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Isabel Acuña de Nepomuceno (1904–1986) and her husband, José Nepomuceno (1893-1959), pioneers of the Filipino film. Photo undated.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Twenty years after its first publication, *Pelikula* returns.

The first volume was published in 1999 during the twilight years of the celluloid century. Under the editorship of Dr. Nicanor G. Tiongson, the journal released three volumes that documented a crucial transition period in the country's cinema. However, its printing had to discontinue because of the lack of financial support. Funding remains a challenge. Nevertheless, on the centenary of Jose Nepomuceno's *Dalagang Bukid* (1919), the University of the Philippines (UP) Film Institute endeavored to revive *Pelikula*, to provide an outlet for original research and writing on Philippine cinema—no matter the challenges.

So many things have happened since the last volume saw print in 2001. Digital technology overhauled film production and consumption; it birthed communities of filmmakers and cinephiles throughout the archipelago; it diversified cinematic forms and themes; and it expanded the reach—and the meaning—of Filipino film. There have never been more films produced in the Philippines and more opportunities to encounter them than today. Simultaneously, challenges and debates have arisen continuously, erupting as heated exchanges on various fora and social media and not a few times in senate hearings, spontaneous press conferences, and demonstrations. These are sure signs that Philippine cinema is moving forward.

Despite these many colorful developments, however, knowledge production in Filipino film studies has not kept pace. To be sure, a lot of valuable papers are being published in academic journals such as *Humanities Diliman*, *Kritika Kultura*, and *Unitas*. I myself have oriented Plaridel, the publication of the UP College of Mass Communication, toward cinema studies in the Philippines and Southeast Asia during my tenure as director of the office that publishes the journal. The Visayas-based *Sinekultura* and Mindanao-based *New Durian Cinema* have also published essential pieces.

Nonetheless, I am confident that more researches are being undertaken than those that eventually get published. Moreover, many more scholars, students, and writers, I am sure, are interested in joining a conversation in progress for over a hundred years about Filipino film's significance. *Pelikula*, which is curated for specialists and general readers alike, aims to give space both for new writings and new writers. Broadly covering national and regional perspectives, the journal is envisioned as a primary resource material that documents knowledge production and encourages debate and discussion on Philippine cinema's history and development.

I give my heartfelt thanks to respected scholars, critics, artists, writers, and programmers who have agreed to be part of the journal's advisory board. I am also grateful to the National Commission for Culture and the Arts for supporting the initial efforts to revive *Pelikula*, through the cinema committee with whom I have had the privilege to serve the film sector.

-Patrick F. Campos

A Newspaper's Account of Cinema in Cebu, 1915-1919

Radel Paredes

The emergence of cinema in Cebu could be traced back to the establishment of the first exhibition venues at the start of the 20th century. Yet little is known of these early years of cinema in Cebu due to a lack of available records. Newspapers could have been a great source of information but almost nothing of the few that Cebu had during the time have survived. The earliest and still relatively extant local newspaper available in the archives of the Cebuano Studies Center in the University of San Carlos is the Spanish language *Nueva Fuerza*, which was issued starting May 16, 1915 with a flip-side Cebuano section bannered as *Bag-ong Kusog*.

In response to the need for early film history in Cebu using local sources, this paper covers film-related events recorded in *Nueva Fuerza* during its first five years of publication. The periodical review focuses on anuncios or advertisements, news stories, features, columns, and photos that help show how cinema developed in those years of American occupation. It looks into the increasing influence of Hollywood on the local screen in the wake of World War I and the clamor for independence as the Philippines was about to reach its second decade under American colonial rule.

Cinema during latter half of the 1910s belonged to what Tom Gunning calls the period of the “cinema of narration,” when film had already evolved into a full-fledged narrative medium, albeit remaining silent and largely in black and white.¹ In Cebu, the period saw the dramatic rise in the number of American films although the theaters still advertise them mainly in Spanish-language titles.

The Novelty Years

The earliest indication of film's arrival in Cebu comes from the anuncio in the Manila-based newspaper *El Comercio* in 1897, which declares that a certain Mr. Charochi was going to visit Iloilo and Cebu where he “plans to stay for a few weeks before returning to Manila and present screenings using his cinematograph.”² Although it was likely, given the length of his stay, that he could have screened films in Cebu, no records attest that it actually happened. The turn of the century was a period of unrest and revolution in Cebu, starting with an uprising on April 3, 1898 that led to the liberation of Cebu from Spanish rule on December 29, 1898.³ The short stint of self-rule would be followed by the American occupation of Cebu in 1899 and the outbreak of local resistance. The war made it difficult for cinema to thrive in Cebu as a form of public entertainment.

