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Philippine Popular Culture: Dimensions and Directions. The State of Research in Philippine Popular Culture

Doreen G. Fernandez

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Philippine Popular Culture: Dimensions and Directions
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DOREEN G. FERNANDEZ

Popular culture in the Philippines is a concern of recent awareness, recent exploration, and even more recent definition. Consider the country whose popular culture is in question: a Third World, developing nation; with many indigenous ethnic groups still definitely unurbanized; with a long history of colonization that left behind at least two immediately discernible layers of cultural influence, the Spanish and the American, and a less discernible (being more deeply assimilated) one, the Chinese; in a present socio-economic state that is still predominantly agricultural, semi-feudal (many feudal structures, especially in agricultural practices and related lifestyles continue, barely changed), and neocolonial (dependent on foreign economies, especially through the pervasive presence of multinational corporations). It is clear that definition of what is popular in the Philippine context can be no easy task.

Consider further: although the root word involved is *populus*, the people, the meaning "popular culture" has taken on in this day is not just "of the people" but more specifically of the mass, a mass generally understood to be urban and industrialized. Applied to the Philippines and its peoples of different levels of urbanization, with only a small percentage being urban and industrial in the Western mode, the term has to take on shades, sub-meanings, and distinctions, all of which demand preliminary explanations.

Mass media-generated culture in the Philippines is what can be properly called popular culture, and this is of recent vintage.¹ The

1. The different ethnic cultures of pre-Hispanic tribal communities, born of a common economic matrix, constitute Philippine folk culture, strains of which have drifted into elements of popular culture. The post-colonial culture that developed with the concept of a nation has been called by Dr. B. Lumbea "a national culture. . .," being "the various 'folk cultures' of the Filipinos. . . 'homogenized' by communication technology and by history." See "Popular Culture as Politics," *Philippines: International Popular Culture* 1 (1980):10.

electronic media — film, radio, television, the large-circulation press — were established in the Philippine scene early in the twentieth century, but because of economics their sweep is still largely and exclusively urban (not all rural areas have cinemas nor are they reached by newspapers and magazines; it is only since the transistor radio that the hinterlands are touched by electronic media; and to date only relatively few households are reached by television).

Research in the field is comparatively young, having started out in the sixties as mass communications research. The factors that led to this were: the recognition of mass communications as a vital, current field of endeavour and inquiry; the sending of scholars to schools abroad, and their return with questions about the Philippine situation; the establishment of the University of the Philippines Institute of Mass Communication and of mass communication programs in other schools; and government interest in the relation of mass communication to development. Mass communication research, concerned with content (content analyses) and effects on the audience, is the earliest form of popular culture research in the Philippines, although it is of course not meant as such.

In the middle seventies there came the literature scholars who began to examine film, television, radio and comics as modes of fiction and drama — in different media. Their concern was that of the cultural critic, and was derived from that of the literary critic: in this new form, what cultural values were being transmitted? Again: how well was the transmission being done? — to whom, with what effect, and to what purpose? This concern was bred by the recognition that “serious” literature — the novel, the short story, the poem, the play — was not reaching the great majority, not even the urban masses, and certainly not the rural masses. Even more urgently, since 1972 and the imposition of martial law, there were few outlets for the short story and the poem, and only one, *Liwayway* and its regional brethren, for the popular novel. Plays were hardly ever published except in university-based publications (how far could those reach out?), and when performed, reached only those of the immediate spatial community, the urban community, the school community, the town, the barrio. Any literary product reaching the people was getting there through the media, and that reach, that power,

needed to be studied, analyzed, evaluated.

Perhaps it would now be expedient to go through each major area of Philippine popular culture and examine briefly its history, and the state of research done in the field. Television will not be treated, since it shares its principal offerings, drama and music, with radio, yet does not reach nearly as wide a public.

