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the **Flip**
reader

being a greatest hits anthology from
flip: the official guide to world domination.

edited by **jessica zafra**

foreword by **jaime augusto zobel de ayala**



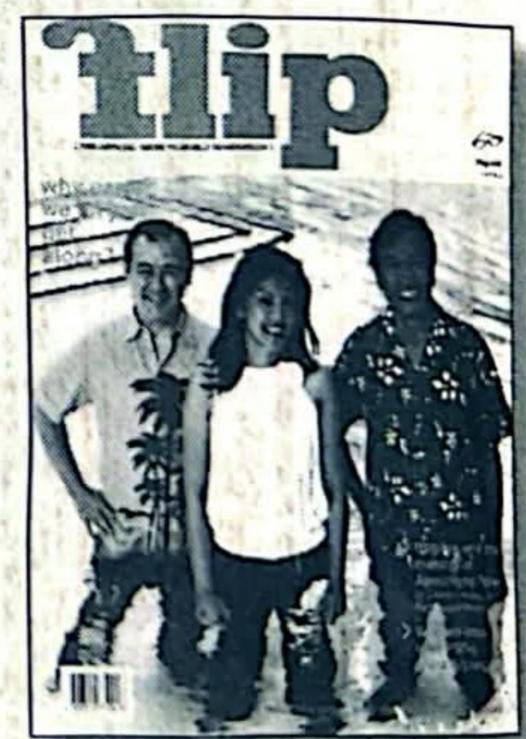
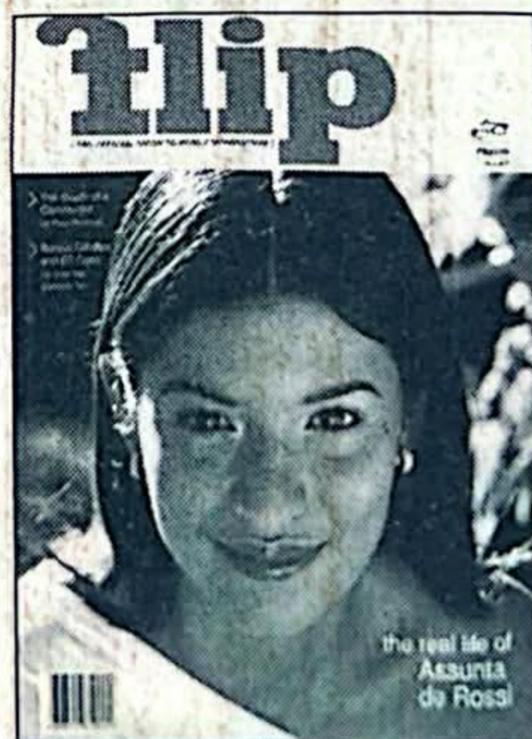
