAPLE FARE TO GENRE

Reeling from the fatigue induced by the steady stream of fly-by-night productions of the 60s and seized by the tension of the First Quarter Storm, the Philippine film industry in the first year of the decade of Martial Law cemented the reputation of the sex genre by way of the seminal film *Uhaw* in 1970. Film history describes the film as proceeding from the hackneyed love triangle trope, but deviating from the melodramatic repertoire of presenting its subject and its subjects. For love here is substantiated through sexual desire and not necessarily through romance, that is, if we must install an antinomy between the two. A story of a woman named Lorna who had to be satiated by her husband and her husband’s friend certainly would point to a new way of articulating fulfillment as a mode of resolving some form of lack in the self, which in the melodramatic genre almost always finds solace in filial and patriarchal compliance. In this case, the lack is consummated in sex and its attendant stigma: adultery, betrayal, promiscuity, lust, and immorality. The emergence

of *bomba*, therefore, had to a great extent secreted the tensions of the era, with film constituting a locus of contradiction in terms of its ability to implicitly question the norms of an emergent regime of progress, discipline, and cultural identity.

Uhaw traces its genealogy from the soft-core tradition in international cinema and, most probably, from National Artist for Film Gerardo de Leon's daring excursions into sex. Lena Pareja identifies the film *Huwag Mo Akong Limutin* (1960) which she feels is "one of the earliest films to delve seriously and realistically into questions of adultery and sexuality" (Pareja 164). The film, because it flirts with taboo, got into trouble in its time: "It encountered censorship problems because of its depiction of adultery and premarital sex. Specific scenes cut were the kissing scene between Cynthia Zamora and Cesar Ramirez and the suggestion of abortion. The character of Doña Consuelo, a sexually deprived middle-aged woman played by Arsenia Francisco, was ordered modified to make her less realistic" (164). The fate of this particular film could only prove how sex is imbricated within a network of social expectations and practices. It also makes us realize that film, animated either by conventional or radical temper, is always accountable to a certain public of ideological partisans, and that there are measures which regulate its circulations. Also, the notion of "realism" as construed in mimetic (as in "realistic") terms is foregrounded as a salient concept governing modes of regulation. The idea of graphic depiction runs through the whole discourse of censorship in the Philippines.

The genre called *bomba* (from the vernacular word which means "bomb") aligned its own stars away from the constellation of more traditional movie celebrities: Merle Fernandez, Rosanna Ortiz, Divina Valencia, Stella Suarez, Sophia Moran, Scarlet Revilla, and with male consorts in the persons of Ricky Rogers, Roldan Rodrigo, and Vic Vargas. The prominence of the trend would only be eclipsed by the stunning and almost phenomenal rise of Nora Aunor, who in more ways than one had broken the codes of startyping by her mere ascent to the cinematic establishment. Dark, small, and nowhere near the mestiza or movie-star template, Aunor fascinated the mass audience who by this time had gone weary of Hispanic and Hollywoodish idols as well as sleazy *bomba* stars. Some critics hold the opinion that Aunor's rise and *bomba*'s decline had cohered with the Marcos blueprint for a Martial Law regime. They say that Aunor's

films were escapist and significantly undermined the “progressive” tendency of bomba films (Flores 2000, Tiongson 1983). But this is another story.

What needs to be confronted here is how sex would be elided by the Aunor persona, which throughout her exemplary filmography has been desexualized, that is, her desire is conveniently displaced across the conventions of “wholesome” romance. We wonder then how a genre built on sex could be supplanted by a star who had ridden on the crest of teenage trends and torch songs.

While Aunor reigned, a new breed of bold stars burst into the scene. And it is but interesting to note that the most significant figure in this period was the first Ms. Universe winner from the Philippines. Gloria Diaz, Ms. Universe 1969, fuelled the rise of the wet-look trend in the 70s by way of *Pinakamagandang Hayop sa Balat ng Lupa* (1974). Featuring bold stars in revealing outfits and traipsing or grappling with each other’s hair on seashores, the trend literally drenched its stars in water, the better to expose their bodies “logically.” Elizabeth Oropesa, Daria Ramirez, Chanda Romero, Carmen Ronda, and Beth Bautista ruled the realm under the aegis of a safer expression of “bold” and in light of a clampdown on bomba. The man of the hour was George Estregan.