Komiks. The first Filipino comic strip was "Kenkoy," which first appeared in 1929, its main character a city slicker through whom creator Antonio Velasquez commented on "the foibles of Filipinos grappling with the new manners and mores brought about by urbanization."² It then consisted of four frames, used as a filler in the popular weekly *Liwayway*, but eventually grew to a full-page feature. By 1931 other comic strip characters joined slick-haired Kenkoy, almost all of them modelled on American comics characters: Kulafu, who roamed the mountains of Luzon as Tarzan did Africa; Huapelo, the Chinese corner store owner (long a stock figure of fun in Philippine life, fiction and drama), Saryong Albularyo, the barrio doctor whose last name meant quack; Goyo and Kikay, local counterparts of Maggie and Jiggs,³ and so on through the years and the changing fashions to eventually include today's superheroes, horror stories, science fiction, preternatural creatures derived both from lower Philippine mythology and from Western sources. And so there appear Dyesebel the siren; the flying Darna; the Medusa-like Valentina, characters from Philippine folklore, otherworldly royalty and nobility out of the quatrains of the *awit* and *corrido*, freaks of many persuasions like phantomanok (phantom and rooster) and horse-bodied Petra, magical agents of good like Karina and her flying *kariton* (pushcart), historical figures, sports figures, and in a more realistic vein, people from daily life — martyred mothers and drunken fathers and business executives and blue-collar workers.

Since 1972 and Martial Law, the komiks have also been used by government agencies to carry such developmental messages as the Green Revolution (home vegetable gardens), housing programs, and family planning.

The content — the dreams, the hopes, the values, the vision of life, the escape from reality (that suggests the reality escaped

2. Lumbera, "Popular Culture as Politics," p. 12.

3. Most of the general information on the *komiks* is from Soledad S. Reyes, "The Philippine Komiks," *Philippines: International Popular Culture* 1 (1980): 14-23.

from), the problems and their solutions, the total world view reflected in the komiks – definitely makes the komiks popular culture. Although not created by the consumers, these are created for a popular and not an elite audience, by artists who, although motivated by profit, have their finger on the public pulse, their ears cocked to the public voice, their minds tuned to the public dream.

But it is not only content that makes komiks “of the people.” It is also the fact that they have such a reach and grasp:

At present, there are fifty komiks-magazines published weekly in the country with a combined circulation of more than two million copies. It is estimated that there are sixteen million regular readers of the komiks from Aparri to Jolo. . . if one counts those who borrow or lend their comics for a fee. When one considers that the total population of the Philippines is 44 million, the number of komiks readers represents a diffusion rate of 1 to 4. Although most of the readers are not affluent, they spend an average of 2 million pesos a week. . . or more than 100 million pesos a year on this popular medium.

For countless Filipinos, the komiks is perhaps the only reading fare – a cheap, accessible substitute for more serious literature. The komiks’ popularity may be seen in the phenomenon of magazine stalls in busy downtown Manila or small “sari-sari” (corner) stores in the barrios that double as libraries where anyone can read a komiks magazine for twenty centavos. In many neighborhoods, komiks-swapping, especially between neighbors and between urban workers and their provincial relatives, is the system of circulation.⁴

Dr. Reyes sees the komiks as having taken on different roles: “purveyor of entertainment and moral lessons, disseminator of values and attitudes, and even a source of practical knowledge on farming, government policies, medicine and science.” She also finds that although the form and distribution method is popular, the underlying sensibility is very largely folk – note the large

4. Ibid., p. 14. Estimates made in earlier studies show that the pass-on readership of a komiks magazine is six persons to a copy. This is because the housewife, the school-boy, the househelp do not discard a magazine once read, but pass it on to the rest of the family or to the neighbors. Household help who work in the cities save up komiks in trunks to take home to their relatives on annual vacations. The figures on komiks’ readership from Media Information Philippines ’79-’80, published by the Audit Council for Media, Inc., (ACM) assert that twenty-four of the twenty-six komiks magazines which are ACM members, have a total weekly circulation of 2,055,211. See Rodolfo A. Fernandez, “Komiks Best Medium for Development Message,” *Times Journal*, 27 March 1980, p. 4.

amount of folk material — and it is on this meld of folk and pop that the people's maximum receptivity to komiks rests.

