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The Filipino Film Industry:
Profile, Problems And Prospects

By

Nicanor G Tiongson
TH E FILIPINO FILM INDUSTRY: PROFILE, PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Hicenor G. Tiongson

Amused by the Filipino's obsession with movies, a critic once jokingly remarked that in the Philippines more people go to moviehouses than to churches. The comment was meant to be hyperbolic, but it probably comes close to the truth, as the following facts would seem to prove. In 1983, the film industry, according to one film scholar, reported that there were about 1,100 moviehouses operating all over the country, and that an estimated 1,626,000 Filipinos viewed films every day of the year except Good Friday when all moviehouses closed. Regardless of whether the church can claim as many devotees, these data prove beyond doubt that the cine has indeed become one of the most important institutions in contemporary Philippine society.

Given these facts, the power of cinema cannot be underestimated. Cinema catapulted a Nora Aunor to fame and fortune, and a Rogelio de la Rosa to political prominence. It helped to get Ferdinand Marcos elected to the presidency (through movies like Iginuhit ng Tadhana and Pinaaduklod ng Langit). Later, it served to well to strengthen and perpetuate Marcos' dictatorial rule and the interests of the Establishment that supported the dictator (mainly through the various censors' bodies controlled by the government). On the other hand, cinema has fought the Establishment in favor of the majority by exposing American domination (Hinsa'y Isang Gamu't Gamot), military abuses (Boy Kondenado), the problems of workers (Biyah Ko: Kapit sa Patalim), the journalists and the religious (Sister Stella L.), the peasants (Sakada), and the urban poor (Maynila, Sa mga Kuho na Likhaan and The Boatman).

Clearly, the immense popularity of cinema has invested it with the power to disseminate values and ideas, which may be used for or against the interests of the greater many. If only for this, cinema should not be ignored. On the contrary, it should be harnessed as an important agent for social change. Such an endeavour, however, will have to be premised on an understanding of the history, profile, and problems of the Filipino film industry.
Profile: 1981-1985

Since the film industry has been undergoing a period of transition since the February Revolt, its present profile will have to be drawn from data gathered about the industry from 1901 to 1985.

The Films. With regard to the number of films shown in the country every year, the Filipino Film Review reports that in 1981 there were 187 feature films shown in the country, 162 of which were new, and four re-releases. In 1982, there were 172 feature films, of which 150 were new and 22 re-releases. In 1983, there were 162 feature films, of which 141 were new, and 21 re-releases. In the first six months of 1984, there were 70 feature films, of which 63 were new, six re-releases and one co-production. Based on the figures from 1981-83, the average number of feature films shown in the country during those years would be about 174 films.

Regarding the types of films shown in the country, Jackelyn A. Campos reports in the Filipino Film Review that of the total output of the industry from 1978-1982, action films accounted for 47%, drama for 32.3%, and comedy 20.2%. Of the total number of action films, 83% are fiction, the rest are based on true characters and events. The same pattern seems to be apparent in the Filipino Film Review's report on films in the first six months of 1984. In the above period, 70 feature films were shown. Of these, 63 were new. Of these 63 new films, 31 were action-dramas, 16 were dramas, 8 were comedies, 5 were sex films, and 2 were youth-oriented movies.

Typical of the action film is Humuko Ka...Ronquillo (1963), which traces the story of the real-life historical character Ronquillo (played by Rudy Fernandez) as he suffers injustice at the hands of the law and decides to fight the authorities with a band of followers in the mountains. The most important ingredient of this type of film are the fight sequences which have to be scattered liberally throughout the film.

The melodrama or drama par excellence is Mga Batang Yagit (1904), a film based on the very popular TV soap opera of the same title created by Jose Miranda Cruz. The film follows the lives of four children who are oppressed by hateful grandmothers, mothers, hostesses, call boys, but who manage to put one over their oppressors and even to have fun (e.g., singing while pushing a cartful of garbage). The film is replete with a lot of...
screaming confrontations and a hundred and one tearful breakdown and reconciliations.

