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# POP AND CIRCUMSTANCES: SOME OPERATIVE PREMISES

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Social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which mislead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.

- *Karl Marx*

I haven't rejected Marxism. Something different has occurred. It is Marxism that has broken up and I believe I am holding on to its best fragments.

- *Ernesto Laclau*

There is little chance that a moralizing denunciation of the logic of consumerism will have any significant effect in contemporary society, or that it will prove much more attractive than the revival, say, of the old religious motif of the vow of poverty.

- *Fredric Jameson*

**T**he insipid response of Philippine academe to the theoretical initiatives that attempt to reappropriate the conjunctural possibilities from within the territory of the "popular/mass" is surely symptomatic of either the basic instinct of orthodox leftist survival/political correctness or of the discreet charm of the bourgeoisie/party — wherever it may sublimate and in whatever form it may assume. In fact, there are moments when these two apparently oppositional tendencies coalesce in their efforts to fence out the discourses of the popular/mass from their respective canons of privileged constructions. For clearly, the popular/mass cannot possibly gain efficacy as political instrument inasmuch as it, on the one hand, does not contain the Aesthetic and, on the other, it *contains*, precisely, the guerilla revolution. Thus runs conventional wisdom hereabouts. Either which way, the domain of the popular/mass, together with the constituencies whence it derives the power to prevail, the mandate to write texts, to shape lives,

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and to bring forth worlds, is denied of any substantial form of theoretical investiture as a legitimate agency of tactical partisanship and strategic cogency. In other words, it does not count. And the academe cannot but distance itself from it because the popular/mass offers no distancing effect that operates on the Aesthetic and the Ideological.

It is this bipolaristic negation that must be problematized. This paper, however, specifically locates left-wing mediations of, if I may implicate the imprimatur of the master narrative, Marxist theorizings on popular/mass culture; and concomitantly, the former's construals of the recuperative agenda pertaining to the latter. I feel that it is the revolutionary project, more than any other enterprise still in business today, that must learn to reckon with the subversive desires inscribed in and sustained by the technology of popular pleasure. After all: while the culture in the popular is not "cultured," its claim to popularity invokes the people and the mass. Simply put, what is at stake really are crucial territories of contestations, loci of confrontations, sites of struggles.

Tony Bennett's "Marxism and Popular Fiction" (in *Popular Fictions: Essays in Literature and History*. Ed. Peter Humm, Paul Stigant, and Peter Widdowson, 1986) lays bare the sort of cavalier nonchalance with which canonical Marxist thinkers grasp popular culture. Bennett posits that Lukacs, for instance, has nothing to say on the subject; not a word. Goldman for his part virtually precludes discursive activities on the popular front: according to him, only great works of the past can express worldviews. Even Althusser sets up dichotomies that contradistinguish "authentic art" from "works of an average or mediocre level." And to finally deal the death blow to the popular, the Frankfurt School passionately preaches the logic of false consciousness, the principle which underlies its leftist moralism, its derisive dismissal of mass culture, and its valorization of high modern and avant-garde art.

Bennett ably demonstrates that Marxism's high priests have not only treated popular culture condescendingly, they have snobbed it decisively and, worse, excluded it from the revolutionary catalogue raisonné. It is this theoretical marginalization which predisposes Bennett to conclude that it is within the Marxist horizon of habitus to negatively define the popular — which ironically partakes of the same populist population/mass the movement contracts/conscripts to further the cause — against something it deems more aesthetically potent and politically exigent. By plundering texts for the evidence of falsifications of reality which they putatively embody, like quarries to be "sociologically ransacked," Marxist criticisms, Bennett continues, "have joined hands with bourgeois criticism in reproducing, in the very form of their critical practice itself, the Literature/popular fiction distinction in its ideological form." (p. 250)

Bennett further probes into the inquiry by zeroing in on the underside of production: the notion of value, valuing, and valuation. He argues: "Texts do not have value, they can only be valued by valuing subjects of particular types and for particular reasons, and these are entirely the product of critical discourses of valuations, varying from criticism to criticism." (p. 244) Bennett then proceeds to see through the ways in which Marxists value texts, with the view of finding out how these procedures and methods militate in the final analysis against a more politically enabling reading of the popular.