Komiks have been studied both from the mass communication and the literary-cultural approaches in magazine and journal articles, and in theses. An early study was Karina Constantino David's "The Changing Images of Heroes in Local Comic Books," 1974 (cf. bibliography). Dr. Reyes' subsequent work is pioneering, since although it occasionally uses literary norms and methods, it takes the komiks as a phenomenon of popular culture.

Film. The first films shown in the Philippines were short features called *cinematrografo*, usually presented interspersed with zarzuela or vaudeville numbers. In 1909, two Americans, Yearsley and Gross, produced the first two locally made feature films, both on the life of Jose Rizal. The first full-length feature film, was Jose Nepomuceno's "Dalagang Bukid," in 1919, which used the story and the star of Hermogenes Ilagan's zarzuela of the same name, the most successful play of the type (it is said to have played at least 1000 times all around the islands). The first talking picture in the islands was made in 1932 by Musser, and titled "Ang Aswang."⁵

In 1924, there were 214 moviehouses all over the Philippines, thirty-four in Manila, nineteen in Negros, seventeen in Rizal province, sixteen in Pampanga, fourteen in Laguna, thirteen in Tayabas, and five in Iloilo.⁶ By 1939 the Philippine movie industry was fifth in the world in the number of talkies produced. There were 345 sound theaters in the country, a 25 percent increase over 1938, and eleven movie companies with a paid-up capital of almost ₱430,000.⁷

From then the Philippine movie industry moved from the big-studio syndrome to the present proliferation of small independent producers, battling such obstacles as high taxes, (28 percent of gross earnings) high production costs, scarcity of raw materials, no government help, little or no professional training for actors and technical staff, and, most especially, competition from foreign movies which, until the last few years, had exclusive

5. For most of the historical material on the Filipino film, I am indebted to John Lent, *Philippine Mass Communications Before 1811 After 1966* (A Philippine Press Institute Publication, 1972), pp. 107-28.

6. *Makinaugalingon*, 10 June 1924.

7. Lent, *Philippine Mass Communications*, p. 111.

hold over the first-run movie houses.

However, the Filipino film definitely has an audience. The moviehouses enjoy fair to full occupancy from 9 A.M. to 11 P.M. daily, a phenomenon that has disappeared from the West.⁸ Television has not usurped the movie domain, since it is not yet available to the mass audience — the workers, low-salaried employees, household help, and their families, whose chief entertainment is the movies.

Of the films that fill the moviehouses, an average of 120 each year (in the last five years) are Filipino, but these are generally the ones that are mobbed, and whose stars — Dolphy, Vilma Santos, Nora Aunor et al — have become folk heroes or, in the current lingo, “superstars.” Filipino movies, moreover, enjoy a longevity that foreign films do not. After they have gone through the first-run Metro Manila circuit, which determines whether they will make a profit or not, they then go through the provincial circuit, (where, rarely, some low-budget film, perhaps a martial arts piece that flopped in Metro Manila, succeeds), then through the second-run circuit, then through what might be called the third- and fourth-run circuits, the cheap movie houses. By this time the scratched prints are in the same decrepit state as the smelly, bedbug-infested, non-airconditioned moviehouses. Finally they move on to television, where they can practically live forever.

There are no film archives in the Philippines, no film libraries even in the vaults of the former Big Four — Premiere, Sampaguita, Lebran and LVN Studios — and so the television run is of value to the film student or historian as being the “living morgue” of the Filipino films that survive.

The content of these films has been the subject of much discussion and criticism, especially since 1976, the year of the formation of the *Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino*, the film critics’ circle, composed mostly of film buffs and writers from academe and journalism. *Bakya* is the pejorative adjective a Filipino director in the late fifties used to describe the films. The *bakya*, the

8. The Philippine Motion Picture Producers Association says that in 1976, some 66,024 million patrons went to the movies in 116 Metro Manila theaters, an average of 5,502 million persons per month, or 183,400 per day. Counting the Metro Manila population at about 7 million, about a fourth went to the movies once a week. Nationwide, about a million moviegoers sat in about 900 theaters daily in 1976. These facts are cited by Lucila Hosillos in “Movies in a Third World Country,” *Third World Studies Dependency Series* No. 15, June 1978.

wooden shoe worn by the lower classes, was used to symbolize the unelevated taste reflected in the movies, with their melodrama, weeping, fighting, formula romances, and stereotyped characters.

