

of the roots of their discipline, the gains it has made through the years, its dynamic nature, the form it has come to assume in the present, the persistent challenges, as well as the tasks it needs to accomplish in the present century.—**MA. AGNES A. PACULDAR**, MA POLITICAL SCIENCE STUDENT, COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES-DILIMAN.

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Neferti Xina M. Tadiar. *Fantasy-production: Sexual economies and other Philippine consequences for the new world order.* Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2004. 366 pp.

The book initiates us into its terrain of inquiry via a scene of decadence in which Marcos kin and minions impersonate the *We Are the World* music video with nearly wicked glee. That the send-up transpires in a bacchanalia aboard a yacht exemplifies eccentric excess and vitiates the nobility of its origin, the worldwide relief to the catastrophic famine in Africa in the eighties. Condensed in the moment, which recordation is recovered from the archives of Malacañang Palace after the popular revolt against the despot in 1986, is a perversion of universal proportion. This foundational tableau coheres well with Neferti Xina M. Tadiar's project of staging tensions within totalities where peculiar aspirations of anticipation, of belonging to, or catching up with—in other words, of impersonating—the capital of empire are rehearsed. Such re-dressing, or the thrill of “trying out new lives,” however, constitutes a “desiring action” open to all those who decide to hope; it is not the exclusive diversion of those who mimic its travail.

This collection of essays is interested not only in making sense of this fraught process, but also in sensing it. Thus, the author contrives the trope of fantasy, a leitmotif in a fugue of many running passages, as well as the ways in which it is composed and through repetitions or inversions elaborates into “sexual economies.” The latter rubric clarifies the main theoretical method of fantasy-production through an articulation of work and exchange, which are described as sexual, or at least sexualized. Here, the Philippines figures not solely as a locus of this transmission; it is rather construed as a “consequence” for a reality, which is made fictive as fantastic because it is democratizing and developing, that a “new world order” mediates. This foregrounds some sort of a Philippine “effect,” or perhaps the “effect” of the Philippines,

at a time when a *sui generis* superpower seeks to free its dominion from the infamy of fundamental traditions and to reform it within an elected civilization, which is as fundamentalist as it gets.

The book, however, resists the tendency to reduce this constraint as a mode of capture, insisting on “dreaming” as a potentiality that need not be conflated with the ideological and the known; it fleshes itself out in the practice of facture. It modulates this argument through a reflection on “irony” and the methods of its representation by scholars like Tadiar herself and Arjun Appadurai, and the assertion that imagination, from which irony is forged, may craft a resistive ethic in the face of social contingencies. By way of Slovoj Zizek, fantasy is defined as the “belief which is radically exterior, embodied in the practical, effective procedure of people” (9). And so, while the thoroughgoing analysis engages in a critique of fantasy, it also leans toward a means of addressing culture that is not entirely beholden to the “experience of necessity or expediency but rather takes the risk of faith in possibility” (23). Emerging from this condition of elusiveness or elision, intractability or distraction are “dreaming practices that tangentially escape the logic of desiring subjects” (23). Tangentiality refers to “the collective dream forces and movements that are harnessed for the construction of hegemonic subjects and their counter-hegemonic opposition, and yet escape the universal and universalizing forms of both” (23). The book cuts out a difficult task for itself, as it strives to insinuate an antinomy into the interaction between domination and resistance playing out within the hegemonic activity and simultaneously to extricate the same from the universality of the radical ends of their totalizations/totalitarianisms.

The book thus configures what may be deemed a cognitive mapping in which variant forces—overseas contract workers, highways, historical discourse, political event, and film—conspire to conjure an encompassing biopolitical sphere. Weaned away from the protocols of typical investigations in social science or the humanities, these are not controlled as variables forming aggregate data; they are regarded as symptoms of a pathology or traces of a dispersal. However they are coded as metaphors of dissemination, they disclose a sense of ruin amid plenitude or trauma under the auspice of progress, and are marked allegorically as errant or dislocated. Spinning from a take on irony, the discussion then proceeds to read this “illustrative use” of the Philippines textually, an operation that is not without its problems. First, the notion of irony is not convincingly argued as a function of tangentiality