Lukacs, according to Bennett, appraises texts "in proportion to which they approximate the norm of historical self-knowledge," (p. 245) upholding the concept that texts must render "depth of historical penetration" and "social typicality." Althusser somewhat twists the tail of the Lukacsian prescription by stating that texts must be assessed "in terms of the extent to which (they) distance or rupture the ideological discourses to which they allude," (ibid.) emphasizing how the apparatuses of aesthetics, or the devices of defamiliarization, or the specific set

of disorienting formal operations work on and through texts. Against this theoretical background, Bennett is led to calculate the political effects that these critical perspectives could bring into the reading of the popular, insisting that we need to come to grips with "forms of critical practice that can best politicize the process of reading;" (p. 255) "to 'occupy' the domain of popular fiction merely provisionally; to treat it as a strategic site upon which to deconstruct the entire system of concepts of which popular fiction is at once a part and the excluded term." (p. 262)

The trouble with Lukacsian and Althusserian aesthetics is that it cannot account for those forms which do not fall under the rubric of Art — as interpreted either in terms of the prerogatives and criteria of Marxist ideologizing or of the Russian Formalist/New Critical etiquette. For what really debilitates the model, that which begirds the progressive/reactionary opposition, is actually the fascination with aesthetic form/art object as frame of reference: popular culture is to be considered void *ab initio* because of its *a priori* absence of artness/articity; before anything becomes politically correct and aesthetically defensible, or in other words, "real," it must be foremost and forever, once and for all, Art — whatever it takes. Otherwise, it has no theoretical personality and cultural capital: it cannot be discussed "seriously" and is not transactable as commodity of knowledge.

Herein lies the dilemma of how the problematics of power that make possible and ensure the status of art as social production and practice and as inculcated norm of specialized activities/disciplines could be *c/sited*, articulated, and then reappropriated to speak on behalf of certain interests and struggles, if the operative term is, for all intents and purposes, form as poetics — as in, say, pure literariness or cinematicity or any other technicianist category internalized by a universal valuing subject — or form as mode of production intricately within the text and representing unhistoricized historicity. How can the category of

the popular/mass be foregrounded then so that it would cease to be merely a sociological fact that can only aspire for artistic status in order to be construed as something significantly and functionally ideological and not just, in the words of Bennett, simply ideological? As he would point out: This lopsided historical approach makes it appear that "the history that flowed into the text through the conditions of its production were the only one that counted, overriding or cancelling out in advance the history which might bear on it through the history of its consumption." (p. 248)

Which inevitably brings us to the premise of contemporary cultural studies. Graeme Turner's *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction* (1990) provides a very interesting overview of the British tradition of cultural materialism as informed by the groundbreaking discourses of Antonio Gramsci, Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart, Stuart Hall, Richard Johnson, and E.P. Thompson, to cite only the most well-known. One need not reiterate here the paradigmatic shifts charted by cultural studies in the areas of language, discourse, hegemony, culture, subjectivity, audience, textuality, ideology, and reading. Suffice it to say that cultural studies has liberated Marxism from the inertia and torpor of its orthodoxy, remapping its territories, refunctioning its premises, and putting it to more responsive uses. If not for these epistemic ruptures, popular culture today, in spite of its overwhelming presence and effects, would still remain in the periphery of academic discourse and be virtually out of the reach of the academic, whose intervention in the process of its production and reproduction can only come in the form of consuming and then subsequently regurgitating pop pap and pulp in high modern disgust.

Terry Eagleton (*A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*, 1990) clarifies the claims of British Cultural Studies by resituating/repositioning Marxism within the theoretical agenda of other Marxisms:

But for Lukacs and Althusser, "Literature" itself remain a largely unproblematic term — as it does indeed for the Hegelian Marxists of the German Frankfurt School (notably Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse), who find in the very forms of art a spiritual transcendence of a sordidly class-bound society. They differ thus from the second major Marxist cultural heritage, which concerns itself less with the genesis of the art-work than with its political uses and effects, less with the literary product itself than with the social relations and cultural institutions from which it emerges. The aim of this tradition is to transform or dismantle the very meaning of the term "literature" by transforming the material means of cultural production in society as a whole. Prominent among such revolutionary cultural workers were the Bolshevik avant-garde artists (Futurists, Formalists, Constructivists, etc.) of the 1920s, who sought not merely a new meaning in art but a new meaning of art, fashioning new social relations between artists and audiences, collapsing the barriers between art and social life, and insisting on new media of cultural communication. Crushed by Stalinism, their great inheritors were the revolutionary artists and critics of Weimar Germany (Erwin Piscator, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin) and to some degree the Marxist surrealists of France gathered around Andre Breton. (p. 143)