Arguments have flown back and forth about whether it is the directors and producers rather than the audience who are bakya, since they are the taste makers; about bakya being a mark of class distinction rather than of taste, because the general audience has accepted good films when presented in a vocabulary known to them; about the defects of the Filipino film being due to its having derived its style mainly from folk drama, and its still having to grapple with the medium. The lively prose has advanced analytical thinking on the Filipino film, especially since the advent of young, trained directors who have focused on message and technique, instead of relying on formulae.

Literature on the Filipino film includes five books, none of them real studies of film as film, much less as popular culture. One purports to be a history; one is about film stars; one is about censorship; one is a largely pictorial memoir; and the fifth is a film directory.⁹ The rest consists mainly of film reviews, feature articles, and assorted commentary in weekly magazines or daily newspapers. A few scholarly studies are concerned with film history, which is obviously the primary need. Of special value is the work of scholars Nicanor Tiongson and Bienvenido Lumbera. Dr. Tiongson's "From Stage to Screen,"¹⁰ for example, examines folk drama as a source for the Filipino film; and his "Four Values in Filipino Drama and Film,"¹¹ studies colonial values expressed in both media. Dr. Lumbera's as yet unpublished study of the archetypal heroes and heroines in Philippine film sees them as derived from Philippine literature, e.g. Kristo, Hudas, Mahal na Birhen and Maria Magdalena from the *Pasyon*; Florante, Laura, Florida and Aladin, from *Florante at Laura*; and Ibarra, Ma. Clara and Sisa from the Rizal novels.

9. The following are cited by John Lent: Guillermo de Vega, *Film and Freedom: Movie Censorship in the Philippines*, 1975; Vicente Salumbides, *Motion Pictures in the Philippines*, 1952; Julio Silverio, *Sulyap sa Buhay ng mga Artistang Pilipino*, 1973; Monina A. Mercado, ed., *Dona Sisang and Filipino Movies*, 1977; and *Film Directory*, 1977.

10. Nicanor G. Tiongson, "From Stage to Screen," *Philippines: International Popular Culture* 1 (1980): 60-67.

11. Nicanor G. Tiongson, "Four Values in Filipino Drama and Film," *Rediscovery* (Quezon City: The Ateneo de Manila University, 1977), pp. 198-211.

Dr. Lumbera has also written a paper on the difficulties of research on the Philippine film, citing the absence of film archives, and the problems adhering to each of the periods of the development of the Filipino film.

A researcher of De La Salle University has compiled an as yet unpublished bibliography of periodical sources on the Filipino film.

Radio. In June 1922, three 50-watt stations owned and operated by an electrical supply company and organized by an American, Henry Hermann, were given temporary permits to set up stations in Manila and Pasay.¹² The stations were mainly for demonstration, and for about two years provided mostly music for the few who owned sets. They were replaced by a 100-watt station, KZKZ.

By 1939 there were four stations owned by department stores, which used them mainly to advertise their own merchandise. Advertising in radio by companies other than the owners began in 1932. Radio control laws were promulgated at about the same time that these outside advertisements began to be accepted.

Radio in the thirties is said to have gained almost as much glamor as the movies, since newspaper attention was lavished on radio personalities, just as it was on movie stars. "Sunrise Club" and "Listerine Amateur Hour" were the more popular radio shows.

During the Japanese occupation, all radio stations were closed, except KZRH, which was renamed PIAM. Reception on short-wave was strictly forbidden, but many receiving set owners risked their lives to listen to broadcasts of "The Voice of Juan de la Cruz," the "Voice of Freedom" from Corregidor (till May 1942) and the Voice of America. It was on these hidden radio sets that the underground newspapers depended heavily for information on the war.