Still, a few itinerant screenings took place in makeshift venues. Cebuano scholar Resil Mojares dates the first recorded screening of cinema in Cebu in April 1902 when Pedro Alario set up the Cinematografo Electrico-Optico Luminoso Walgrah in a camarín (warehouse) owned by then mayor Don Florentino Rallos. Mojares believes that Alario could have been working for the Englishman known only as Walgrah, who owned Manila's second movie house in 1900, the Cinematografo Walgrah located in Intramuros. “We have no information on what movies were shown at the Rallos warehouse, but these must have been ‘novelty’ films of the camera-trick genre,” Mojares notes. “What is clear is that the cinematografo created quite a stir in the local community.”⁴ Film exhibition then simply consisted of a projector and screen setup in any place large enough to hold an audience. Mojares mentions as examples Cinematografo ni Pastor (1904), Cinematografo Mabini (1904), Cinematografo Walgrah (1906), and Cine Royo (1908). The latter, located in Juan Luna, doubled as a cockpit owned by Cebuano businessman Don Pedro Royo.⁵

We have no information on what movies were shown at the Rallos warehouse, but these must have been ‘novelty’ films of the camera-trick genre. What is clear is that the cinematografo created quite a stir in the local community.

As the cine's popularity grew, playhouses also began screening films. Teatro Junquera, Cebu's first theater established in Colon Street in 1895, later featured films in its presentations. After 1910, it became more of a movie house than a place for stage plays.⁶ It first became home to the American-owned It Cinema in 1909 and Cine Empire in 1911.⁷ Ownership and management of Teatro Junquera was passed from Juakin Junquera and Florentino Rallos to Leopold Falek and Pedro Rivera-Mir and, finally, to the Avila family who later renamed it Cine Oriente.

Mojares writes that Cine Empire was renamed Cine Ideal after it moved to Colon Street in 1911.⁸ *Nueva Fuerza*, however, indicates that up to 1915, Cine Empire continued to advertise screenings under its same name. It was not until the year after, on March 6, that the Greek entrepreneur identified only as Mr. M. D. Mabromatis,⁹ who previously screened films in his Cebu Cabaret, inaugurated his movie house, the Cine Ideal, in Colon Street. In the anuncio for this event, the movie house was said to have screened a nightly program of twelve films from Paris, Milan, Turin, and Chicago through its distributors in Manila, namely: Sirena, Empire, and Cine Ideal, which must be an affiliate or franchise of the movie house.¹⁰ As more theaters were established in Colon, it soon became known as *Calle del Teatro* (street of theaters).



First Cine Oriente ad on *Nueva Fuerza*, Bag-ong Kusog, 5 Feb 1915. Images courtesy of Radel Paredes.



Cine Empire Noli Me Tangere, *Nueva Fuerza*, 17 Oct 1915.

1915: World War I and Worcester

The First World War was raging in Europe as it entered its second year in 1915. And, with the US taking the side of England, France, and the rest of the Allies, the Philippines—being America’s new colony—started military preparations with the prospects of war spreading to the Pacific. *Nueva Fuerza* ran a continuing report on the growing number of casualties from both sides in the battle fronts of Europe. On September 9, along with other news of the war, the paper declared that the death count had reached 21,770,000.¹¹ *Bag-ong Kusog* reported the arrival in Cebu of five American destroyers sent to patrol the sea.¹²

Following American war propaganda, *Nueva Fuerza* helped spread anti-German sentiment among the Cebuano public as its writers caricatured and demonized the Kaiser and the German people in general. As the hate campaign intensified, incidents of discrimination against German nationals in Cebu also increased. Curt Mutschink, identified in a news item as “primer official” of the German boat Wiegand, which was docked at the Fort San Pedro, was fined PHP 500 for allegedly smuggling alcoholic drinks.¹³ But an article in *Bag-ong Kusog* praised the patriotism of Germans living in Spain who tried to sneak through Allied checkpoints by hiding in coffin-like wooden boxes just to be able to return to Germany and join the war.¹⁴

War was in the air and even the anuncios were hawkish. A Botica Cebuana ad ran the headline *declaration de guerra* against its competitors. Amid the anxiety over the war in Europe, cinema provided escapist entertainment. The movie houses also catered to the public’s growing interest in the war, offering revistas or newsreels as well as fiction films about the Great War. In May, for example, Cine Oriente billed *La Guerra de las Guerras* (*War of Wars*)¹⁵ and *Escenas de la Guerra Actual* (*Actual Scenes of the War*).¹⁶

Still, most of the movies advertised were fiction films that did not deal with the war theme. These included serials which were typically “action-oriented, offering thrilling elements like master criminals, lost treasures, exotic locales, and daring rescues.”¹⁷ The first film to be advertised in the maiden issue of *Nueva Fuerza* was *Marlo y Sra* (probably

Marlo y Señora or *Marlo and Wife*, as news items in Cebuano call the film *Ginang Marlo* or *Mrs. Marlo*.), which came out with short news items about the film that was to be screened in Cine Oriente starting in May.¹⁸ Other films that were repeatedly advertised were the Italian film *El Bandido de Port Aven* (*The Bandit of Port Aven*, 1914),¹⁹ *La Casa de Couber Burglary* (*The House of Burghery Couber*),²⁰ *La Daga Japonesa* (*The Japanese Dagger*), *El Cardenal Richelieu* (*The Cardinal Richelieu*), and Francis Ford’s *La Rosa Misteriosa* (*The Mysterious Rose*, 1914). But enjoying the longest run in the anuncios (advertised from November 1915 to the end of January 1916) as well as the most publicized in 1915 was Louis Gasnier’s and Donald MacKenzie’s *Los Peligros de Paulina* (*The Perils of Pauline*, 1914). Produced by the French company Pathe, this serial features the American actress Pearl White.