For contemporary Marxism, there is no isolated "literature" to be ideologically examined; what we have instead is a set of literary modes of production, embedded in the dominant social relations of capitalism, which may themselves be transformed by political practice to produce new meanings of "literature" and new audiences. The literary works of the past must be studied in their historical conditions; but, more importantly, they must be constantly rewritten, in order to be put to different kinds of political use. (p. 144)

For her part, Angela McRobbie ("Post-Marxism and Cultural Studies" in *Cultural Studies*) notes:

It is not just textuality, difference, identity, politics, and Derrida's insistence on the relational and unfixed nature of meaning (the "floating signifier"), nor is it the "interruptions" of feminism and race which have wrought the crisis of Marxism in cultural studies. Stuart Hall is quite right to remind us that from the start cultural studies emerged as a form of radical inquiry which went against reductionism and economism, which went against the base and superstructure metaphor, and which resisted the notion of false consciousness. However, no matter how far removed cultural theory became from political economy, for example, it did, nonetheless, retain a sense of political urgency. (p. 720)

As Raymond Williams reminded us a long time ago:

The major modern communication systems are now so evidently key institutions in advanced capitalist societies that they require the same kind of attention, at least initially, that is given to the institutions of industrial production and distribution. Studies of the ownership and control of the capitalist press, the capitalist cinema, and capitalist and state capitalist radio and television interlock historically and theoretically, with wider analysis of capitalist society, capitalist economy and the neo-capitalist state. Further, many of the same institutions require analysis in the context of modern imperialism and neo-colonialism, to which they are crucially relevant.

Over and above their empirical results, these analyses force theoretical revision of the formula of base and superstructure and of the definition of productive forces, in a social area in which large scale capitalist economic activity and cultural production are now inseparable. Unless this theoretical revision is

made, even the best work of the radical and anti-capitalist empiricists is in the end overlaid or absorbed by the specific theoretical structures of bourgeois cultural sociology. (*Marxism and Literature*, 1977)

This debate on the reinvention of Marxist prerogatives in the face of broad changes has indeed shaken the armchairs of Marxists everywhere. Fredric Jameson has had to remind his confreres of the realignment of political economic variables in contemporary society, of the systemic overhaul which must be deemed as a determining talking point within which to situate new theoretical modalities. According to Jameson:

What is original about "late capitalism" (a generally accepted term for the third stage of the world-wide expansion of this system, after a nineteenth century national capitalism and an early twentieth-century "imperialist" or "colonial" one) is fundamentally cultural, and the greatest strides made in contemporary Marxian theory have been in this area (which it is important to grasp in the widest sense, as encompassing daily life, information, media and communications, the role and function of intellectuals, and abstract theory and philosophy of all kinds). What used to be called "cultural imperialism," that is today, the export of U.S. cultural products (film, television, information -- and misinformation -- ideologies, music, sports, clothing styles and other fashions), is, along with food, our most profitable industry, as well as our most powerful instrument for influence of a material as well as an ideological type (what my tradition calls "hegemony") over foreign countries...Into this cultural void then, and as the only form of some possible resistance to a universal English-speaking American/Disneyland culture all over the globe, the various so-called religious fundamentalisms have then flowed. It remains to be seen whether they can resist the U.S. "life-style" tidal wave

(certainly, some American religious "fundamentalisms" have seemed utterly compatible with consumption on an energetic scale).

At any rate, the academic relevance of these developments is as follows. What is barbarously called "reification theory" (or the analysis of so-called commodity fetishism) used to be a secondary tradition with Marxism; today it has become the dominant mode of analysis (or "problematic") of all Marxist investigations (from sociological ones to those of high literature and mass culture, from psychoanalytic studies of the subject and of gender and sexuality all the way to finance capitalism, the international Debt, and the power of the IMF)." (from "Actually Existing Marxism," pp 15-16, unpublished manuscript)