and an impulse of gender trouble; the explication of feminist irony in the conclusion is rather belated. Second, while this compendium of related papers tries to overcome the limits of academic disciplines, it is not able to sustain its wish to plot out the coordinates it posits within a range of affective reckonings in terms of the ethnographic, the filmic, the spatial, and the feminist gesture. In other words, irony as affect is retooled as a practically superstructural expression rather than as a structure of feeling, in spite of the obsession to materialize it and to simulate the energy to which it is but tangential: a face-off that vexingly refuses both direct conversion and infinite mediation, overdetermination and indeterminacy. This outcome may well derive from a literary and discursive overinvestment in cultural analysis in which a gamut of implications is “read” from or “read off” redeemed texts, which albeit and perhaps because they are abducted become wondrous and charged, but also “worn out” by overwrought affinity, exotic beholding, and sometimes the indignity of correctness. In the long haul, this inadequacy deprives an undertaking of this magnitude of the textured materiality it requires, the erotic idiom it endeavors to utter, the very rondure of worldliness it so covets.

It has to be conceded that it is arduous to review the array of material the book presents; only an appraiser of significant conceit would attempt such assignment, considering that the references here weave in and out of the fabric of time and situation and defy the demands of historicization. Moreover, its theoretical assumptions may exasperate the diligent observer. To cite a case: while the debt to Žižek is acknowledged, a rigorous reevaluation of the lush literature on psycho-Marxism and reification is not attempted, leaving us confounded with regard to the premise on which terms like dreaming and fantasy are really predicated. The author tackles this lapse by cautioning that the category “dream” is loosely used, and that she cannot accept the idea of psychoanalysis being of transhistorical virtue, complicit as it is with the *bildung* of imperialism. It is an explanation that only serves to sharpen the predicament because in some parts of the book social thickness is verisimilarly flattened into surface intensities. The eclectic disposition of the venture, therefore, fails to be productively idiosyncratic.

The notes on Filipina actress Nora Aunor and her film *Himala* (Miracle) (1982) are instructive, and they are the most breathtaking. The Noranian imaginary is held up as miracular and heretical, summoning a multitude of “subjective inventions” that helped enact the “people’s performance of power” in the deposition of Marcos,

whom Nora had supported but later abandoned. Surely, there is no straight line between Nora and revolution; but supposedly there is a tangential link. This tangentiality could have been profoundly complicated, however, had the turns in the career of Nora as a political player in a film industry subsisting on the feudal patronage of politicians and the manipulation of State apparati been sufficiently tracked. How, for instance, would this heresy relate to the near-lynching of Nora in EDSA I, where the idol of waning charisma was the object of a people's iconoclasm? What about her checkered record of shifting partisan allegiances, leading to the betrayal of her legion's devotion? And what to make of a dense filmography that is implicated in genre, the star system, and the burden of putting up appearances in the name of mythology?

Undoubtedly, there is melancholy in the Noranian narrative (the term which alludes to both believer and belief, "faithful claim" and fantastic vision), owing to the suffering etched in the persona and the dramatization of paradigmatic characters, from Bakekang to Flor Contemplacion. But this is only a level in Nora's sufferance that has to be consistently disconfirmed because of the astuteness of the agency at work in the writing of what is turning out to be an abusive biography. The basis of the politics of hope lodged in this tangentiality is tenuous and ultimately untenable, because it is made to rest on either loss or transcendence. We would rather intricate it within an intimation: the intimacy with exceptional estrangement and the suggestion of chance or risk, the suggestiveness of being entitled to *pag-iral* (presence), or of actuating *bisa* (potency) within the bounds of *diskarte* (strategy), *palabas* (performance), and *ginhawa* (inspiration). Nora's *pagganap* (acting or action) is an artifice of possession in the sense that it fulfills a *kaganapan* (destiny). It could only be heretical to the degree that it supplements the hysteria of resilience, of dying for others so that salvation could be realized and the remiss subject be at last represented in spectacle, in the fires of consumption. This is ratified in the passional cycle in which death and bereavement oblige the living to negotiate certain forms of parting, one of which is imitation: of becoming the intimate of the dead and taking on the habits of memory within a transpersonal moral world of poignant entreaties.