The “serial queen” type that Pearl White portrays uses “the trope of the imperiled woman” who is able to survive every obstacle through skillfulness and as such “put forward assertive models of femininity.”²¹ Such a character must have shocked or delighted an audience torn between a predominantly Catholic Hispanic conservatism, which assigned subordinate roles to women, and the growing influence of American liberal values reflected in ongoing debates over women’s right to education, suffrage, and even divorce.

Another notable film was *Noli Me Tangere*, advertised by Cine Empire in *Nueva Fuerza* in October 17.²² It appears to be the film adaptation of Jose Rizal’s novel made by Manila-based American filmmakers Edward Meyer Gross and Harry Brown. The film was a big hit in Manila yet no article or news item about it appeared in *Nueva Fuerza*. If it was screened at all, it would be interesting to know how the Cebuano audience reacted to it, especially as it was a film about the Filipino national hero that was made by filmmakers who belonged to the new colonizers.

Meanwhile, the Cebuano sense of patriotism was expressed more boldly in the outrage over the appointment of Dean C. Worcester as head of the Visayas Refining

Company in Mactan. Worcester was an anthropologist who had been the Philippine Secretary of the Interior from 1901 to 1913 during which he made *Native Life in the Philippines*, a documentary which showed the “savagery” of native Filipinos, particularly those in Northern Luzon. Released in 1914, this film was used by Worcester in his lecture tours around the US in an effort to persuade his fellow Americans not to support the granting of independence to the Philippines as the country still needed to be “civilized.”²³

Worcester’s film angered many Filipinos, so when news of his coming to Cebu came, a series of protests led by the local intelligentsia broke out. In July 25, *Nueva Fuerza* reports of a “meeting *de protesta*” that was held in Cine Oriente.²⁴ In his book *Exemplar of Americanism: The Philippine Career of Dean C. Worcester*, Rodney Sullivan describes the protest, thus: “A large crowd gathered at the Cine Oriente, Cebu’s largest theater, answering a summons from fourteen prominent citizens for a popular protest against Worcester’s arrival. The summons emphasized that the objection was not to the company as such but to the designation of Worcester as manager; among other complaints, it cited the ‘hostile campaigns waged by Worcester against the Filipino people.’”²⁵ Between July and October, the *Nueva Fuerza* ran a continuing coverage of the issue. An article in *Bag-ong Kusog* calls Worcester the “great enemy” and recalls how Worcester used footages of Igorots to portray Filipinos as uncivilized.²⁶ Although Worcester’s film was not released in the Philippines, the protests of Filipinos against it indicate their growing awareness of the power of cinema to distort reality and manipulate public opinion. Against the backdrop of American colonial rule, the protests reflected Filipino desire for self-determination and sense of national identity.



Cine Ideal ad for Graft in *Nueva Fuerza*, 21 September 1916.

Film exhibition business was already becoming lucrative in 1915. Three movie theaters regularly advertised in *Nueva Fuerza*: Cine Royo, Cine Oriente, and Cine Empire. Mabromatis’s Cebu Cabaret also screened “world famous movies” at ticket prices ranging from forty centavos for the *preferencia* or privileged seats to ten centavos for *entrada general* or general admission. But in December, as a Christmas treat for the public, Mabromatis screened movies for free outside his cabaret.²⁷ Cinema Empire, on the other hand, claimed in an anuncio that it was “*El Coliseo mas fresco, comodo y elegante de Cebu*” (The coolest and most elegant Coliseum in Cebu). Moviegoers could also choose to pay ten, twenty-five, or forty centavos for a ticket. On October 21, 1915, *Bag-ong Kusog* reported that the theater was closed temporarily because a new projector was being installed that would result into much clearer movies.²⁸

An anuncio for a concert in Cine Oriente mentions entrance fees at ten, fifty, and eighty centavos. The luxurious theater was decorated with paintings by Raymundo Francia, who advertised himself in the newspaper as “*pintor y decorador del Cine-Oriente*.”²⁹ Ten centavos was the lowest one could pay for a ticket to the theater. And for that price in the following year, one could buy a *vaso grande* (big glass) of *cerveza* or beer in a hotel bar.³⁰ The monthly pay of the ordinary Filipino worker in 1916 was only about PHP 20 while the American worker in the Philippines was paid PHP 300 to PHP 400.³¹ Capitalizing on the popularity of the movies, the government required PHP 100 annual tax for theaters.³²

As cinema increasingly became a favorite pastime, some people started to be wary about its negative effects. *Nueva Fuerza* cites findings of a court in Osaka which linked watching movies with juvenile delinquency.³³ An article in *Bag-ong Kusog* reports observations of an eye doctor in the US that watching movies could harm the eyes.³⁴ Watching films was also linked to superstitious beliefs. A news item tells the story of a woman in Manila who gave birth to a baby with only one arm and one leg and whose face closely resembled Bumuy, described as a comic character similar to Max Linder, which she watched in a film the night before.