Jameson's recognition of the need to reorganize the Marxist problematic, however, is not sustained by a more radical revamp of operative premises. While Jameson proceeds from the position that the capitalist world has already entered the orbit of late or multinational or informational capitalism or postmodern culture "with its new technologies (cybernetic and nuclear) and its new internal expansion and commodification, which has most often been described as a colonization of the mind (but also an industrialization of hitherto precapitalist agricultures), or in short what we might characterize as the commodification of those last two remaining zones of a certain freedom we still call Nature and Unconscious" (p. 12); he still cannot come up with a more revolutionary term with which to categorize this transitional moment. Jameson, in fact, cannot but simply reiterate that "late capitalism is still capitalism," albeit a "prodigious mutation," to be sure. On the one hand, Jameson insists that it is the challenge of Marxism today to "generate an enlarged theory of capitalism capable of explaining the production of a whole host of new social levels and the development of a whole range of new differentiations" (p. 13), on the other, trapped as he is in the epistemic circumscrip-

tions of classical capitalism which he thinks are still operative, Jameson believes that the problematic of Marxism which "developed around the peculiarities of the production of value in industrial capitalism, at a crucial central space -- that of surplus value..." (p. 8) has not been substantially altered:

(I)t does not seem empirically plausible to suggest that the internal dynamics of present-day capitalism (or late industrial business, if you prefer) have been radically modified. Surely the whole system continues to revolve around the maximization of profit, and its participants are not at liberty to suspend that fundamental motive even locally, let alone to replace it altogether in certain areas. What we see today, rather is the spread of the profit motive in a generalized and tendentially global and universal fashion, so that it comes to be basic and to recognize areas hitherto relatively exempt from that pressure (areas that might range from old-fashioned book publishing to village agriculture). In the language of my philosophy, this is called the penetration of capital into hitherto uncommodified zones and enclaves, and the process today is omnipresent... (p. 10)

Along with capitalism, Jameson likewise upholds the tenability of class as always having "the last word" in the long run, thus undermining the possibilities of overdetermination, which he seems to apprehend as "delicious pluralism of late capitalism and its alleged celebration of a host of social differences" (p. 4), or as precondition for alliance-building, which is premised on the completion and realization of class through race and gender: "What this idea suggests minimally is that if you forget any one of these basic categories, it does not fail to remember you." (p.30)

Jameson's self-reflexive critique of post-Marxisms, poststructuralisms, and postmodernisms opens up Marxism and lets the air in, so to speak. But the way he anchors certain crucial problematics on the axiomatics of class, capitalism, commodification, and the "various cultural and

consumerist mirages and intoxications" (p. 40) concomitant to their practices somewhat fails to convince us that Marxism, as it is appraised here, can really grapple with the "new diasporic social logic" that would usher in a "new global oppositional language and culture." Surely, Marxism, which Jameson compels to explore "all kinds of interesting overtones about fetishism" in a "truly modern or postmodern way," (p. 40) has to intertext with its others.

And Arif Dirlik, writing in "Post-Socialism/Flexible Production: Marxism in Contemporary Radicalism," precisely talks about this. Dirlik begins by stating that "in its spatial and temporal premises, Marxism is indeed limited by a conceptualization of the world in which the capitalist mode of production provides the principles for ordering time and space..." (p. 2) He continues:

More bluntly, beneath the surface formulations concerning an alternative social existence to that prevailing under capitalism, Marxism in its spatial and temporal premises has suffered from the ideological hegemony of the capitalist mode of production of which it was the product, which has limited its ability to conceive of authentic alternatives to capitalism -- to which the ruins of "socialist" societies stand as sad testimonials. For all its powerful critique of capitalism, therefore, Marxism must rise and fall with the capitalist mode of production. (ibid.)

Dirlik thus locates at once the crisis of Marxism: that is, its failure to absorb the shocks of capitalist transformations and consequently "come to terms with alternative radical critiques of capitalist society that have their sources outside of the Marxist tradition. In other words, can Marxism be made into something other than a 'derivative discourse' -- that is, derivative of capitalism?" (p.6)

By subjecting Marxism to a Marxist critique, Dirlik undercuts the former's illusion that it can essentialize the production, organization, marketing, circulation, and consumption of capitalism.



One can no longer safely invoke capitalism as a homogenous, continuous, undifferentiated, and exclusive category of practice. For, verily, as Dirlik points out, "while the capitalist mode of production persists, it has gone through phases that differ significantly from one another in social and political organization, and even the organization of production." (p. 27) And so, let us now swoop down to the bottomline: since it has been agreed on already that capitalism is no longer the capitalism of before, is it still viable to cling to the knowledge it implicates, to its vision of the world, to its strategies of struggle? Moreover, it is as if capitalism were overwhelmingly preemptive and preclusive that non-capitalist modes could not exist by virtue of its presence. How do we now assess the dynamics of overlapping modes of production in the Philippines, for instance? Is capitalism, as defined in terms of Eurocentric parameters, singularly salient to the analysis of this kind of milieu?