As the decade neared its end, the industry tried to sort of institutionalize the genre by launching stars through the bold route. Alma Moreno’s *Eva Fonda, 16* (1976) and *Ligaw na Bulaklak* (1976); Lorna Tolentino’s *Miss Dulce Amor, Ina* (1978); Rio Locsin’s *Disgrasyada* (1979); Vilma Santos’s *Rosas sa Putikan* (1976); Chanda Romero’s *Sa Kagubatan ng Lungsod* (1975); Elizabeth Oropesa’s *Mister Mo, Lover Ko* (1975); Daria Ramirez’s *Lord, Give Me a Lover* (1976); Beth Bautista’s *Huwag* (1979); Amy Austria’s *Nang Bumuka ang Sampaguita* (1980); Dina Bonnevie’s *Katorse* (1980); Gina Alajar’s *Diborsyada* (1980); and Cherie Gil’s *Problem Child* (1980) were launching pictures that sought to consolidate the stellar claims of the said actresses. There was also a marked swerve of setting for sex: from the beach for the previous wet-look trend to the bed. And so, the “bed scene” scenario was born and maximized to showcase the various ways of doing sex and making out in the context of heterosexist and marital drama.

After these actresses achieved a degree of success, bold was somehow downgraded into “sexy” and shifted to a less aggressive gear. Still, the industry was not remiss in cranking out the likes of Isabel Rivas, Janet Bordon, Tet Antiquiera, Vivian Velez, Azenith Briones, Jean Saburit, and Cecille Castillo. They were joined by male stars like Ernie Garcia and Orestes Ojeda. At this point, the trend was inchoate, still forming in the crucible of trial-and-error experiments. The diversity of discoveries would swing from the honky-tonk type of bold actress like Myrna Castillo, who hails from Tondo, to an ingenue like Dina Bonnevie, who rose to prominence courtesy of Lily Monteverde’s well-oiled film cartel. At this time, too, Tetchie Agbayani’s nude poses for Playboy Magazine stirred the hornet’s nest in Manila and saw a moral confrontation between Agbayani and the city’s moral crusaders led by Polly Cayetano.

The genre became solvent again in the mid-80s when the Marcos government through the Experimental Cinema of the Philippine (ECP) brought in new market variables. Using government funds and the imprimatur of Imelda Marcos and daughter Imee, an art film establishment and its decadent ambitions began to hold sway. And in this new dispensation, bold was in. As the regime was teetering on the verge of a nervous breakdown, it ushered in the spectacle of the Manila International Film Festival, the premier venue of very bold productions leavened by the aesthetic benediction of both State and Art. The ECP, propped up by generous endowment from the country’s depleted coffers, produced and exhibited a smorgasbord fare of very bold movies, featuring such stars as Maria Isabel Lopez and Sarsi Emmanuel. Launched as male bold stars were Daniel Fernando, Gino Antonio, and Julio Diaz. In this season of State-sponsored soft-core pornography, “art film” aspirants served the public with wild helpings of decadence in a time of substantial deprivation and repression: Peque Gallaga, Tikoy Aguiluz, and Celso Ad. Castillo engaged the dictatorship’s obscenities and proceeded to churn out “art films” which packed lots of sex and subtle substance. Also, the major studios followed suit, and in their own way kept up with the State’s neo-bomba preoccupations. Ana Marie Gutierrez, Sarsi Emmanuel, Julie Ann Fortich, Pepsi Paloma, Stella Strada, Claudia Zobel, Liz Alindogan, Carmi Martin, and Tanya Gomez were the stars of the bold show at the height of the anti-Marcos protest rallies. To complement this carnival act, the Marcos publicity machinery coopted Viva Films and manufactured a

true star of the 80s, Sharon Cuneta. It was only Cuneta, who like Aunor is desexualized in her films, who was able to withstand the onslaught of bold. Daughter of the mayor of a corrupt city in the Philippines and ardent supporter of the Marcoses, Cuneta's full potential as an establishment star was harnessed to the hilt. In 1984, for instance, her melodrama about a flower vendor who sings her way to wealth was pitted against *Sister Stella L*, a film on a nun's awakening to social injustice. Most expectedly, Cuneta's project clobbered the most compelling political film to come out in the 80s.