The year 1915 saw the prevalence of European films although those from America had started to dominate the local screen. Among the films screened that year were war newsreels, which catered to the hunger for the latest information about the war. The movie house also became not just a venue for collective entertainment but for expression of public grievance, as in the case of how Cebuanos trooped to Cine Oriente to protest against Worcester. With the controversy over Worcester’s racist film and the rise of war newsreels and movies, Cebuano spectators were being introduced to the power of cinema as tool for propaganda.

Gran Espectaculo, *Bag-ong Kusog*, 13 Jan 1916.Cine Ideal ad for *Guerra*. 4 May 1916.

Opposite page:
The Man Inside in *Bag-ong Kusog*, 25 Oct 1917.

1916: Cebu's War of Cinemas

Cebu in 1916 saw increasing public anxiety as the US entry in the war in Europe became more and more imminent. As American warships patrolling the Pacific arrived in Cebu, the crackdown on German expatriates in the city intensified, leading to arrests and seizure of property.³⁵ Meanwhile, local theaters were engaged in their own marketing war. In March 6, Mabromatis finally inaugurated his own movie house, the Cine Ideal, located in Colon. The inaugural ad states Cine Ideal's affiliation with another theater of the same name in Manila, along with Sirena and Empire. The mention of Cebu Ideal being connected to Empire in Manila is confusing as another Cine Empire also existed in Cebu. Perhaps, affiliation here only means relationship between theaters in terms of film distribution and exchange and not as local franchise. Cine Ideal also claims that all its films come from Paris, Milan, Turin, and Chicago. Prices of tickets were at ten and twenty centavos.³⁶

Echoing wartime chest beating, Mabromatis declared war on his competitors in May, reducing ticket prices to as low as five centavos and offered to show twenty films every night, which he claimed was something never done by any other theater in the country.³⁷ This was announced in an ad that flashed the headline “*Guerra*.” Being the manager of an ice plant, the Greek entrepreneur could also afford to drop the price of ice cream sold in his theater to as low as five centavos. Stiff competition had driven theater owners and managers to be creative in marketing. Seat arrangement in cinemas retained class segregation of old playhouses, with privileged palcos near the stage, a butaca or balcony, and the *entrada general*, which had the lowest price. People from all walks of life gathered to watch a movie in the same theater albeit in seats demarcated according to class.

Starting January 30, articles and advertisements announced the screenings in Cine Royo of the “*serie gigante*” (gigantic series) called *Las Hazanas de Elena* (*The Exploits of Elaine*), the 1914 film directed by Louis J. Gasnier and Leopold Wharton, which also starred Pearl White. Cine Royo ran it from February 2 to July 2. Produced by Pathe, both *Los Peligros* and *Las Hazanas* exemplify the new thriller genre which features an adventurous heroine who always tend to outsmart her male antagonists. Such a character reflected the liberated “new woman” that in Cebu would be associated to the controversial “yaya” dress (a loose dress that revealed the shoulders) and the equally risqué tango dance.³⁸

Aside from the two Pathe films, fewer titles were featured in the anuncios that year. They were *La Mano Aferradora* (*The Gripping Hand*), Francis Ford's *La Moneda Roda* (*The Broken Coin*, 1915), Otis Turner's *La Caja Negra* (*The Black Box*, 1915), Howell Hansel's *El Misterio del Million* (*The Million Dollar Mystery*, 1914), and Sherwood Mac Donald's *El Circulo Rojo* (*The Red Circle*, 1915). All these films were produced in the US, mostly from the previous year. Even *Las Hazanas* was a collaboration between a branch in the US of the French company Pathe and the American-owned Wharton Studio with American cast and crew. This suggests the gradual takeover of the global film business by US companies, as the war-stricken French and other European film companies withdrew or closed down. The lack of films, particularly those coming from Europe, was evident in Cebu this year.

Still, demand for movies continued to grow not only in Cebu City but also in the neighboring towns. An anuncio in *Nueva Fuerza* called for investors for a movie house to be built in the town of Carcar, promising sure and fast return for a small capital. It also offered catalogs of equipment and a list of European and American films. But nothing in *Nueva Fuerza* in the next three years would show that this planned movie house in Carcar was actually built.