Dirlik, who also thinks that global capitalism is still capitalism, enumerates further the changes in the climate. He claims for one that the transnational corporation "has taken over national markets as the locus of economic activity, which is not just a passive medium for the transmission of capital, commodities and production, but determines the nature of the transmission, and its direction." (p. 40) Also, global capitalism has in a sense "homogenized" the world, eroded the power of nation, and transformed the function of the nation-state. According to Dirlik:

Transnational corporations, in their organization as well as their activities in production and consumption, have created a transnational class of professionals and managers, dependent groups that are tied to it through subcontracting and other mechanisms, global patterns of consumption and, with it, a global culture. (p. 44)

But this globalization is not really thoroughly efficient. Dirlik highlights, too, the contradictions that destabilize the attempt to absolutize the world,

recuperating in the process the emergent role of nationness or ethnicity in this new political and economic end/game: "It is probably not accidental that while globalism finds its most enthusiastic advocates among the more powerful transnational corporations with bases in the economically stronger states (the Trilateral or Triad areas of the United States, Western Europe and Japan), newcomers on the scene (such as from Taiwan and South Korea) are more visibly tied in with the nationality and nation-states of their origins." (p. 44)

It is in this context that the previous construals of Marxism collapse. Dirlik particularly pounces on the privileging of class as the determining agency of practice. To quote:

The political implications of this tendency are equally horrendous: in existing socialist societies, the abstract notion of class was to be appropriated by the vanguard leadership, to be used to deny the complex social existence of the very laboring classes themselves, to remake them forcefully in the image of the abstraction. This kind of teleology has not only proven to be politically and socially dangerous; it is hardly appropriate at a time when the structure of social existence and individual consciousness appears more blatantly than ever as the overdetermined product of social relationship. (p. 60)

Indeed, Marxism can no longer turn a blind eye on the fact that the world is organized and cleft along new lines. From a conference on marketing, we listen to this report:

The world market is now being computer micromapped into consumer zones according to residual cultural factors (i.e. idioms, local traditions, religious affiliations, political ideologies, folk mores, traditional sexual roles, etc.), dominant cultural factors (i.e. typologies of lifestyles based on consumption patterns: television ratings, musical tastes, fashions, motion picture and concert attendance, home video

rentals, magazine subscriptions, home computer software selection, shopping mall participation, etc.), and emergent cultural factors (i.e. interactive and participatory video, mobile micromalls equipped with holography and super conductivity, computer inter-facing with consumers, robotic services, etc.). The emergent marketing terrain which must be our primary concern can only be covered totally if the 304 geographical consumption zones already computer mapped (the horizontal) can be cross referenced not only with the relatively homogenous "conscious" needs of the macroconsumer units, but also with the heterogenous multiplicity of "unconscious" needs of the microconsumer (the vertical). (pp. 61-62)

It is this rigorous reterritorialization of mobile positionalities that must be taken very seriously, and not just liped-service to. It is not seldom to hear orthodox Marxists quoting poststructuralists, only to reduce society to the determinations of class or mode of production. A Tausug single mother living in Tondo's slums cannot be conveniently categorized as poor only; the potentially "contradictory endowments" of being Tausug, woman, single mother, and squatter are indispensable pressures that overdetermine her subjectivity. Furthermore, her relationships with Metro Manila, patriarchal, Catholic, Filipino culture also impinge on the multiple constructions of her heterogenous personality. This irreducible overdetermination of the subject must never be seen as a liberal democratic and bourgeois/reactionary ploy to invalidate the revolution, to elide struggle, to erase the subject as historical agent, and to valorize coalitional and parliamentary politics. Rather, it must be considered as a necessary staging of the symptoms of a changing world, of the dialectical risks that rankle in the ambiguous and overlapping moments of the dominant, residual, and emergent. The site of combat must no longer be romanticized and idealized as the *querilla* zone. It must be widened to encompass all activities that speak of change in the name of various causes. The war is on, yes, but the

trope of seizure through armed conflict is not the only metaphor/option people can avail of in their intense aspiration to strike a better deal.