But the book paves a different path. It remarks on how the film *Himala*, which discredits folk spirituality as corruptible and fanatical, deters a new heresy by pursuing the critique of fetishism in which Elsa is unveiled as false and purveying false consciousness (which reiterates Renato Constantino's accusation that Nora in her prime subcontracted

American “synthetic culture”), thus refusing “what seems to be tangential to the...socio-subjective modes and relations that do not develop into the proper national subject of history” (256). It admonishes the state-funded production for foreclosing a heresy in which “objective disenchantment and subjective faith coincide,” a heresy that may spurn the instrumentalization of subjects as representations of others. To surmount such impasse, it proposes, first, the renewal of Nora’s following (that is, women domestic workers overseas) from sacrificial heroines seared on the screens of melodrama into their own “superstars” and, second, the reversal of Nora Aunor from “superstar” to something “mundane” so that she could reconnect herself to the “heretical movement that she articulates and is generated by” (257). The conjuncture prefigured here might be Flor Contemplacion, who, indeed, became a *cause célèbre* when she was hanged in Singapore in 1995 for allegedly killing her friend and her friend’s ward; three films on her life have been made. In one of these, Nora portrays the sufferer par excellence and in doing so resurrects a dying career by making a killing at the tills. Six years later, Nora, shorn of her aura as La Aunor and serving as some sort of a doppelgänger of a presidential aspirant, revisits EDSA accompanied by leftist luminaries, this time as an authentic witness who denounces her erstwhile patron and lover, Joseph Estrada, as a batterer of women in front of the image of the Virgin Mary (Our Lady of EDSA), an uncanny return to the denouement of *Himala*. In these instances, the renewal is achieved but only through death; and the reversal is consummated but only through abjection: an addiction to fantasy. Flor became a sensation and roused her nation and Nora, after making all sorts of transactions with political brokers spurred by the most earthly motivation of survival, was arrested in the United States for carrying illicit drugs in 2005. Nora’s tribe will certainly dedicate to her their *pakikiramay/pakikiisa* (sympathy and support). In turn, she will evoke the need to be loved and at the same time recall with subtlety what she has divested through the seasons so that others could hope, in the spirit of the abnegations of Elsa of *Himala*, the precocious trickster of compromised lineage who revokes the miracle of her own making with a fatal confession that martyrs her and moves her faithful to herald her sainthood. This is the dilemma that the concept of the “inseparability of the representation of the superstar syndrome from the presentation of Nora Aunor” introduces (253); it neglects the history of the phenomenon as one informed by the mediatized ordinariness of Nora that was to become her allure and

idealization: an icon that can be touched as a beloved and domesticated as a victim, on the one hand, and a native that was human enough, on the other: dissident, indulgent, dissembling, and, truly, “liberated.” The book thus does not benefit from its indifference to both ethnographic exploration and the critical inheritance of negative dialectic. It also begs a more commensurate formulation of the political program that this belabored strain of heresy (in)cites in light of the significant theorizations on prospects of emancipation, the relays of debates of which are unfortunately short-circuited in this exercise.

All told, *Fantasy-production* emboldens us to reimagine the world with flair and temerity, but also humbles our conviction by reminding us of what a Counter-Reformation treatise calls the “defect of distance” in our approach to the wayward, reckless reality we desperately try to understand and transform. An enterprise of this scope warrants a more deliberative conversation with and reciprocal negations of translocal sources, bruising exposure to the nuances of everyday epiphanies, and the willingness to reset the horizon of even the most interventive of expectations and the vainest of righteous indignations. This vital work signals the imperative in Philippine Studies, in particular, for a rapprochement among alternative agenda and techniques of discernment, including the emergent repertoire of immigrant scholarship of an exilic inflection, to finally intuit a resonant tenor of the Philippine consequence in a more robust register, beyond a fantasy impromptu.—
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Hideo Kobayashi. 2004. *Postwar Japanese economy and Southeast Asia*. Quezon City: New Day Publishers. 172 pp.

The book takes on a historical approach to the analysis of economic and business relations of Japan primarily with its Asian partners. In characterizing these relations, it presents key actors (personalities, enterprises and institutions), events (e.g. diplomatic visits), and proclamations somewhat roughly arranged according to five time periods. Kobayashi must also have chosen to avoid the use of technical analytical tools in Economics to reach a wider audience.