1917: Cinema in the Time of War and Cholera

Triggered by the sinking of American merchant ships torpedoed by German U-boats in the Atlantic Ocean, the United States finally joined the war in Europe in 1917. In its April 8 issue, *Nueva Fuerza* bannered the headline “*Declaracion de Guerra.*”³⁹ The US entry in the war was much anticipated by the Cebuanos. Propaganda films screened in the local theaters helped ensure local support for the American war effort. News of the fighting filled the pages of *Nueva Fuerza*, which also dealt with the question of whether German submarines would reach the Philippines.⁴⁰ As government feared the spread of war in the Pacific, it began training selected students in the University of the Philippines in the operation of a submarine. A news item reports of plans to manufacture submarines in the Philippines.⁴¹ Defenses around Manila were beefed up, particularly in the island of Corregidor where heavy artillery and fortifications were installed. Mines were laid in the sea surrounding Manila to thwart entry of German warships and submarines.⁴² President Manuel Quezon pledged to send 20,000 Filipino soldiers to Europe⁴³ and ordered the creation of *Militia Nacional* or reserve force. Newspapers also echoed government’s call for wartime austerity.⁴⁴

Reports of Cebuanos killed in the war in Europe helped intensify anti-German sentiment that would later be aimed at the German civilians living in Cebu.⁴⁵ The authorities began a crackdown on German nationals in Manila, raiding their homes and confiscating their belongings. In Cebu, the German Vice-Consul M. C. Andre, who also headed the Behn, Meyer & Co., was arrested while he was sleeping in his house in Mabolo. The American torpedo ship “Bainbridge” guarded German boats docked at the pier in Cebu. The local constabulary also helped watch over these enemy boats.⁴⁶

Besides stories of World War I, *Nueva Fuerza* also reported the outbreak of the Communist Revolution in Russia. On the same day it bannered the American declaration of war, it also ran the news story “*La Revolucion en Rusia.*”⁴⁷ More and more articles on this event would appear suggesting local interest in the ideology behind the revolution, which was referred to as “*collectivismo*” or “*Bolhevismo.*”

Amid all the somber news, the public found refuge in the movie house, which offered escapist entertainment and, in the case of propaganda war movies, a reflection of their militaristic and patriotic zeal. War newsreels continued to be popular. Cine Ideal screened newsreels of recent fighting, particularly at the Somme.⁴⁸ Other films about the war featured in the anuncios were Edward Jose’s *La Perla del Ejercito* (*Pearl of the Army*, 1916), William Bertram’s *Nell el Marino* (*Neal of the Navy*, 1915), and T. Hayes’ and Hunter Hayes’ *El Misterio del Submarino* (*The Secret of the Submarine*, 1915).⁴⁹

This year saw the rare use of publicity photographs as illustrations for the anuncios. This includes the advertisement

for Cine Ideal’s screening of Stewart Paton’s *20,000 Leguas* (*20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, 1916), an adaptation of Jules Verne’s novel of the same title.⁵⁰ Another ad illustrated with not just one but six photos is one that featured the screening in Cine Ideal of George Lessey’s and Richard Stanton’s 1915 film *Graft*. Interestingly, the anuncio does not carry the title of this movie but only implies it in the copy using the Cebuano translation of graft as “soborno.”⁵¹ Still another ad illustrated with photograph is one featuring the 1916 American film *The Man Inside*. This ad is entirely written in English and strangely does not mention the theater sponsor and instead banners the name of the actor, Edwin Evans, in hand-executed lettering that is as big as the title.⁵² An article in *Nueva Fuerza* also describes the French silent film actor Max Linder as “*el popular comico en las cintas cinematograficas, el eterno humorist*” (*the popular comic of cinema, the eternal humorist*). These instances suggest the growing fascination among Cebuanos for actors as celebrities or stars. The increasing emphasis on the names of the actors in the anuncios and newspaper publicity coincided with the rise of the Hollywood star system, leading the way for the emergence in the Philippines of the culture of the *artista*.

Other movies advertised this year were Jacques Jaccard’s *Brillante Celestial* (*The Diamond from the Sky*, 1915); *La Hija del Circo* (*Circus Girl’s Romance*, 1915); T. Hayes’s *El Secreto de la Mancha Roja* (*The Crimson Stain*, 1916); W. A. S Douglas’s and Harry Harvey’s *La Garra del Diablo* (*The Grip of Evil*, 1916); Louis Feuillade’s *Vampiros* (*The Vampires* or *Les Vampires*, 1915); James W. Horne’s 1916 serial drama *Stingaree*; Jacques Jaccard’s and MacRae’s *Libertad* (*Liberty, A Daughter of the USA*, 1916); George B. Seitz’s *La Garra del Hierro* (*The Iron’s Claw*, 1916); T. Hayes’s and Hunter Hayes’s *El Secreto de la Mancha Roja* (*The Crimson Stain*, 1916); *Ha Caída la Humanidad en el Abismo del Mal* (*Humanity has Fallen in the Abyss of Evil*); and Thomas Ince’s pacifist film *Civilizacion* (*Civilization*, 1916). As in 1915, a total of seventeen film titles were featured in the anuncios in 1917. Most of these films come from American film companies like Universal, Wharton Studio, and Metro and about half of the listed films were produced the year before. This shows that importation of films was starting to stabilize as local distributors now relied more on US-based film exchange companies for their supplies.