The comedy is typified by Haku Ha! (1984), which casts the comic trio, Tito, Vic and Joey, as overstaying students, and follows them through the zany ups and downs of student life. Slapstick humor and witty lines, with a few songs and dances thrown in, are the life of most comedies.

The sex film is typified by Scorpio Nights (1985), which tells the story of a security guard and his young housewife. The latter decides to have an affair with the young boy who lives on the floor above. When the husband discovers the two in bed, he shoots them and shoots himself. The movie, though technically well-crafted, presents us with a series of prolonged love-making scenes between the protagonists which seem to have no other purpose than to titillate the audience sexually.

The youth film is exemplified by Bagets (1984), which presents five boys, played by Aga Muhlach, J.C. Bonnin, Raymond Lauchengco, Herbert Bautista and William Martinez, as they go through their conflicts with stupid teachers, sex-starved women, and immature parents. Pretty faces and trendy costumes, the latest dance steps and songs, and lots of juvenile humor spell success for a movie for youths about youths.

The Producers. In 1983, 75 film companies produced 162 feature movies. Of these film companies, 29 were members of the Philippine Motion Pictures Producers Association (PMPPA), which includes the big established film companies, like FPJ Productions (Fernando Poe, Jr.), Seven Stars (Jesse Ejercito); Wonder Films (Alex and Cheng Muhlach); Tagalog Ilang-Ilang (Supiridion Laxa); RVQ Productions (Rodolfo Ruison or Robby); Sampaguita Pictures (Marichu Vera Perez-Maceda); MVP (Marichu Vera Perez-Maceda); JB Productions (Joseph Estrada); 20 belonged to the Integrated Movie Producers, Importers and Distributors Association of the Philippines (IMPIDAP), which includes Regal Films (Remy and Lily Monteverde); and 26 were independent producers.

In 1983, the top ten producing companies were:
Regal = 11 films; Viva = 9; GP = 5; Cine Suerte = 5;
Baby Pascual and Associates = 5; Robby = 5; Bukang Liwayway = 4; JH = 4; GPJ = 4; and RV = 4.
Producers have to spend for 1) actors and actresses who can eat up as much as 40% of total production cost; 2) production staff, which distributes about 30% of production cost to the line producer, director, writer, assistant director, production manager, cameramen, production designer, make-up artist, legman, stillman, film editor, music director, sound effects man, sound mixer, propman, setman, two utility men, post-production coordinator, field cashier, looper, public relations officer, and lay-out artist; 3) the raw materials, including color and black-and-white film rolls, sound recording rolls, and magnetic tape, all of which take up about 10% of total production cost; and 4) the promotions, in the print and broadcast media, which can devour, as in the case of Regal, almost 20% of production cost.

The Theaters and Audiences. As already mentioned, the Film Industry estimates that there are 1,200 theaters all over the country, ranging from first to third-run theaters, in the urban and rural areas. These theaters show films everyday of the week except on Good Friday. The industry also estimates that there are 1,626,000 viewers each day, which would mean that in one year or 364 days, there are about 591,864,000 viewers.

Lucila Hosillos identifies the audiences of Filipino movies:

Movies are patronized by the urban and town dwellers, workers, peasants and other low income groups who constitute about 70 to 75% of the population and who live on subsistence wages and subhuman conditions. The habitues, however, who contribute the bigger income to the movie industry are of the upper and middle classes for whom movies are prime entertainment. A smaller percentage of the middle and upper classes are movie buffs, aficionados, dilettantes, censors, the cultural elite that prides itself in being the avant-garde of film art, and the personnel and investors of the movie industry. By sheer bulk and number, the low-income sector should be able to support the movie industry. It does not have, however, the financial means. In fact, low-income urban habitues frequent the neighborhood movie houses which show double programs and charge cheaper than first-class single-run cinemas downtown.