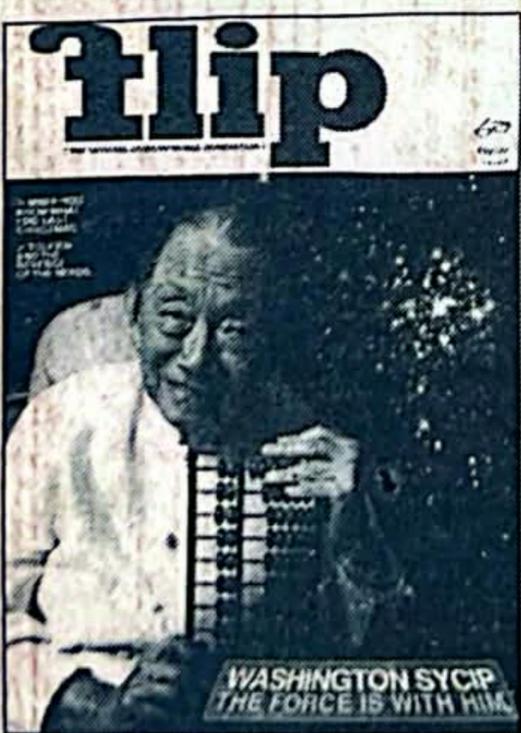
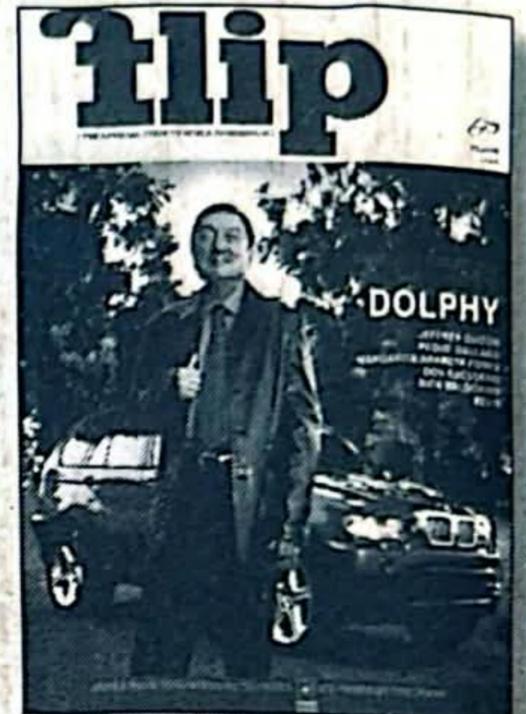
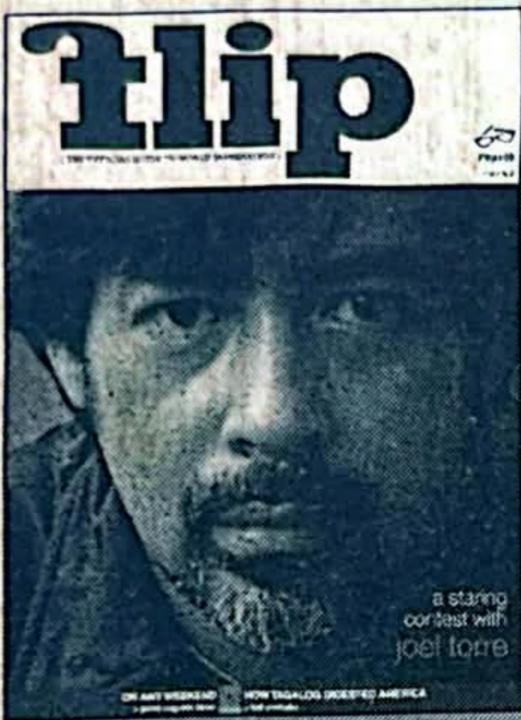
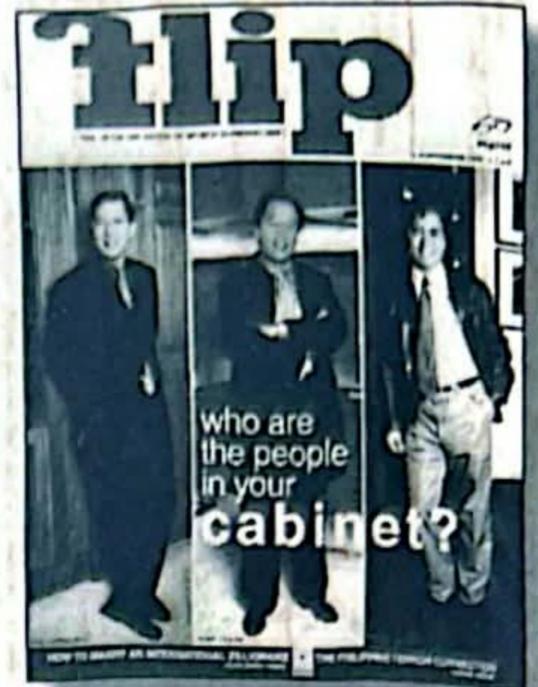
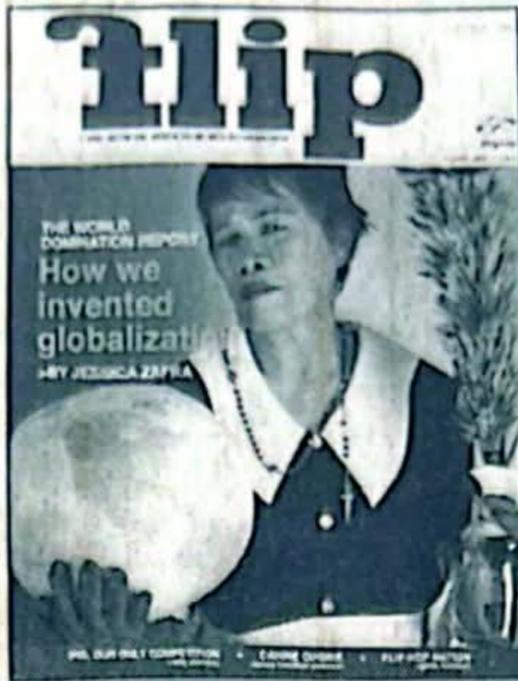
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the **flip**
reader