As more people trooped to the theaters in a time when epidemics like cholera and leprosy were terrifying the public, concerns for hygiene, etiquette, and moral decadence among spectators were raised. A common target of complaints was the women’s practice of chewing betel nut and spitting indiscriminately.⁵³ One writer noted that this has left red stains on the walls and floors of the theaters. He tried to debunk claims that this native practice could clean and strengthen teeth.⁵⁴ The same writer also exposed voyeurism among some men in the *entrada general*, whose heads were trained not on the screen but on the women upstairs hoping

to see “body parts that should not be seen.”⁵⁵ The dark halls of the cinema also induced criminal activities such as when a writer was attacked while he was watching *La Garra del Hierro*. Incidents like this added to the impression that the movie house is not a safe place. Meanwhile, local moralists succeeded in closing down the Cebu Cabaret, formerly owned by M. D. Mabromatis and now identified with Carl Peterson.⁵⁶

Ownership of theaters was also commonly passed on, as owners often resort to buying out the competition. On April 22, for example, *Bag-ong Kusog* announced that the “popular” businessman Don Pedro Royo, who owned Cine Royo, was now the new owner of Cine Oriente. From then on, ads of the same movies would name the two theaters as sponsors, indicating that the same program was being screened in both theaters.

Unlike in the previous year, there had been almost no report in the *Nueva Fuerza* about M. D. Mabromatis, except for one article that tackled complaints against the services of the ice plant that he used to manage. The writer of the article noted that since Mabromatis left the company, service became elitist as it refused to sell ice to the poor who desperately needed it for medicinal purposes.⁵⁷ This contrasted with Mabromatis’s style of enticing lower class customers by offering discounts, treats, and even free outdoor screenings on special occasions.

1918: War Ends

Germany signed an armistice with the allies in November 11, 1918, marking the end of the war. One year of US participation in the war had turned the tide against the Germans. The Philippines supported the US by sending troops to fight in Europe. The country’s military also prepared in case the war spread to the Pacific. As part of this preparation, the government ordered all German nationals in the country to be rounded up and sent to the US as prisoners of war. It was estimated that there were about 200 Germans living in the Philippines.⁵⁸ Money confiscated from them amounted to PHP 3,000,000 and this would be used to help fund the US war efforts.⁵⁹ In Cebu, the year began with dramatic increase in news of anti-German activities and reports of Cebuanos killed while fighting in Europe.⁶⁰ Local authorities continued their crackdown on German nationals. As rumors of the presence of German spies were reported,⁶¹ the constabulary conducted raids, arrests, and seizure of German businesses in the city.⁶²

Cebu’s theaters continued to screen war films, such as Rupert Julian’s *El Kaiser*, *La Bestia del Berlin* (*The Kaiser or The Beast of Berlin*, 1918), Joseph Golden’s *Los Lobos de Kutura* (*The Wolves of Kultur*, 1918), Jacques Jaccard’s 1917 film *Patria*, and *Heroe del Marne* (*Hero of Marne*). In the latter, the appearance of President Woodrow Wilson allegedly drew applause from the audience.⁶³ This reception of the image of the American president suggests that Cebuanos had already embraced US colonial rule. It demonstrates once again the power of cinema as an ideological apparatus. Other newsreels featured in the ads include *Visita de S. M. el Rey Jorge a su Gran Flota* (*Visit of King George to his Great Fleet*), *La Captura de Mesinas y La Batalla de Arras* (*The Capture of Messinas and the Battle of Aras*), and *Los Peligros del Servicio Secreto* (*The Dangers of the Secret Service*).



Cine Royo y Oriente ad for *El Secreto del Submarino*, *Ali Sing o El Peligro Amarillo*, *La Garra del Diablo* o *El Abismo del Mal*, and *La Perla del Ejercito*, *Bag-ong Kusog*, 13 Sept 1917.

Film exhibition business remained lucrative in 1918 and theaters lured audiences with more variety in programming. Cine Royo reverted to the old practice of staging vaudevilles and acrobatics alongside screenings.⁶⁴ Its sister theater Cine Oriente also staged performances of magic and hypnotism.⁶⁵ For this brief period, screen and stage were once again reunited. Moviegoers also became more and more demanding. A newspaper writer complained about shouting, loud laughter, and cursing in the *entrada general* and compared this behavior of Cebuanos with moviegoers in Manila who, he said, were generally quieter and would only laugh at scenes that were funny. He asked why theater owners in Cebu would not go around the audience to monitor such misbehavior as they did in Manila. He felt embarrassed that this behavior might give the Americans in the audience wrong impressions of Filipinos.⁶⁶ Another writer in *Nueva Fuerza* criticized some women in the audience who would lie down to sleep on their seats to the dismay of those sitting beside them. These comments aimed at people in the *entrada general* suggest class contempt but also racial insecurity prevalent among the more privileged.