But 1945, and the end of the occupation, heralded the real birth of Philippine radio. Within five years after the war, there were thirty operating stations. In 1961, the largest broadcasting chain in the Philippines began to be formed, first as the Bolinao Electronics Corporation, which became then the Alto Broadcast-

12. Much of the data on the history of radio in the Philippines is from Lent, *Philippine Mass Communications*, pp. 78-94.

ing System, then the Chronicle Broadcasting Network, which after Martial Law became the Kanlaon Broadcasting System.

Programming in the first post-war years was heavily American in flavor, consisting mostly of canned US serials. DZRH initiated the first successful local shows: Philippine Manufacturing Company's "Purico Show," "Kwentong Kapitbahay," the first soap opera in Pilipino, and "Kapitan Kidlat," about a Philippine superhero.

Republic Broadcasting System's DZBB, started by Bob Stewart on 1 March 1950, became famous for on-the-spot news coverage, and for "Newscoop," a program on which controversial individuals discussed "hot" subjects.

From those early days and past landmarks like the famous "Kuwentong Kutsero" of the fifties, a satire on Filipino manners, mores, politics, and government which eventually moved on to television; "Kami Naman," a situation comedy; and "Vicks' Variety Show," the formula of Philippine radio developed. It consists of a maximum of soap opera, a quantity of emceed popular music programs (with commentary, jokes, and dedications), public service and advice-to-the-lovelorn programs, and news, with a few "different" shows as spice — developmental programs beamed at farmers, *balagtasan* for the Tagalog regions, *composo* for the *Ilongo* regions, religious programs, and very occasionally, classical music.

A survey made in 1969 by the *Economic Monitor* showed that 62 percent of a total of 6,347,000 households had radio sets, and there were 1.5 million sets in the islands. In Rizal province, surrounding Manila, 50 percent of the homes had radios, whereas in Albay only 4 percent. In Manila, 87 percent of the households had radio sets. It was obvious that radios were massed in urban centers.¹³

The reach of radio changed in 1959, with the "transistor revolution." President Carlos P. Garcia asked CARE to donate a few thousand transistor radios for the barrios, explaining that these would "combat subversive elements in the rural areas,"

13. In 1975 the Broadcast Media Council registered 231 commercial and non-commercial radio stations throughout the archipelago, forty-one in Greater Manila. In 1972, 90 percent of all households had at least one radio receiver, with an average listening time per household of two to four hours daily. See Valerio L. Nofuente, "The Media in Search of Social Function," *WHO?*, 22 July 1978.

most of which, of course, did not, and still do not, have electricity.

In the barrio, therefore, where the traditional – and often the only – method of spreading or getting information was by word of mouth, the transistor radio became a towering presence, bringing news of the government and of the city and its problems; infusing pop music into the domain of the kundiman; spreading, in effect, popular culture beyond the urban sprawl and into the rural folk realm.

The two principal forms of popular culture conveyed by radio are popular music (which will be dealt with later in this article) and the radio soap opera. Both have been studied in different ways by mass communications researchers, principally through content analyses and surveys determining the effects on the attitudes of listeners. The two principal writers who have used other approaches are: Virgilio V. Vitug, poet and journalist, who takes a historico-critical approach, and Jose Javier Reyes, who takes a semi-literary approach. Vitug, calling the radio soap opera “Pabrika ng Luha at Pantasya,”¹⁴ feels that the scriptwriters are “imprisoned” by time constraints (they write two to four scripts daily) and by formula plots, and should awake to their responsibility to make radio drama an instrument for awareness and education, and thus a spring of information and truth. Reyes studies the female roles in the dramas – the expected and unrelenting martyrdom that make the heroines dominant over the males, and that causes tears to fall on the audience’s ironing boards – and asks: is this reflected reality, the authentic lot of woman in semi-feudal Philippine society, or is it instead the source of an idea that has been successfully implanted through all these years?¹⁵ One might note at this point that the longest-running shows on radio were the serials “Ilaw ng Tahanan” (nine years) and “Gulong ng Palad,” recently translated to television, both built on the foolproof formula of cascades of tears and flocks of martyred women.