What this paper aims to underscore is the processes by which power moves, how it is mobilized to disseminate truths, to construct categories, and to make sure that these mediated realities are inserted into legitimating institutional networks and are received by various constituencies as natural and ineluctable. One cannot possibly gain access to this terra incognita if one continued to subscribe to the idea that aesthetic form forms the basis of difference. To do this would be to altogether and retroactively obviate the potentialities of popular cultural texts in prefiguring spaces for intervention in daily life's exchange and transaction of power. Indeed, there is much to theorize on the "sociological realities of pop consumption."

Cluing us into this area is Pierre Bourdieu who problematizes the mechanics of consumption, of how people define things against an implicit standard, of why they are competent to judge things and events, and of how because of this competence they coopt the power to see and know the world in specific terms. Bourdieu in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984) outlines the contours of this conceptual landscape:

Consumption is...a stage in a process of communication, that is, an act of deciphering, decoding, which presupposes practical or explicit mastery of a cipher or code. In a sense, one can say that the capacity to see (*voir*) is a function of the knowledge (*savoir*), or concepts, that is, the words, that are available to name visible things, and which are, as it were, programmes for perception... Thus the encounter with a work of art is not 'love at first sight' as is generally supposed, and the act of empathy, *Einfühlung*, which is the art-lover's pleasure, presupposes an act of cognition, a decoding operation, which implies the implementation

of a cognitive acquirement, a cultural code."  
(pp. 2-3)

Bourdieu tells us that how/why we see and know things is regulated by a matrix of predispositions that exerts pressure on our reception of/towards those things. Ordinary movie fans, for instance, might simply view *Dear Heart* as a Sharon Cuneta flick, but a movie critic worth his/her salt might regard it as a typical Danny Zialcita film. To be sure, there is a disjunction that cleaves the reading of the fan and the critic. But the more interesting point here is that this slippage also disrupts the illusion of the critic/academic that s/he can impose on the fan what to see and how to see it in the "proper" way. Fans see things the way they do because they belong to a discursive community governed by rules of interpretation which they are competent enough to recognize. In spite of the academic efficacy vested in the judgement of critics and the very real effects of canonical benediction, fans mediate reality in their own fashion because they have defined for themselves a context of interpretive alternatives and options within which and against which they make sense of their interactions with society and themselves.

Meaning thus is not read-off from the text by a fixed unitary reader, but rather produced by an overdetermined subject circumscribed by the predisposition to respond to taste, which cannot but represent and reproduce the competence to read according to a range of meaningful norms. It is this power to mediate reality, the competence to site subject-positionality, the habitus to privilege ideologies and subjectivities that ought to be the subject of a thoroughgoing theory which, following Fredric Jameson, must dismantle or deconstruct the intertextual parts of the text and describe its functioning. Aside from the promising breakthroughs in audience studies, which have intelligently reformulated the equation of analysis from literary criticism/textual representation to cultural studies to sociology of reception, Jameson reminds us to resort to the knowledge already cleared off by

Michel Foucault's "political technology of the body," Jacques Derrida's "grammatology," Jean Baudrillard's "symbolic exchange," Jean Francois Lyotard's libidinal economy, and Julia Kristeva's "semanalyse."

We can ask, for instance, how women viewers negotiate the multiple implications of what could be feminist subversions in popular cinema. If Tania Modleski, writing in "The Search for Tomorrow in Today's Soap Operas," can toy with the idea that soap operas need not necessarily be apprehended as an entirely negative influence on the viewer, but rather as a force of negation, a "negation of the typical (and masculine) modes of pleasure in our society" — which privilege narrative verities such as "progression," "climax," "resolution," "irreversible change," "expectation of imminent closure" — we might as well find out how Filipino women filmgoers smuggle out meanings from films churned out by, as it were, the irremediably masculinist and capitalist movie industry. What would they make of the heroine's refusal to deteriorate into a damsel in distress and reject in no uncertain terms Prince Charmings who are vacillating wimps (Hilda Koronel/Christopher de Leon in *Kung Mahawi Man ang Ulap*), repentant rapists (Hilda Koronel/Christopher de Leon in *Kapag Puso'y Sinugatan*), manipulative social climbers (Maricel Soriano/Richard Gomez in *Ikaw Pa Lang ang Minahal*), libidinal lotharios (Dawn Zulueta, Maricel Laxa/Richard Gomez in *Iisa Pa Lamang*)? In what ways would they remanufacture the desires of Sharon Cuneta in *Tayong Dalawa* who continually reterritorializes her positionalities as at once single brown yuppie living alone in a condominium and apart from her conservative mother, lover to an unwed husband, and potential mother of an illegitimate daughter; or of Nanette Medved in *Hinum na Mukha* who has to undergo a surgery of neurotic facelifts from slum carnival freak, to modern-day Frankenstein fancied by a demented medic, to remorseful parvenu? How, I wonder, should they cope with the stress induced by the anxieties and neuroses of these feminist utopian aspirations to

contravene patriarchal protocol and inaugurate a less oppressive destiny?