The fall of Marcos created a vacuum and therein thrived morbid symptoms of hard-core pornography. The *penekula* (a vernacular contraction for penetration film) flourished. Based on its label, the trend featured actual penetration scenes and brought to the fore stars like Myra Manibog, Joy Sumilang, Isadora, and Lala Montelibano. Equally daring were the men: Mark Joseph, Bobby Benitez, and George Estregan.

As the industry ached under the scrutiny of moral debates, bold had to be reformulated. As some form of transition from the very flagrant penekula to a more acceptable mode of bold, Jaelyn Jose's star shone. A serious actress, she made films—*Private Show* (1986), *Takaw Takso* (1986), and *Flesh Avenue* (1986)—that bared not only her flesh, but also her social conscience. Jose's resistance to out and out bold films intimated certain possibilities for the industry at that time of uncertain change, proving that the sex film could be turned into something else if given more sensible treatment.

But not for long, after sometime, the film business was able to concoct another formula. In the late 80s, after a lull of about two years after the EDSA revolt, the ST (short for sex trip), as if to cast its pearls before the swine of Cory Aquino's sellout to cacique interests, was the fodder at the bold trough. Gretchen Barretto, Rita Avila, and Cristina Gonzales—women from middle class families—whetted the appetite of audiences with doses of sex in the form of sexy scenes. The selling point of this type of genre as peddled by Seiko Films was the women themselves who were packaged as non-call girl types and as fairly decent stars. Here the lower-class desire for a *colegiala* nymphet would reach its acme of fulfillment.

As the romance with ST ebbed, the industry rehashed the bold genre in the 90s and called it by another name, TF (short for titillating film). Aside from the naughty Filipino pun found in the first two syllables of the first word, the trend capitalized on mischief as gleaned in the titles of films—from *Patikim ng Pinya* (1996) and *Talong* (1999)—and the frankness of stars like Rosanna Roces, Rita Magdalena, and Priscilla Almeda to be joined later by Ina Raymundo and Ara Mina. They cavorted with Jay Manalo, Leandro Baldemor, and Anton Bernardo. Seiko Films, the prime mover of the ST trend, also sowed the seeds of this most recent predilection in Philippine cinema.

At the turn of the decade, sex in Philippine cinema came to a head when the liberal MTRCB, headed by the former anti-censorship politician, Armida Siguion-Reyna, was accused of allowing pornographic films to be shown, and so was accused for not pursuing the mandate of the Board and at the same time for helping fellow producers to make a killing in the box-office at a time when the industry inched toward extinction. The trend at this point outstripped the daring of the 80s, short of duplicating the precocity of the *penekula*. One film, for instance, *Sa Paraiso ni Efrén* (1999), shows the star caressing a man's groin with her face on the opening credits. Much would be remarked on this episode in the late 90s, instigating multi-denominational rallies against the MTRCB. But the core of the clamor was "regulation" of sex in Philippine cinema and the abuse of creative expression and the principle of self-policing by the industry in an era of a cinematic presidency.

MODES OF PRODUCTION

The circulation of films which sell sex has been sustained through time by the industry establishment. Inasmuch as "stars" and "formulae" have to be distributed on a mass scale and to a diverse public, sex weighs in as significant luggage. There are vital nodes in this traffic of sex in Philippine cinema.