Flip

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flip: the official guide to world domination.

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lourd ernest h. de veyra
tad ermitano
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deirdre mckay
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edited by **jessica zafra**

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Anvil 

the **flip** reader

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with photographs by Dick Baldovino

Cover and book design by Ige Ramos Design Studio

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Published and exclusively distributed by

ANVIL PUBLISHING, INC.

8007-B Pioneer Street

Bgy. Kapitolyo, Pasig City 1600

Philippines

Sales & Marketing: (632) 6373621, (632) 6375141

Email: marketing@anvilpublishing.com

Fax: (632) 637-6084

Web site: www.anvilpublishing.com

ISBN 978-971-27-2114-4

Printed in the Philippines



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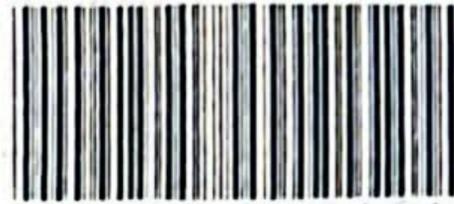
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VINCE RAFAEL

Mega-malls have become such pervasive features of urban life that a verb, “mall,” has entered the vernacular to denote the wide range of activities one does in a mall: shopping, eating, hanging out and so forth. It is easy to forget that these large malls are, in fact, relatively recent developments dating back to the Aquino administration. Where the Marcos regime had left a legacy of state-subsidized buildings and crony-financed infrastructures such as the Cultural Center Complex, the Heart Center, and various hotels to promote tourism, post-Edsa history can perhaps be characterized as the era of mega-malls. Sprawling, privately-owned spaces, they serve as quasi-public spheres where different social classes gather daily, drawn by the display of commodities. The social significance of mega-malls has led two scholars, Eve Lotta Hedman and John Sidel to refer to them as sites for the making of a new kind of “civil society.” In their important book, *Philippine Politics and Society in the Twentieth Century: Colonial Legacies, Post-colonial Trajectories* (New York: Routledge, 2000), Hedman and Sidel write that mega-malls signal “a mode of (post) modern national consolidation.... As enclaves of enchanted convenience and safety, malls thus may most closely approximate something akin to a “civil society” for the vast majority of the Philippine urban population who endure daily experiences of routine overcrowding, pollution, brownouts... violence.”

Furthermore, the “extraordinary spacious, clean, [and] air-conditioned” malls and their “display of material abundance and changing styles present

consumers" with the sense of boundless choices that is equated with freedom. Together, the sensation of choice and the illusion of freedom suggests what amounts to "an elective affinity between mass consumerism and democratic citizenship." (pp.133-34).

What existed before the mega-malls? What was the architecture of public life before it had been so thoroughly colonized by the private corporate interests of the malls?

