

Queer Media and Representations

On September 22, 2012, the University of the Philippines (U.P.) Pep Squad bested seven teams in the Cheerdance Competition of the University Athletics Association of the Philippines (UAAP), an inter-university sports competition. The squad's winning six-minute performance was called, significantly, "Freedom," an attempt to indigenize the U.S.--invented and driven sport of cheerdance to the local idiom of the ultimate ego-ideal, equality of sexes and unity among competing universities. The performance showcased both male and female squad members sporting cropped hair and flesh unitards, invoking in their cheerdance routine the iconic image of the Oblation -- the statue that basks naked in the glory of approaching knowledge and the symbol of U.P. -- as well as multicolored flags and grass-covered balls that turn out to be pompoms, while forming the required tumbles, tosses and pyramid formations.

The appeal of the various teams' cheerdance performance to a primarily university youth crowd is its queerness: the gender division of labor, with female athletes being tossed and forming the apexes of pyramids and male athletes doing the tossing and serving as bases; the indistinguishable male and female athletes, at least in the U.P. Pep Squad routine; the cheerdance competition itself being mainstreamed from its usual roles of rooting for teams in basketball competition; the shifting of primarily gay-identified male athletes nominalized in the competition to a mixed-sexuality male formation in achieving mini-celebrity statuses, like the female cheerdancers, in their respective universities; or the codified waifish bodies of female cheerdancers and muscular bodies of

male cheerdancers. Audiences of the televised youth spectacle have cheered without knowing the queer basis of their desires and identifications.

Queer studies is a relatively new field in Philippine cultural studies. This has been preceded by gay studies, then lesbian studies, and prior to this, by feminist studies. For the most part, what has reached Philippine cultural studies are queer studies articulated by Filipino scholars based in the U.S. An issue of “queer media studies” is an even newer subfield in Philippine cultural studies. But media lends itself well to queer analysis through its polysemy of horizons of meanings.

Plaridel Journal breakthroughs a growing interest in the queer turn of Philippine cultural studies. Queer studies refers to the ambivalence and non-permanence of meanings and structures of meanings; the continuous slide of signification and signifying practices; and the eruditeness and fleetingness of signs and cultural phenomena. It is precisely in the anti-heteronormative libidinal drive of queer studies that renders a self-reflexive gesture to unmask, deconstruct and recodify itself (the essence of “queerness”) into something else less normative, codifiable, and central to meaning and experimentation.

Four articles compose the queer media issue. First, Robert G. Diaz’s “Queer Love and Urban Intimacies in Martial Law Manila,” expounds on the historical infrastructuring of Metro Manila during martial law under the Marcos dictatorship. Interestingly, it was under the most oppressive time of official nation-formation that queerness did provide a relief from the definite and definitive temporality of the dictatorship. Interposing both film and literature--the former by Ishmael Bernal as abjected by Imelda Marcos’s fascist aesthetics of representing and the representative-ness of only “the true, good and beautiful,” and the latter by Jessica Hagedorn in her diasporic novel removed from both time and space of the historic but albeit historicized nation-formation that substantiated the subjects and subjectivities of the Marcos dictatorship—Diaz, a flaneur, walks the readers through the nooks and crannies of Manila’s interstitial spaces where subversive experimentation of the time and place of the dictatorship and nation-formation are rendered visible.

Joel David’s “Thinking Straight: Queer imaging in Lino Brocka’s *Maynila* (1975)” posits heteronormative filmic and aesthetic practices against the grain of fluidity of sexuality that subverts official nation-formation and dominant movie-as-industry filmic practice. Like Diaz’s fascination with the martial law era, David contextualizes the intrusiveness of queer experience, albeit a couple of scenes in the film diegesis, that is able to call into issue and contestation the state and bureaucratic capitalism that thrived in the Marcos dictatorship. And like Bernal, Brocka’s subversive attempt attests to Third Cinema’s radical potential, like queer studies, for alternatives to the hegemonic discourse. What is interesting in David’s article is that what was rendered absent is brought back

into the present rendering of the subversive discourse --which is otherwise informative on the brink of disappearance had it not been for David's keen historiographic substantiation of Brocka's—and therefore, our own—filmic rendition.

J. Neil Garcia's "Post-colonial Camp: Hybridity and Performative Inversions in *Zsazsa Zaturannah*" furthers the meditation on queer discourse's application to Philippine social realities and cultural phenomena. Garcia is critical in his interrogation of the possibilities and limitations of queer discourse in the analysis of a popular graphic novel turned successful middle-class stage production, based on a queer subject turned superheroine. He forewarns of the "assimilability" of the Philippine cultural phenomena within global queer theory, analogous to either the self-orientalism of Third World scholars to accommodate First World discourse, or to the neo-orientalism of First World scholars to render Third World cultural phenomena for primarily First World readers and scholars. Of course, Garcia presents a dense theoretical discourse that only he can muster, given his position as the primary scholar in Philippine gay discourse. Yet he engages readers to examine familiar—or even familial, given the insularity of Philippine gay and queer discourses—issues at hand, throwing caution to the wind to those who seek to go to this queer turn in Philippine cultural studies.