Knowing the constitution of movie audiences, it is clear that the bigger percentage is comprised of the low income groups, who are deprived of even secondary education, who have not been exposed to artistic films, and who have
been raised to appreciate the simplistic characterization he encounters in popular magazines, radio serials, television dramas, and genre movies.

On the other hand, in the minority are audiences who have enjoyed a tertiary education, who have been exposed to the arts in and outside the country, who demand a measure of technical expertise and artistry for any film. Some sectors of this urban-based audiences have banded together into private citizens groups, which try to upgrade the quality of Filipino films by giving out annual awards. In the year 1986, these awards groups included: the FAMAS, which is an industry award; the Urian Awards, which is given by the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino, the country's only group of film critics who judge films on pure artistic merit; the Catholic Mass Media Awards, which encourages technical and artistic excellence and emphasized human values in films; the Film Academy Awards, where the guilds (directors, assistant directors, Actors, production designers, cinematographers, editors, screenwriters) choose the best of the works of their members for the year; and the Star Awards, given by a newly-formed body of movie writers.

probs

Time and again, critics and film buffs have decried the low quality of Filipino films. Why are the stories of most films incoherent or, badly-structured and often fatous? Why are the characters and the acting so stereotyped? Why is sound and sound mixing so incompetently done? Why do they use canned music and derivative songs? Why is production design so anachronistic, illogical, and tasteless? Why is editing so badly-paced and the cinematography so declarative, tired and unimaginative? Is there a director on top of it all? Why are so many Filipino films so bad?
One can go on with a litany of complaints ad nauseam, but nothing can be done to improve the Filipino film if solutions are not provided for the industry's basic and perennial problems.

Pop-Lit-Wale. After comparing the films that made good at the box-office and those that the FRB awarded with A or B ratings, Jackelyn Campos of Filipino Film Review concludes that: "Statistics strongly indicate that less artistic films are more attractive at the tills and that the majority of the local film audience shy away from artistic or highly artistic films." Shaped by decades of inane movies, the "bakya" crowd who comprise the majority of Filipino film audiences has been conditioned to like the following: 1) genre movies or formula films, that provide escape from their humdrum existence through action movies featuring supermen who can go through 15 fight sequences unscathed; musical comedies that star beautiful people singing and dancing to catchy and cheerful music; comedies whose humour often ridicules the poor, the weak, and the ugly; sex flicks that inflames one's sexual fantasies; 2) the conventions of traditional cinema, which decreed that a director should merely narrate, not interpret, a story, that he be a raconteur, not an artist; that a script should emphasize plot rather than character, which plot should be made up of colorful and convoluted events but narrated chronologically (flashbacks confuse such an audience); that dialogue should expose and narrate rather than show character; that acting and characterization be black-and-white so that the good may be separated from the bad, and that actors and actresses play the roles they have been identified with (Dolphy must either be John or Pacifica Palaypay; Nora must always be "api"; Ronnie Poe must always be a peace-loving man and turn avenges because of injustice; Rudy Fernandez must always play real-life criminal characters; and Vilma Santos is best as as a mistress, never as a nun); that actors and actresses be beautiful, i.e. mestizo and mestiza; that the cinematography be "declarative" in lighting and camera angles; and that editing be slow enough to accomodate a mind unused to complexity; that a movie should have a message, an "aral" that in reality endorses and legitimizes the establishment (e.g. the poor must be content to be poor because luck will eventually take pity on them, that the rich are really kind and have immense problems of their own, that the foreigners have always been good to us).

The Dominance of Foreign Films. As foreign multinationals dominate the vital sectors of our economy, so the cultural multinationals like Warner Brothers, Twentieth Century Fox, Paramount, United Artists, MGM, Universal and Columbia dominate the local film industry. American films, which occupy half of the screen time of
theaters in 100 countries and rake in $4 billion of the total $12 billion admissions all over the world, have huge capitals that allow them to do films which may not be all that significant but which showcase technological superiority of costumes, sets, props, sounds and cinematography. Naturally, local films are no match to American movies. For how can a Filipino producer ever think of competing with Francis Ford Coppola's $50 million budget for Apocalypse, when that budget is bigger than the budget of the whole Filipino film industry for two years?