Film titles continued to be advertised in Spanish although most already came from the US. Among them were Julian Rupert’s *Cinderella de Kentucky* (*A Kentucky Cinderella*, 1917), *La Casa de Muñecas* (*A Doll’s House*, 1917), Allan Duran’s *El Honor de Una Mujer* (*A Woman’s Honor*, 1917), and Thomas Dixon’s *La Caída de Una Nacion* (*The Fall of the Nation*, 1916), a rejoinder to D. W. Griffith’s *The Birth of the Nation* (1912), which is based on Dixon’s novel. The screening of this racist film came at a time when articles in *Bag-ong Kusog* calls African-Americans residing in Cebu as “agta,” which in Cebuano refers to a mythical dark skinned and kinky-haired giant that dwells in large trees.



Cine Ideal ad for Graft.

The anuncios also featured religious films such as *La Pasion y Muerte de Jesus* (*The Passion and Death of Christ*) and *El Novena Dia* (*The Novena Day*). The popularity of religious movies during this time is not surprising given that the Philippines is a predominantly Catholic country. According to film historian Charles Musser, the passion play was one of the three distinct genres of early cinema, next to travel and boxing films.⁶⁷ “Religious subjects in general were an important genre for the early film industry,” he said.⁶⁸

More than 80 titles were featured in the anuncios this year, which was a dramatic increase compared to previous years. They include Jacques Jaccard’s *Alas Rojo* (*The Red Ace*, 1917), *Amor Volcanico* (*Volcanic Love*), *La Mano de Beatriz* (*Beatrix Fairfax*, 1916), *La Flor de Tempestad*, *Los Amores de Ambrosio* (*The Loves of Ambrosio*), *Conflictos Matrimoniales* (*Marital Conflicts*), Jo De Grasse’s *El Auto Escarlata* (*The Scarlet Car*, 1917), George Seitz’s *El Anillo Fatal* (*The Fatal Ring*, 1917), William Steiner’s *El Peligro Amarillo* (*The Yellow Menace*, 1916), *La Dulce Alicia* (*Alice in Wonderland*), Colin Campbell’s *Gloria* (*Gloria’s Romance*, 1916), and Charlie Chaplin’s *El Hombre Trampa* (*The Tramp*, 1915).

A historic event this year was the screening in Cine Ideal of a newsreel about the funeral the first wife of Sergio Osmeña Sr.⁶⁹ This was the first documentary shot by Jose Nepomuceno, according to Joe Quirino in his biography about this Filipino filmmaker who also shot the country’s first feature film, *Dalagang Bukid* in 1919.⁷⁰ The screening of Nepomuceno’s film was the first ever documented screening of a film by a Filipino filmmaker in Cebu. As it was a film about an event close to Cebu and one that featured a lot of prominent Cebuanos attending the funeral, Nepomuceno’s newsreel thus had an intimate reception.

1919: The Rise of Hollywood

Enjoying peacetime boom, theater owners in Cebu continued to upgrade their equipment and facilities. On January 17, Cine Ideal acquired its own generator in order to address the problem of power interruption during screenings.⁷¹ Then in October, it announced that it now had 12 *ventiladors* or electric fans and an orchestra.⁷² Stores outside theaters offered refreshments. Across Cine Royo in Calle Juan Luna, a *salon de refrescos* (refreshment parlor) named Five in Four served ice cream, sodas, *zarzaparilla* (root beer), lemonades, candies, as well as tobaccos and cigarettes.⁷³ A *sorbitihan* (ice cream parlor) called Ang Bitoon, located across Cine Oriente, offered local flavors including fresh coconuts and mango.⁷⁴

As more and more people patronized the newly improved cinemas, controlling the crowd became a problem. An item in *Bag-ong Kusog* tells about a scuffle between moviegoers in Cine Ideal.⁷⁵ Earlier in March, Cine Oriente’s manager Sr. Eduardo Lopez clashed with the local police after two of its members tried to force their way into the theater without paying.⁷⁶ Cine Royo offered free screenings on Victory Day (whatever it celebrated on August 4, it did not indicate).⁷⁷ In an advertisement for the screening of a film starring Eddie Polo (the film could be *Bull’s Eye* starring Polo and released in 1918; again, the name of the actor is

highlighted but the title of the film is not mentioned.), Cine Ideal announced that children were now required to pay full price.⁷⁸

Close to 40 new titles were featured in the anuncios or mentioned in the articles in *Nueva Fuerza* this year. Among them were *El Blanco Tragico* (*The White Tragedy*), *El Amor y Oro* (*Love and Gold*), *Los Bandidos del Ferrocarril* (*The Railroad Bandit*, 1916), J. P. Mac Gowan’s *The Red Glove* (1919), Chester and Sidney Franklin’s *Al Dino y la Lampara Maravillosa* (*Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp*), Ben Wilson’s *La Bala de Bronce* (*The Brass Bullet*, 1918), Theo Frenkel’s *Los Dos Rivaless* (*The Two Rivals*, 1912), Harry Harvey and Jacques Jaccard’s *Las Garras del Leon* (*The Lion’s Claws*, 1918), and *Theda Bara in Carmen* (*Carmen*, 1915). The latter, interestingly, was advertised with the name of the artist attached to the title, suggesting the importance of the celebrity as lure for the audience.