The studio, as the central site of film production in a Hollywood-based industry, fascinates its audiences by showing in public intimate details of private practices. The "kiss," for instance, as sight on screen is deemed unnatural to be seen by an audience, or

to be displayed in full view of strangers. The idea that film impairs this proscription provides grist for the controversy mill and bolsters the industry's capacity for flouting traditional norms of social life. This expectation for film to give full play to a certain radical competence generates a genre that portrays private acts shown larger than life. One could only, therefore, imagine the viability of that capacity. The studio system has invested in this power and from the First Kiss on screen performed by Elizabeth Dimples Cooper to the more staple stagings of sex as formula, there has sprung a naturalized habit of seeing sex as a salient aspect of film experience. Also, the space of sex flows from screen to moviehouse, and vice-versa, as audiences themselves enact sex while watching movies. It is not an uncommon occurrence that one catches seatmates engaging in heterosexual (petting) and homosexual (cruising, fellatio) acts as the film unfurls in the dark cave of the cinema. The studio, through its steady output, ensures that films show sex as a sign of cinematic normalcy as stars big and small always express "love" and "sex" interest in one way or another.

The 90s contributed a scheme to the repertoire of industrial practices: the *pito-pito* style of filmmaking which required seven days of shooting and seven days of processing the film. This set-up encouraged the production of bold films which entailed negligible capital and were easy to sell to theater brokers. The turnover rate of stars under this mechanism was swift as the latter tried to outdo not only competition but also their latest boldness. A director once commented that these stars were recruited from bars where they worked as Guest Relations Officers (GROs), or stopped en route to Japan where they toiled as entertainers. And so, talk would have it that these stars were also on the take behind the cameras, their managers serving as pimps. This easy lay of the land of sex in Philippine cinema at this point was cultivated in part by the climate forecast by the print media which became more insolent in its portrayal of sex in tabloids and magazines, featuring almost-nude male and female stars in glossy covers and centerfolds. Factor here as well sex being discussed in advise columns, radio shows, and even television programs.

Independent producers, banking on the easy return of investment from bold features, have made fortunes out of making sex flicks and building up stars for these. It is in the nature of their lack of financial wherewithal as well as vertical-integration

mechanisms that the independent producers resort to “recoup capital quick” strategies. It is a known fact that of all genres in film, the bold film is the least expensive to produce: stars come cheap; sets are minimal; directors do not need that much time and labor for pre-production, principal photography, post-production, and promotions.

The State always regulates production in film as it invokes the public as needing protection from the excesses of a capital-intensive industry. The intervention of the State comes in the form of censorship, which historically has always been hot on the trail of sex films. But the role of the State in cinema need not always be regulative; it could also be commercial, political, and artistic. The experience with the Experimental Cinema of the Philippines bears this out. Projected by the Marcos government as patron of the artistic film, the ECP became a lair of sex films, which were shown to massive audiences in the guise of film education, and ironic as it may sound, freedom of expression. The ECP had seen itself as promoter of art films even as most of their productions harbored acquiescent values.

As challenge against these State-sponsored initiatives, social realist filmmakers like Lino Brocka and Ishmael Bernal used the system of both State and the market to proffer their own notions of Philippine life. Bernal’s *Manila By Night* (1980), for instance, is a movie full of Regal Babies and sexy scenes, but is a scathing indictment of Manila’s grotesque and hypocritical pretensions. The director’s *Himala* (1982), financed by ECP, is a veiled redefinition of the regime’s quest for power as religion, which is unmasked in the film as opiate.

The technology of video has facilitated the growth of a market of film which thrives on tape rentals and the acquisition of videocassette recorders. It has also made room for the rise of the pornography industry, which is in the main very cheap to conceive. *A Sight and Sound* essay puts it that “since the only requirement of the porno movie is a cast willing to perform sexually, the X-rate adult film has always been the rock-bottom cheapest (and most despised) form of cinema” (28). It elaborates that “westerns need horses and hats, horror films need monster make-up—and both play to audiences for whom a technical gaffe would breach involvement with the world of film. But as long as porno features ‘real’ sex, they needn’t be edited, directed or acted even to the feeble standards of the lowest Z feature” (28). It is for this reason that the genre has become either a