To begin with, the very distinction between "private" and "public" is arguably a colonial innovation. Pre-colonial societies were characterized by the fluid articulation of ritual with art, politics with sex, economics with warfare, justice with freedom and each with every other. Spanish colonial rule introduced divisions among these realms of experience, organizing them around the notion of a private, sinful life periodically accountable through confession and Catholic rituals to a divinely sanctioned public authority charged with recognizing and absolving sin. Churches as the first buildings designed to be permanent and imposing in the islands were also the sites of this public accounting. Along with its *pompas y ceremonias*, the Catholic Church was the nexus of the colonial public sphere. Small wonder then that during the revolution of 1896, Churches were prized targets since these buildings were pregnant with the symbolic and material power to call forth and constitute a public that could be re-formed into a "people." It made perfect sense then that the First Republic should be inaugurated in a church in Malolos, an event commemorated daily in the back of that most public of documents, the ten-peso bill.

The American invasion of the Philippines altered the center of gravity of the public sphere. Under the U.S., numerous state-funded structures emerged outside the confines of Intramuros, arranged according to a master plan modeled after urban designs laid out in American cities. Where Binondo and Calle Rosario in "Chinatown" had been the commercial centers in the late Spanish era, Santa Cruz emerged as the premier shopping district under the Americans. The construction of the Santa Cruz bridge and the Avenida Rizal, alongside the development and expansion of infrastructures such as the trolley cars, telephones, electric lighting, and automobiles transformed the area bounded by Plaza Santa Cruz, Escolta, Plaza Goiti and Avenida Rizal into the city's "downtown."

From bars to movie houses (such as the Lyric and Capitol), bazaars and vaudeville theaters, clothing stores to photographic studios: all these and more could be found downtown. It served not only as an outlet for foreign goods flooding local markets; it also exercised a magnetic attraction to a rising generation of Filipinos educated in the secular public schools

Rather than rebuild, Manila's elites abandoned the surrounding areas and World War II brought the catastrophic destruction of much of downtown.

1970s would be referred to as the "parliament of the streets." labor unions would come to air their views and call to order what in the serve as the hub for political rallies where politicians, student radicals, and radiated. As a sort of alternative public sphere, Plaza Miranda also came to easily mixed, the sacred being the ground zero out of which the profane residual memories of an earlier colonial era when religion and commerce who flocked to the nearby Quiapo church. Then as now, Plaza Miranda held shopping days in the area—thanks to the devotees of the Black Nazarene markets around Plaza Miranda. From the 1920s, Fridays were the biggest A counter to Escota's elitist pretensions were the more proletarian consumption habits—were not to arrive until after the war.

it. These conditions—industrialized mass production and middle class a consumerist ethos in advance of the conditions necessary to support for the cultural practice of window-shopping. Window-shopping cultivates to look at the merchandise. The Crystal Arcade helped to prepare the way to display its extensive stock of goods drew many who could only afford and a number of Manila's fanciest stores. Its liberal use of glass and light handful of buildings that had air-conditioning. It housed the Stock Market a singular structure for its time, and not only because it was among the art: Andres Luna de San Pedro y Pardo de Tavera. The Crystal Palace was whose name alone conjures the entire history of Philippine nationalist winding staircases and stunning glass walls were designed by an architect today's malls, the Crystal Arcade. Completed in 1932, its Art Deco lines, expensive hotels, a.k.a. "kapihan." The other was the grandmother of views and gossip, thereby anticipating today's political kibitzing in shop, Botica Boie, where the city's *cognoscenti* congregated to exchange institutions ruled. One was the American-owned drugstore cum coffee The center of the pre-war downtown was Escota, where two license for costumed celebrations, beauty pageants, floats, and fireworks. Gras, part World's Fair, meant to showcase new products while providing radio programs, and from the 1920s, the annual Manila Carnival: part Mardi- advertising industry supporting a variety of newspapers. Later there were and live theater influenced by jazz and tin pan alley, and an emergent department stores modeled after Macy's and Bon Marche, Hollywood movies and processions, this new consumer culture thrived on window displays in to the beginnings of a consumer culture in the colony. In lieu of masses then, not only as an economic center but as a social force, giving rise and rural migrants coming to the city for work. Downtown was significant