Jay Jomar Quintos' "Sulyap sa Karanasan ng Mga Asog: Isang Pag-aaral sa Karanasang Homosekswal sa Pilipinas" ("A Glimpse into the Asog Experience: A Historical Study on the Homosexual Experience in the Philippines") does the impossible: to historically map out the platitude and vicissitudes of gay discourse in the Philippines. Using both historical and popular documents attesting to the formation of a "gay" (also, queer) subject, Quintos navigates through the discursive formation of this subjectivity, both hegemonic and alternative renditions and representations in media. What is interesting in Quintos' article is the interconnectivity of representations past and present, that lead to a greater opening for contestation of the gay and queer figures in popular representations—those that have been rendered unrepresentable and under-represented can and should be rendered in their own image and imaging, unmistakably foregrounding the need for self-representation in gay and queer popular, state and folk discourses.

The interview by Jaime Oscar M. Salazar with Martin F. Manalansan, whose seminal book *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (2003) paved the way for queer studies in Philippine cultural studies, is illustrative of the perception, reception, saga and travails of pushing for an integral Philippine queer discourse that illuminates global queer discourse. The interview provides a self-reflexive moment for Manalansan, pondering on the issues and concerns he faced in his scholarship as "Filipino" and "Asian" queer specialist in a

multicultural yet conservative academic setting in the U.S., and its relevance to the formation of a Philippine queer discourse. Manalanasan's response—and body of work thus far—allows for a foregrounding that, especially for a queer person and specialist “of color,” queer discourse remains a site of contestation. Minoritized itself, the discourse also acknowledges its need for a polysemy of origins and contexts of meanings. He answers the debates that arose out of his scholarship, remaining vigilant over the tendency to render the Philippine queer experience as a shadow of the imperial experience and the empire of experience.

The essays attest to the necessity of queer criticism as a site of relief and destabilization. In the marketplace of ideas, including the Cheerdance Competition, it is wise to extend the possibilities of queer discourse along other kinds of cultural categories, especially class. What the essays expound are the centrality of queer discourse in informing state, postcolonial and western academe's propensity to benchmark social and intellectual realities. What also needs to be emplaced is queer along class lines and transformations. In the issue of the Cheerdance Competition, for example, how did this competition become mainstream in terms of commercial cable television taking this program on as part of its most anticipated event, alongside the UAAP basketball championships? What does the formation of eight teams, all representing the best and most commercial of private education (with the exception of U.P. as the only state university included), evoke in response to neoliberal education that systematically cuts budget for education and creates greater reliance on individualized sources for self-funding? What is the sports history that renders the Philippine youth experience to be easily integrated into the U.S. empire, and its sports, making cheerdance one of the two biggest sports events for the UAAP? And what does it also mean that students, mostly from the most expensive private universities, cheer and feel gratification for the fulfillment of their desire to root for their team, university and neoliberal education warfare?

The possibilities for queer studies within the already embedded Philippine cultural studies remain expansive. In time, queer studies can be an important benchmark in the interdisciplinarity of theories and discourses able to analyze and contextualize individual, citizen and nation-formation, and if extended, the possibilities for individual, citizen and nation-transformation.

I am especially grateful to the nameless reviewers who have enriched the revisions of the articles, and also to the managing editor of *Plaridel Journal*, colleague Clarissa David whose decisive yet consultative approach has made this issue possible, and also to University Researcher Alex Tamayo who efficiently and effectively trafficked the exchanges that made this issue unique. Of course, the scholars whose trust in the journal have also paved the way for the issues of queer media studies into the forefront of communication and media research, whose vouch of confidence is certainly appreciated.

While working through this issue, I am especially humbled by my own experience of being “dropped off” by a student whom I mistook as a friend and comrade. Part of a cohort in the College, I was in a group of faculty, alumni, friends and students that talked shop about the conditions of the possible in the College, in U.P. and in the nation. In our exchanges, one, after being chided and rattled for his privileged class origins and bias, decided to drop off the group, quite effectively dishing what we thought was the progressive class politics of the cohort. In hindsight, of course always just in hindsight, it is the very idea of state abrogation of minoritarian positions that renders the triumph of the hegemon, making the possible and the possibilities moot and academic.

I thank this youthful blasphemy for making me realize Walter Benjamin’s “angel of history,” impotent to the destruction of the past yet hopeful, albeit only by himself, that he can redeem the past for the present and progress from the semi-colonial semi-feudal characteristics of the Philippine state. Even in my middle age, I am still humbled by the queerness of life in U.P. and the Philippine state--or that it is my own refuge to the hegemon.



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