field of experimentation or a barren wasteland of arrant ineptitude and exploitation. The array of techniques that video offers—from reproduction to playback mechanism—as well as its place in the private confines of the home conspire to entrench the technology in the lives of people who consider watching television a way of life. Notorious video productions of pornography, crude as these are, are also exported abroad and have immortalized several trysts involving celebrities as film folklore. The Rudy Fariñas-Vivian Velez, Romeo Vasquez-Vilma Santos, Eddie Ilarde-Coney Reyes, and Richard Gomez-Sharon Cuneta tapes may have been doctored or spliced, but the idea, disseminated as urban mythology, remains that video has gained access to the private lives of people and has the ability to manufacture stories and scenes through its unique technology.

With the presence of censors in Metro Manila, unscrupulous producers who would want to amass money distributing sex-oriented films to moviehouses willing to exhibit them resort to reinserting cut footage into the approved prints of films. More often than not, it is the rural cinemas or obscure movie houses in the alleys of Metro Manila that engage in this practice. Thus, for instance, while a seemingly sanitized version of a sexy film might be advertised on the marquee, hard-core pornographic scenes would suddenly interrupt the feature inside the theater. These scenes may or may not be part of the film being screened. This observation may direct our attention to the weakening of the moviehouse as the main legitimate domain of film exhibition and the ascendance of the cinema's former ancillary markets like video and cable as the more reflexive media of dissemination.

Finally, the most efficient conduits that mediate sex as discourse and its public are the talent scouts and movie directors who discover bold stars. Among the more flamboyant of this type in the 80s were Rey de la Cruz, Rading Carlos, Cloyd Robinson, and Joey Gosiengfiao. De la Cruz, for instance, came up with the most amusing taxonomic classification with which to name his flock. His fertile imagination yielded Softdrink Beauties (Pepsi Paloma, Sarsi Emmanuel, Coca Nicolas), Hard Drink Beauties (Brandy Ayala, Chivas Regala), Elite Beauties (Lala Montelibano, Farida Yulo, Lampel Cojuanco), and even Rebel Beauties (Lota Misuari and Honey Honasan). He was also fond of puns, thinking of names like Claudia Collins (with the second syllable of the first name and the first syllable of the surname

forming the sound which is the vernacular slang for masturbation) to further tease the patrons of sex films.

THEMES: TABOOS AND TRANSFORMATIONS

There are certain themes that keep the public captive and enthralled through relentless manufacture of a thematic repertoire which ensures the preponderance of sex in stories and daily narratives. These themes need not be perceived as always proffering false consciousness, but as reiterating the social problems implicated by cinematic and industrial mediation of sexual expression.

The theme of rite of passage, from innocence and youth to carnal knowledge, fastens the narrative to the body of the virgin whose initiation into the desires of the world transforms her into a “whore.” The stigma of this rite of passage is exploited from every possible angle, from ablutions in the river to rape scenes and on to the erstwhile virgin suddenly craving flesh herself. Films like *Ligaw na Bulaklak* (1976), *Isla* (1984), and *Virgin People* (1983) tackle the problems of violation, but in the process reinstall the primacy of the male gaze in looking at and seeing through the conundrum.

Rape likewise presents an occasion for baring the body. *Brutal* (1980), *Rubia Servios* (1978), *Angela Markado* (1980), and even the massacre films hatched in the bizarre mind of Carlo J. Caparas discuss rape almost clinically and therefore subject the body of the woman to another round of autopsy, this time through the prying eyes of a public reared in a daily history of sex.

The nature of sex work is explored as the basis for molding characters which, most logically as demanded by their referents in real life, act as sex workers and reenact the rituals of the trade. *Aliw* (1979), *Burlesk Queen* (1977), *Private Show* (1986), *Boatman* (1984), *PX* (1982), *Macho Dancer* (1989), *Sibak* (1995), *Mananayaw* (1978), *Hot Property* (1983), and *Playgirl* (1981) focus on the sex worker as sex object and necessarily objectify his or her experience as destiny. The dubious films *Sibak* (1995) and *Toro* (2000), for instance, open with the male dancer and sex worker declaring that they have accepted sex work as a way of life, as if to say that such condition need not be transformed but simply regarded as *fait accompli*. The same can be said of *Burlesk King* (1999).