began their trek to the suburbs. Wealthier Americans and Filipinos settled in what once had been vast tracts of rice fields converted into upscale American-style suburban developments with their own shopping centers and country clubs: Makati. They built large homes in such subdivisions as Forbes Park, Bel-Air, San Lorenzo, Magallanes, Dasmarinas, and so forth. Others who deserted Malate, Ermita, Paco, and Pasay to bordellos and bohemians carved out huge estates in the rural vastness of Cubao, Mandaluyong and San Juan. Economically destitute and politically corrupt, the new Republic could not be bothered by the task of urban planning. The development of Manila after the war was thus largely consigned to private developers and local political expediency. The result is a metropolis staggering in its lack of public space and architectural coherence, willfully oblivious to the sorry state of its historical buildings and barely capable of sustaining the environmental pre-requisites for civility necessary for a democratic life.

Enter the shopping malls. In its nineteenth century European form as enclosed arcades, shopping malls were prominent features of an urban culture increasingly confronted with the spectacular displays of goods extracted from the labor and resources of colonized peoples, whether from rural Java or the south of France. In its post-war American incarnation, the shopping mall played a strategic role in the development of the suburb, which in turn was a strategic response to the "incursion" of blacks and non-white immigrants into the cities. As receptacles of white flight, vanilla suburbs were bastions of segregation secured by restricted covenants that penalized homeowners for selling their property to non-whites. Shopping malls were seen to be safe havens from the racially "messy" downtown of the cities.

In the Philippines, shopping mall development initially followed the American pattern. The earliest post-war malls in Makati, Greenhills, and even Cubao were initially conceived as clean and "safe" spaces for elites and middle class shoppers fearful of mixing with the masses. But as with the eventual desegregation of the suburbs and malls in the U.S., so too the urbanization of the suburbs and the "downtowning" of the malls in the Philippines. Throughout the 1960s and 70s, two distinct shopping cultures still existed: supermarkets and malls for the *burgis*, Divisoria, *palengke*, and the Quiapo-Ongpin-Baclaran, etc, markets for the *masa*. On the eve of Martial Law, cracks began to develop. Student activists in the suburban campuses of UP Diliman, Ateneo in Loyola Heights and even La Salle in Green Hills, brought the rambunctiousness of urban politics and mass action to the quiet burbs, beginning with the Diliman Commune of 1971,

while their marches and rallies brought them back to the old downtown in Plaza Miranda. And in Makati and Greenhills malls, Coronado Bowling Lanes and Green Lanes, to name only two, became favorite sites for student rumbles, drug deals and even Hare Krishna hangouts. What finally broke down the two shopping cultures was SM.

Starting with a modest shoe store in Carriedo in 1945, Henry Sy from Fujian province, China came up with a formula for making lots of money. He would sell shoes in large quantities at low prices, by way of rapidly turning over his stock. Expanding into textiles and household goods, Sy opened his first Shoemart store in Makati in 1962, then in Cebu in 1965 and Cubao in 1967. While other developers shrank from new ventures and capital fled for other shores in the turbulent 1980s, he poured money into new business deals and began to build his gigantic malls, combining shrewd management skills with his willingness to use any means necessary to break up labor unions and keep workers in line. By 1985, amid the crisis provoked by the Ninoy Aquino assassination, the first SM City went up in Cubao. Shortly after Edsa I in 1986, SM Centerpoint was built, followed in rapid succession by SM South Mall in Las Pinas, SM Mega Mall in Mandaluyong, SM City-Cebu and several others throughout the 1990s from Angeles City to Bacolod, from Davao to Iloilo. It is perhaps fair to say that with these "cities", SM Prime Holdings, Inc. rivals the Republic of the Philippines and its challengers, the National Democratic Front and the MILF in its ability to shape public culture and redefine national identifications along transnational lines.

As quasi-public spaces, mega malls produce what Hedman and Sidel refer to as the "blurring of social distinctions and... reproduce and reflect an image of limited equality that resonates with the promise of democratic citizenship." But they also conceal the mechanisms of extraction and exploitation that make their operations possible. They produce pleasures by repressing their sources, and encourage unrealized desires that find their expression in everyday acts of desperation, occasional crimes, and interminable boredom.

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ISBN 978-971-27-2114-4

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