And as if this were not bad enough, the Philippine government has never even thought of other ways of protecting the local film industry from this unfair competition. First, the government has allowed an unlimited number of foreign films to enter the country, resulting in foreign films inundating the local film market. Consider these data presented by Gualberto Lumawig in his Parliamentary Bill on the Philippine Motion Picture Industry:

In 1973, the total Filipino film output was 146, whereas imported films totalled 412. In 1974, local films totalled 120, imported films, 519; in 1975, Filipino films totalled 145, foreign films, 390; in 1976, local films totalled 174, and foreign films, 301. Last year (1977), Filipino films totalled 141 whereas foreign films totalled 294. It is very clear, therefore, that the movie industry in the Philippines is under domination of imported films with the business being cornered at an average of 60 per cent of the whole market.

Furthermore, in the past, foreign films were favored by the BRPT in the matter of censorship. According to a Malaya columnist, the BRPT used the Code and Rating Administration (CARA) of the Motion Pictures Association of America in evaluating American films to be exhibited locally. Because the CARA tended to be more liberal especially in depiction of sexual scenes than the local censors' rules, the American films had less cuts and naturally more audiences, than their Filipino counterparts.

American dominance of the local industry has resulted in an unfair competition, which Filipino producers have tried to neutralize in a less-than-ideal manner. Because the enemy is too big to "beat," the local producers have decided to "join" them, by slavishly imitating foreign films that succeeded at the box office. Hoping to ride on the popularity of
the original films, Filipino producers have come up with embarrassing copies like: Disgrasyada, which copied Turning Point; Si Malakas, Si Huganda, Si Mahinhin, which combined A Different Story and Love Story; Ninong, which derives from Godfather; Ikaw at ang Gabi, which is Torn Between Two Lovers; and the films of Tony Ferrer which were patterned after James Bond movies. For many a Filipino producer, imitation has become a way of survival.

Excessive Taxation. Movie industry people claim that the cinema is one of the most heavily taxed businesses in the country, earning almost P400 million a year for the government. And it seems to be true. Forty percent of a movie's gross receipts go to the following taxes: percentage tax, fixed tax, specific tax, flood control tax, amusement tax, ad valorem tax and withholding tax.

Because of such taxation, Lino Brocka observes: "A film with a P1 million budget has to earn three times that budget in Metro Manila alone to recover that principal investment and pay the rest in taxes."

Since the burden is so heavy, film producers have to ensure huge earnings by getting superstars like Dolphy, Fernando Poe, Jr., or Nora Aunor to appear in their movies. Because superstars charge much higher rates (Dolphy in 1983 used to charge P2 million), almost half of the production cost is lavished on just one or two actors, to the prejudice of the production staff that creates the content and artistry of a movie. The result is to be expected — a movie that has very little sense or logic, but which brings in a lot of profit.

Furthermore, because of such taxation and because movie has to earn three times what it cost in Metro Manila alone, producers have to make sure that the playdates of their movies are ensured and favorable. Big film companies have created their own theater circuits to give preference to their own films (small producers have called this foul because it is tantamount to a cornering of the market). Most producers, however, have to reserve the dates ahead of time and are often at the mercy of bookers. Once a playdate is fixed, the producer then rushes to finish the film. Sometimes, he forces a script writer to finish a script in less than a week, a director to finish shooting a film in two weeks, and post production to finish in a week. More often than not, the result of such haste is cinematic waste.
The Film Producers. Given the huge capitalization of and the favorable conditions given to American films, given the burden of excessive taxation, and given that the film industry is an industry, one understands why local film producers seem to have no other consideration but profit. Because of profit, the producers have created and encouraged the star system mentioned above, which in turn is one of the root causes of unprofessionalism in the industry. Pampered by the producers, a superstar feels no compunctions about simply not appearing for a shooting schedule, even if this causes so much expense in terms of time, effort, food and transportation, and even if it deprives the extras and other "little people" of their salary for the day.