Popular Magazines. The first magazine of general circulation (vis-a-vis those of special interest, for example, the religious week-

14. Virgilio V. Vitug, “Pabrika ng Luha at Pantasya,” *Sagisag* 1 (September 1975): 13-17.

15. Jose Javier Reyes, “Radio Soap Opera,” *Philippines: International Popular Culture* 1 (1980): 68-74.

lies of the 19th century) in the Philippines was probably *The Philippine Magazine*, published in 1905. It cannot quite be called "popular," however, since it was in English, and therefore, not available to the majority, especially at that time, when the teaching of English had begun only four years earlier. Perhaps it is the *Philippines Free Press* which should be called the first, because although it was in English, it was printed on cheap newsprint and eventually, by the time it stopped publication in 1972, was indeed read by the majority of the English-speaking Philippine public.

Quite obviously, a real popular magazine would have to be in the vernacular, and although there have been many shortlived publications in this century, the popular magazine was definitely *Liwayway*, started in 1923, and which by 1941 had a circulation of 89,000.¹⁶ With its sister publications *Bisaya*, in Cebuano Visayan; *Hiligaynon*, in Ilongo Visayan; *Bannawag*, in Ilocano, and *Bicolnon* in Bicol, *Liwayway* became the cornerstone of popular publishing in the Philippines. To date, only *Bisaya* and *Bannawag* remain of the provincial weeklies, but *Liwayway* is an institution.

Studies of the *Liwayway* poems, short stories and novels, interestingly enough, would be literary studies, and not popular culture studies. For this popular publication has been, throughout its history, the venue for most of the published Tagalog poetry and fiction by serious writers in the vernacular.¹⁷ The elite magazines, on better paper and with finer printing, were publishing English material, and so this colonial after-effect made the Tagalog writer both serious and popular at the same time, since he had a concrete audience to reach, and editors who had definite ideas about what that audience wanted.

More definitely within the domain of the popular culturist are the women's magazines like *Women's Home Companion*, *Women's Journal*, *Mr. & Ms.*, *Mod*, and even the spicy *Jingle Extra Hot* (recently lost to the anti-smut campaign). These sell "a couple of

16. The information on magazines is mainly from Lent, *Philippine Mass Communications*, pp. 53-77.

17. There is no "high culture" to speak of in the vernacular. Isagani Cruz explains it thus: "... there is no point talking about the Tagalog popular novel as opposed to the Tagalog novel, since Tagalog novels are always popular, being published serially in *Liwayway* or similar magazines." See his "Why Study Pop Culture?," *The Diliman Review* 27 (October-December 1979): 53.

hundred thousand issues per week,"¹⁸ mostly in Metro Manila, and are in English, with occasional Pilipino sections.

Dr. Soledad Reyes sees them as escape literature for "bored housewives. . . harried office girls, ordinary clerks, pimply school girls, old maids, pseudo-sophisticated college girls, overworked teachers and other kinds of women — from seven to seventy."¹⁹ They supply emotional crutches, support for sagging morale, assurance that the reader can be transformed into a ravishing sophisticate through a great diversity of articles (mostly syndicated) that fall into a pattern of success. First there are the "how-to" articles on being beautiful, being sexy, etc. Then the "intimate glimpses" into the lives of the jet set, the celebrities, the stars. Then a tour of beautiful places, and finally enough of a dose of psychology, or medicine, or psychiatry to top up the package.

This is a field relatively unexplored by research. There are a few mass communications studies, and two essays by Dr. Reyes, one on the image of woman that emerges from these magazines, and the other on its being a "dream factory."²⁰

Popular Music. Until as recently as seven years ago, pop music in the Philippines was definitely American. There was popular music earlier — kundimans, zarzuelas, love songs, street songs, children's nonsense songs — and although some of these actually found their way into records, they were not sung on vaudeville stages or spun out on the airlines. Even the nationalism and activism of the late sixties and early seventies did not change the steady diet of American pop, rock, and Broadway on the airlines, TV variety shows, and stage shows, although they did arouse an interest in old Philippine songs which were sometimes reworded to suit new conditions.