The struggle of and by women thus to construct new conditions for visibility and intervention in the arena of textual practice and production of gender discourse rages fuchsia bright. But, definitely, there are casualties. Why is it, for instance, that the liberal, witty, financially independent Vilma Santos suddenly and easily degenerates into a bed-hopping, chain-smoking lady-in-waiting who finds life incomplete and meaningless without Eddie Rodriguez. But why must he always come? Why must the metrical trope be upheld? Can women not live in their own terms? Apparently, men are threatened when the woman can hold out on her own. Look what happens to Maricel Laxa in *Ikaw Ang Lahat Sa Akin*. Because she is smarter than Richard Gomez, she is conveniently portrayed as an overly ambitious nouveau riche, a disputatious fishwife, indeed, the perfect foil to Janice de Belen, a self-effacing, sickly, docile elementary school teacher with whom Richard cohabits in the conjugal home. Man is seemingly an island. But how about the women?

Well, Sharon Cuneta was able to put up a flourishing restaurant business without Gabby Concepcion in *Bakit Ikaw Pa Rin?* Nora Aunor as the southern belle Magnolia de la Cruz was able to head a conglomerate after being harshly rebuked by Tirso Cruz III in *Bilangin ang mga Bituin sa Langit*. There are more examples. And I mention these not much to regale women with success stories as to insist that the circumstances and situations of women in Philippine popular cinema cannot be simplified by orthodox and reductionist sociological analysis anymore. For verily, they symptomatize, as recoded in filmic discourse of course, the fierce combat for meaning festering in texts/societies, for the appropriation of the vision and the truth that should hold sway at the end of the day. Thus, the next time we see Janice de Belen (*Rosenda*) playing prostitute to pay for her daughter's hospitalization and wanting to marry his boss in the hope of

conflating the office and home sphere, the public and private domain; Vina Morales (*Sana'y Ikaw na Nga*) singing her way out of the clutches of a domineering benefactor who is into drugs and the Yakuza; and Lea Salonga (*Bakit Labis Kitang Mahal?*) putting on that Broadway pout, posing petulant, and anxiously sorry for not being perfect — we must look again and see through the implications of transgressive, because transformative, desire.

It is this habitus of the popular audience that must be explained. John Fiske ("Cultural Studies and the Culture of Everyday Life," in *Cultural Studies*) pursues the trail via Bourdieu:

I wish to turn to Bourdieu's theory of the "habitus" as a way to think through both the material practices of everyday culture and our difficulty in studying them. The concept "habitus" contains the meanings of habitat, habitant, the process of habitation and habit, particularly habits of thought. A habitat is a social environment in which we live: it is a product of both its position in the social space and of the practices of the social beings who inhabit it. The social space is, for Bourdieu, a multidimensional map of the social order in which the main axes are economic capital, cultural capital, education, class, and historical trajectories; in it, the material, the symbolic, and the historical are not separate categories but interactive lines of force whose operations structure the macro-social order, the practices of those who inhabit different positions and moments of it, and their cultural tastes, ways of thinking, of "dispositions." The habitus, then, is at one and the same time, a position in the social and historical trajectory through it: it is the practice of living within that position and trajectory, and the social identity, the habits of thoughts, tastes and dispositions that are formed in and by those practices. The position in social space, the practices and the identities are not separate categories in a hierarchical or deterministic relation to each other, but mutually inform each other to the

extent that their significance lies in their transgression of the categorical boundaries that produced the words I have to use to explain them and which are therefore perpetuated by that explanation. (p. 155)

Finally, we must read into the internal economy of popular culture the inscription of hegemonic relations and not merely capture its reflections of false consciousness. As Bennett explains: "It is rather a question of articulation: it concerns the diverse ways in which different practices of writing are bound into the struggle for hegemony; their imbrication with and not separation from other regions of ideological struggle." (p. 263)