Because of profit, producers want to stick to the formula movies which have already proven themselves in the takilya. The action film with at least 15 fight sequences, the melodrama with a lot of screaming and a river of tears, the musical with lots of color and movement and song, the sex flick with at least six major sexual encounters and preferably showing "pumping" (if possible, penetration) and frontal nudity.

But just as producers always keep the tried-and-tested formulas in mind, they are also perennially in search of new formulas. The bomba started out as an experiment which ended in success, in the film Uhaw (1970). The same is true of the youth movie whose breakthrough was Bagets (1984). It is this "adventurousness" that pushes certain producers to finance projects like Sisita Stella L. Unfortunately, Lily Monteverde's reading of the market (she thought such a film would ride on the post-assassination protest movement) proved to be wrong.

Because of profit, producers will meddle in the script writing. They will stay away from stories that are "uncommercial". They will want to ride on the popularity of komiks materials, because the "bakya" crowd is already familiar with such materials. They will snub socio-political themes, because these are "controversial". They will have scripts written for certain actors, no matter how lacking in talent these are. They will want at least five production numbers to satisfy the fans even if it cannot be rationalized in the script. They will order directors to put in such and such an actor or actress, and shoot the film so that it can be sold. They will pay off movie writers to "review" their new films or create controversies about their stars so that they, and their latest movie, will be talked about. They will tell a production designer not to demand expensive sets and costumes, even if these are really needed in a period.
Movie. They will tell cinematographers to scrimp on film, not to have too many complicated lighting equipment and techniques, and too many set-ups that cost time and money. They will ask any old dubber to finish off half of a movie that a superstar can no longer dub because she is making "lageri" in three films. In general, they will opt for action films because there is less of a gamble in these films (they are moderately cast and moderately budgeted, and they earn not only in Metro Manila but in the smallest barangays).

Today, local producers also have to compete with foreign film companies who have started to make films in the country because of cheap labor and free use of scenic places. Eager to "sell" the country, Johnny Litton, MIFF Director-General, was quoted as telling the foreign filmmakers: "The Far East has a reservoir of talents and labor is cheap. It has many exotic locales conducive for film settings. Modern facilities are available."

Finally, local producers have to contend with yet another threat to their investment and profit -- video piracy. It has been found out that there are about 3,000 video outlets in the country, and only 1,483 of them are registered with the VRB. The worst hit by video piracy are American films, which probably accounts for the drop in admissions to films like Superman III, Flashdance and 48 Hours, as a movie industry man would opine. But Bomba movies have also been pirated quite freely by video shops.

Censorship. The hottest issue in the movie industry during the Marcos regime was censorship, especially under Katigbak's BRMPT. This body censored films according to definite guidelines, which among others censured too much sex, too much violence, and most of all, subversion in films.

Composed mostly of people without film expertise, the BRMPT cut films on the basis of scenes and not in relation to the totality of the given film. For example, the shots in Kisapmata showing Vic Silayan's fly as he approaches Charo Santos to abuse her was cut because it was obscene. What the censors did not realize is that the camera angle was Charo's point of view, and the shots on the fly emphasized Charo's fear and revulsion at abuse from her father's hands.

Moreover, the BRMPT seemed to interpret the guidelines subjectively, according to their own (some would say "outmoded") standards of morality. Moral was cut up because it had too many "putang inas". School Girls was censored because it had pre-marital sex.
"Too much violence" is interpreted just as subjectively and according to individual scenes. The BRMPT censored the confrontation between the warring frats in Batch '81, because it showed decent young men lopping off each other's heads. In censoring this portion, the BRMPT did not realize that it was cushioning the full impact of the film's message, i.e. that the frat mentality -- which is the fascist mind -- makes people so blind to other human realities and values that it can turn even decent young men into blood-thirsty barbarians.