In 1973, however, Joey Smith and his Juan de la Cruz band experimented with what later came to be called Pinoy rock.²¹ The sound was heavy Western rock, but the lyrics were in Pilipino, and pleaded for "our own music." Soon came a group called the

18. The information on the women's magazines is culled from Soledad Reyes, "The Image of Woman," in *Readings in Bilingual Contemporary Philippine Literature* ed. Visitacion R. de la Torre (Manila: National Book Store, 1977), pp. 48-55.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

20. Soledad Reyes, "Magasing Pambabae: Pabrikang Pangarap," *The Diliman Review* 27 (October-December 1979): 58-60, and article cited in n. 18.

21. Teresita Gimenez-Maceda, "Popular Music," *Philippine International Popular Culture* 1 (1980): 24-32.

Hot Dog with a slowed down, melodious beat, and a hit with a title in Taglish, "Pers Lab" (lyrics in Taglish and colloquial Tagalog). When serious poet Rolando Tinio translated an album of American songs into Pilipino for singer Celeste Legaspi, producing songs so beautiful they seemed newly composed, the Pinoy trend was on. The Broadcast Media Council gave the spontaneous movement a boost by requiring each radio station to play at least three Filipino songs every hour (an indication of how much American music was being played). Some radio stations responded by having all-Filipino programs, and suddenly Pinoy pop had arrived, aided by prizes and contests for performers, lyricists, etc. and especially by the Metro Manila Pop Song Festival with its generous prizes for winning songs. A phenomenal, untrained composer-singer, Freddie Aguilar, went international with "Anak," in which musicologists saw, beneath the folk beat, strains of indigenous pre-Hispanic music.

At the present, the only thing truly Filipino about Pinoy rock is its lyrics. The music is still heavily derivative of American pop, folk, and rock, but the words have begun to be eloquent about Filipino life and concerns; critical about society, people and mores; prophetic even. Having found a steadier base for his identity, many a musician is wandering further backwards, and exploring native rhythms and instruments, with which to support the Filipino sensibility he sings about.

Being so young a field, most of the research literature on pop music consists of short pieces in weekly magazines and the dailies. *Jingle* magazine, devoted to all types of popular music, has been publishing news and commentary on Philippine pop music since 1973. However, serious scholarly attention is now being devoted to it by musicologist and composer Felipe de Leon, Jr., music critic Anna Leah de Leon, and singer and literature scholar Tere-sita G. Maceda. These have spearheaded the formation of a circle of music critics which aims to devote serious study to popular Filipino music, and to disseminate this study through lectures and articles.

The Literature of Popular Culture. The literature of popular culture consists mainly of: a) reportage and feature stories in daily newspapers and weekly magazines; b) reviews of films, television shows, pop concerts or performances, and very occasionally, radio

programs; c) studies by mass communication undergraduates, thesis writers, and scholars; d) studies by literature students and scholars; and e) studies by the very few scholars (mainly originating from the disciplines of literature and sociology) whose consciousness has been awakened to popular culture as a field of serious research.

The problem with most of the above is that it is done in isolation, without a clear perspective, and unlocated in a definite context. There is, in other words, no concerted effort to define the Filipino through his popular culture, or to synthesize findings so as to determine this culture's broad effects on him.

The journalists use journalistic norms — newsworthiness, currency, human interest. The mass communication scholars tend to count and tabulate. Even when using content analysis, which could be useful in identifying trends, values, attitudes, philosophies, etc., mass communication studies tend to itemize and enumerate, when quantification should be used only as a means towards explaining meaning and significance. Literary scholars naturally tend to use literary norms in the critical stances taken after themes are established, characters analyzed, implications and values read.

No one can be blamed, since each is using the methods customary to his discipline, and most have not even realized that the material they are examining is that "new thing," popular culture. What, then, should be done? Where are the context, the perspective, and the methods to come from?