The concept of domestication and desire or the familiarity of the home which breeds contempt comes through as premise for contriving repression and expression of sexual desire. *Insiang* (1976), *Karnal* (1983), *Salome* (1981), *Scorpio Nights* (1985), and the sex comedies of Ishmael Bernal and Danny Zialcita configure the home as locus of puritan discipline and compel the characters to find sexual fulfillment beyond its boundaries, or transgress the sanctity of the bedroom as strictly marital enclave. In this play of constraint and craving, sex becomes the idiom through which to translate the contradiction and becomes the condition of possibility of breaking the domestic impasse. Sex, however, in this case hardly liberates. *Salome* and her jealous husband commit suicide in *Salome* (1981); and in *Scorpio Nights* (1985), the enraged husband kills his wife and her paramour, and after reaching orgasm shoots himself to death.

Gay sexuality is also party to the perpetuation of the notion that sexuality is sex. A film like *Tubog sa Ginto* (1971) explains gay sexuality in terms of sexual acts which might be considered hedonistic and immoral. Such impulse merely etches the thought that gays are first and last sexual animals, which seems to be the fallout of the current discourse on gayness circulating in academe and civil society.

Finally, sex-related diseases like syphilis and AIDS become trajectories for narratives to enfold sexuality. *Dahil Mahal Kita: The Dolzura Cortez Story* (1983), *The Sarah Jane Salazar Story* (1994), and *Bawal na Halik* (1996) speak of AIDS in very sexual terms and forget that disease, like sex, is lived out in social practice and does not end in contact between copulating bodies.

SEXUAL SUBJECTION

This paper is a preliminary survey of the terrain of sex in Philippine commercial and mainstream cinema. We hope to look deeper into the field in the future. One of the aims of this initiative is to reflect on the discourse of sexual subjection and subjectivity. If we are to believe Judith Butler that as “a power exerted on a subject, subjection is nevertheless a power assumed by the subject, an assumption that constitutes the instrument of that subject’s becoming,” (11) we must inevitably investigate the modes by which “sexuality” generates this power and refunctions agency, which, still

according to Butler, “exceeds the power by which it is enabled” (11). Sex in Philippine cinema has to be seen as always enmeshed in power: the power to suffer pleasure, the power to address desire, the power of agents to resist both craving and conscription as sexual labor and capital. And to the degree that sex in Philippine cinema is also always already discussed outside cinema as moral problems, the subject of sex defines certain boundaries of acceptable norms and possible transgressions in social life. How can we inscribe in cinema the politics of sexuality so that it could overcome the rhetoric of privacy, reproduction, and carnality? In other words, how can we reimagine sex and finally put it to bed?

ENDNOTES

¹See news accounts of the exchange between Manuel Morato and Armida Siguion-Reyna in late 1999 and early 2000.

²See the works of Margarita Holmes, sex counselor.

³See news accounts of the Jojo Veloso case in late 1996.

REFERENCES

- Butler, Judith. *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.
- Donaldson, Laura. *Decolonizing Feminism*. Chapel Hill: University of Northern Carolina Press, 1992.
- Flores, Patrick D. “Makulay na Daigdig: Nora Aunor and the Aesthetic of Sufferance.” Ph.D. Dissertation. University of the Philippines Diliman, 2000.
- Pareja, Lena. *Cultural Center of the Philippines Encyclopedia of Philippine Art*. V-VIII. Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1994.
- Sight and Sound*. May 1997.
- Tiongson, Nicanor. *The Urian Anthology*. Manila: Manuel Morato, 1983.

Patrick D. Flores is the chair of the Department of Art Studies, University of the Philippines Diliman. He actively contributes critical essays on art, film, and popular culture to national and international publications.