"Subversion", however, is what the BRMPT was most afraid of. In their view, subversion is the depiction of a girl being raped by a man in uniform in Boy Konde. (This is supposed to be far from the truth). Subversion is a wife in Moral narrating how her NPA husband was "salvaged" by the military. Subversion is "Bayan Ko" being sung in a rally in Kapit sa Patalin. Subversion is the depiction of poverty and oppression in films like City After Dark, Insiang, Jaguar and Sakada.

All in all, the censors lopped off whatever offended the values and the image of the Marcos Establishment, but they saw nothing immoral in Sharon Cuneta movies, like Deer Heart and P.S. I Love You, which flaunted fabulous houses, clothes and cars as though these were the ideal in life, in a country where the majority are living in poverty and subhuman conditions.

If the Censors had their way, they would have wanted the film directors and producers to depict only "the true, the good and the beautiful" as the First Lady would advise them to do. This, however was what film artists could not stomach. As Lino Brocka put it:

For one thing, the government will remind film artists that they must participate in the task of nation-building. And nation-building means trying to give a "beautiful" picture of the country, trying not to disturb people, trying not to make them angry by depicting the truth to them.

If there's anything good that came out of censorship in the Marcos era, it was the fact that arbitrary censorship exasperated producers, artists and technicians alike that it drove many of them to join forces and unite for the first time against a common enemy. The Free-the-Artists-Movement was the expression of that unity and the beginning of a process of politicization that eventually made movie people realize who they were really up against.
Prospects and Recommendations

Now is the best time for all film artists, technicians, and critics to present to the Philippine government whatever recommendations will benefit the local film industry. After the February revolt, things are still in a state of flux.

Given that the problems of the industry identified by the paper are indeed the root causes of the less than ideal state of the industry today, this writer respectfully presents what he perceives as practical solutions to these problems.

Popular Taste. The patronage of local films by local audiences is probably the most important consideration among producers, film artists and technicians. If the industry is to improve, the taste of local audiences will have to be developed and improved.

Ironically, the solution to this problem we believe is not in the audiences but in the film artists and technicians themselves. It is they who will have to create films that will expose audiences to better stories, better direction, better acting, better cinematography, production design, editing and sound. For if our audiences developed the tastes we now deplore because of exposure to simplistic genre films, it stands to reason that they can also develop other tastes because of exposure to films of higher quality. Education they say is simply exposure. And so it is in the film industry.

Crucial then in changing the popular taste in the continuing education of film artists and technicians. It is they who must be the object of a massive program, on the part of government, the private sector and their own sectors, of exposure to good foreign and local films, to training workshops (such as the actors' workshop) and seminar (such as the directors' lecture series), to various forums where cinematic works are discussed and evaluated.

Aside from training artists and technicians, the exposure of the moviegoing public to intelligent but popular analyses of films in movie fan magazines written in popular language could go a long way in deepening their appreciation for better films.

Finally, the upgrading and popularization of standards used by award-giving bodies could elevate awards nights from their status as variety shows to recognition nights in the best sense of the word. The publication of the list of winners and the reasons for
their victories will allow for a free and (hopefully) intelligent discussions of issues, and put award-giving bodies above suspicion.

The Dominance of Foreign Films. There is no doubt that foreign films will have to be controlled in order to allow our own films to develop in our own country. To the objection that this is limiting our freedom of choice, the answer is that national survival takes precedence over all other considerations.

To effect this control, we recommend the resurrection of the Lunanig Bill of 1978, which was junked by the Batasang Pambansa because of the lobby made by Filipino distributors of American films. This bill provided for a smooth program of reduction of the quota of foreign films, and for the permanent annual quota of such films:

1. During the first year from effectivity of this Act, not more than three hundred (300) feature films with a total foreign exchange remittance of not more than three million six hundred thousand dollars (US $3,600,000), including rights, prints and advertising accessories;

2. During the second year, not more than two hundred and fifty (250) feature films with a total foreign exchange remittance of not more than three million dollars (US $3,000,000), including rights, prints and advertising accessories;

3. During the third year not more than two hundred (200) feature films with a total foreign exchange remittance of not more than two million four hundred thousand dollars (US $2,400,000), including rights, prints and advertising accessories;

4. During the fourth year, and every year thereafter until /, not more than one hundred and fifty (150) feature films with a total foreign exchange remittance of not more than one million eight hundred thousand dollars (US $1,800,000), including rights, prints and advertising accessories...