DIRECTIONS

The above cursory survey of areas of Philippine popular culture and the research done in them makes clear the fact that although there seems to be a volume of available literature touching on popular culture and related topics, much of it is diffuse, unstructured, and not always focused on either the significance of the popularity of the cultural form, or the meaning of the cultural form that has achieved such popularity. The tasks facing research in Philippine popular culture, therefore, include:

1. *Definition.* A stable definition of "popular culture" in the Philippine context has to be reached. More than the choice of topics that can be included under popular culture study,

this also involves defining boundaries or overlaps with respect to other relatively established fields of inquiry (for example, mass communications, drama, literature) in terms of theory, methods, and concerns.²²

2. *Review of Literature.* There is a need for critical review and integration of all the related literature, to define the problems of and possibilities for future research.
3. *Identification of Issues.* Since popular culture in the Philippines was brought about mainly by the entry from the United States of mass media into a culture already heavily American in orientation because of the colonial experience, discussion of popular culture should consider the following and related issues:
 - a) Commodified culture and consumerism, exemplified in the generation of false needs through advertisements and the exposure to an alien lifestyle through forms of popular culture;
 - b) Westernized taste and consciousness, or cultural imperialism and cultural satellization, through imported films, television shows, publications, and popular songs;
 - c) The mystification of Philippine social realities and the pacification of any feelings against current reality by means of the legitimization of economic and political structures not only through the content of TV, radio, film, and comics stories, but also through slogans, government advertising, programming, and the like.
4. *Identification of the "public."* The audience, the *populus*, that makes culture popular rather than elite should be identified in the concrete Philippine context. What is the popular writer's concept of his public? How is his, or the industry's idea of what "sells" formulated? Is there a feedback mechanism?
5. *Definition of the popular writer.* Considering the size of his audience, the popular writer is definitely a significant intellectual. Since the Pilipino writer generally writes for the popular magazines, is he then also a "serious" writer? How is

22. For the ideas presented here in numbers one to five, the author is indebted to discussions with Laura Samson, of the Department of Sociology, University of the Philippines.

the popular writer then linked to the literary tradition? To what socio-economic status does he belong, and how is this differentiated from that of his audience? From that of other writers? Does this have bearing on the "popularity" of his work?

6. *Identification of purpose.* "Popular culture is power," and since it is not created by the people who "consume" it, who does, and to what purpose?²³ Is it for profit? or for development? or in manipulation?
7. *Deepening of inquiry into fields already explored.* The preceding survey has shown that much of the work done to date on popular culture has been survey work: the history of the field, its current state, its significance in Philippine life, perhaps an evaluation. In these fields — film, radio, television, comics, magazines, — it is now necessary to start narrow-field, in-depth studies. An underlying aesthetic may be determined; the link to tradition; the Filipino quality in the form or an aspect of it; how it functions as a cultural indicator.
8. *Identification of other fields of inquiry.* A few other fields not mentioned here have already been explored by one or two individuals: *popular arts*, namely the ceramic and crocheted objects that the low-budget housewife buys with which to decorate her home;²⁴ *popular languages*, like *swardspeak*, Taglish, the young slang; *popular religiosity*, e.g. the Sto. Niño, the icons hanging in jeepneys, the rites and rituals in Quiapo; food habits; disco culture. But how about the language of gesture, popular architectural taste, sports, graffiti, and that tremendously rich expanse, the pop icon? What Filipino pop icons are there besides the jeepney, and what effect do they have on the community's understanding of itself?

Popular culture as a form of discourse serves as a potent force for persuasion and value-building and for the perception of consciousness. In the Philippines today, as we have seen, it is largely

23. Lumbera, "Popular Culture as Politics," p. 13.

24. Alice Guillermo, "The Popular Arts," *Philippines: International Popular Culture* 1 (1980): 53-59.

available to the urban population in Metro Manila, the primate city, and in the urban centers of education, planning and work. In the rural areas, ethnic culture dominates among the tribal groups; folk culture among the rest. The latter, however, because of rural electrification and the transistor radio, are starting to be touched as well by popular culture. In the small, Third World, developing nation that is the Philippines, in which the majority are the poor, the mass, the *populus*, popular culture is indeed power, and therefore demands systematic and purposeful attention.

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