Furthermore, so that foreign film companies do not take advantage of our cheap labor and free exotic locales, an additional tax should be imposed on them, commensurate to the budget of the film, which shall go into the Film Fund to fund worthy projects of local film producers.
Excessive Taxation. Granting that the government wants to protect Filipino industries, it has no choice but to re-study the taxation scheme imposed on the local film industry. The aim of such a re-study should be the elimination of the flood control tax, and whatever taxes are now being imposed but have no logical connection to film.

Moreover, the taxes on foreign films should be raised. In fact, the burden of taxation in the film industry should be on them. For one thing, their capitalization is hundreds of times bigger than local capitalization.

The Local Film Producers. If the Lumauig proposal is resurrected and passed and the taxation scheme reversed in favor of the local films, local film producers will have no reason to think of profit alone. Hopefully, the government can then remind them, without infringing on their freedoms, to be conscious of their social responsibility as film producers.

In order to keep the industry in healthy competition, the government should institute measures to prevent any one producer or group of producers from cornering any aspect of the film industry, e.g. producers cannot be bookers and movie producers as well.

In order to encourage producers to make quality films, the Classification Board should continue the system of tax rebates of the defunct FRB, which gives 100% tax rebate for class A films, 50% for class B films. It is best that the Board also explain in print why such classifications are given for each film.

Finally, in order to remedy the present situation where a producer can control and write, script, direction and general production in order to make more money, film artists and technicians should unionize, so that their demands may be heard and hopefully granted.

Censorship. To prevent the recurrence of the repressiveness and arbitrariness of the BRMPT, the following changes could probably be effected. First, censorship must be replaced with classification, and the Classification Board should merely rate films for the guidance of the community: as G (General Patronage); or P (Parental Guidance Recommended); or R (Restricted for persons 18 and above). The Board of Classification should not cut or ban films, although producers should be given the option to re-edit their films to obtain a more general classification. Ideally, the board should,
like the FACB now, explain its ratings in print.

Second, the persons appointed to the classification board should: 1) know film; 2) have a reputation for honesty and integrity; 3) have no commercial connections to the industry; and 4) have the time to view films. Obviously, political appointments to the board or the proxy system of film evaluation will not do.

Third, in order to make sure that no one body will have such tremendous powers of censorship as the BRMPT, the alternative cinema, especially the video filmmaking, should be encouraged. If one recalls that it was the documentary movies of Asia Visions that recorded and made public the abuses of the dictatorship which the crony media glossed over, it becomes clear that the tradition of making such films should be kept alive.

Finally, in order to establish a mechanism of communication between the classification board and the industry, film artists and technicians should have an alliance through which they can discuss issues affecting the industry and through which they can have their opinions heard. In case government agencies become as intransigent as the former BRMPT, such an alliance can function as a pressure group as well.

Viewed in perspective, the problems of the film industry are problems of many Filipino industries as well: the dominance of the foreign films, the profit-oriented capitalist, the authoritarianism of the past governments, the suppression of people's rights. Clearly then, the film industry is but a microcosm of the bigger reality that is our nation.

In this light, it becomes understandable why past administrations were reluctant to or simply refused to do anything concrete to remove the industry's problems, which are rooted in economic and political premises that they obviously did not want to question.

The present government's reaction to these problems will clarify to people in the industry and to Filipinos in general. If this government is willing to reexamine many realities which affect Philippine society adversely. If it is, then the film industry can look forward to its own liberation, which shall be an important battle won in the struggle to define and establish our economic, political and cultural identity as a truly independent nation.