One of the biggest news that year was the coming of the Hollywood actress Marie Walcamp, who came to the Philippines to shoot a film entitled *Los Petales de Lao Tze* (*The Petals of Lao Tze*, retitled *The Dragon’s Net* and released in 1920). Like Pearl White, Walcamp was a serial queen who starred in films screened previously in Cebu like *La Hija del Circo*, *Libertad*, *Los Bandidos del Ferrocarril*, *Patria*, *Alas Rojo*,

and *Las Garras*. In its January 31 issue, *Bag-ong Kusog* reports the arrival of Walcamp and her crew in Cebu. Yet news of her coming in 1919 raised suspicions that, as in Worcester’s film, Walcamp’s movie might yet again put the Philippines in a bad light. But when Walcamp arrived at the pier in Cebu, she immediately impressed her fans by doing a publicity stunt of climbing the wall of Fort San Pedro. She then paid a visit to the Governor of Cebu to ask permission to shoot in the province. The Governor agreed on condition that the crew would not film people who were naked so as not to portray Cebuanos as savages. The public was also urged to help watch over the crew during filming.⁷⁹

Although war was over, films about it continued to be screened in the local theaters. These include *Los Lobos de Kultura* (*The Wolves of Culture*), George Lessey’s and Playter Wellington’s *El Ojo del Aguilar* (*The Eagle’s Eye*, 1918), and *La Marina de Guerra de los E.U. No.3* (*The United States Navy, No. 3*). A news item in *Nueva Fuerza* also announced the screening of a film featuring Theodore Roosevelt, indicating continued interest among Cebuanos in the lives of American presidents.⁸⁰

- Tom Gunning, “The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, It’s Spectators and the Avant Garde,” in Grainge, Paul, Jancovich, Mark, et al. *Film Histories: An Introduction and Reader* (Edinburg: Ediburg University Press, 2007), 14–15.
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- Resil Mojares, *Casa Gorordo in Cebu: Urban Residence in a Philippine Province 1860-1920*, new ed. (Cebu City: Ramon Abotiz Foundation, Inc., 2017). In his citation notes, Mojares identifies Mabromatis as the manager of the Cebu Ice and Cold Storage when it was owned by Don Mariano Veloso who bought it from the original American owners.
- Nueva Fuerza* (hereon referred to as *NF*), March 5, 1916, 2.
- “Datos Macabros de la Gran Tragedia,” *NF*, September 9, 1915, 1.
- Bag-ong Kusog* (hereon referred to as *BK*), September 30, 1915, 5.
- “Aleman nga Gimultahan,” *BK*, May 20, 1915, 3.
- “Gugma sa Yutang Natawhan,” *BK*, May 6, 1915, 4.
- Cine Oriente ad. *BK*, May 27, 1915, 4.
- Cine Oriente ad. *NF*, May 30, 1915, 2.
- Kristine Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw Hill Companies, Inc., 2003), 61.
- Cine Oriente ad. *BK*, May 16, 1915, 3.
- Cine Oriente ad. *NF*, May 30, 1915, 2.
- Cine Empire ad. *NF*, October 10, 1915, 2.
- Paul Grainge, Mark Jancovich, et al., *Film Histories: An Introduction and Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 70.
- Cine Empire ad. *NF*, October 17, 1915, 2.
- Resil Mojares, “Worcester in Cebu: Filipino Response to American Business 1915-1924,” *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* 13, 1 (March 1985): 2.
- “Meeting de Protesta Contra Worcester,” *NF*, July 25, 1915, 2.
- Rodney J. Sullivan, *Exemplar of Americanism: The Philippine Career of Dean C. Worcester* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1992), 195.
- “Worcester,” *BK*, August 8, 1915, 3.
- “Sine sa Cabaret Walay Bayad,” *BK*, December 5, 1915, 3.
- BK*, October 21, 1915, 3.
- Raymundo Francia ad. *BK*, August 1, 1915, 3.
- Cervesa Oriental ad. *NF*, March 9, 1916, 1.
- BK*, January 23, 1916, 3.
- “Hinungdanon Kaayo,” *BK*, November 4, 1915, 1.
- “Los Peligros del Cinematografo,” *NF*, August 22, 1915, 1.
- BK*, September 5, 1915, 3.
- BK*, September 30, 1916, 5.
- Cine Ideal ad. *NF*, March 5, 1916, 2.
- “Mabromatis Declara la Guerra,” *NF*, May 11, 1916. An article entitled “Gubat sa mga Sine?” also appeared also appeared in *BK*, May 11, 1916, 3.

Conclusion

The Filipino love for Hollywood movies could be traced to the latter half of the 1910s, which saw the rise of the narrative film and American star system. The anxieties during the First World War only reinforced dependency of Filipinos on Americans whose military might had provided them with a sense of security against perceived common enemy. Employed by the Americans as ideological apparatus, cinema facilitated the pacification and subjection of the colonized native who looked to this technological wonder as symbol of sophistication and modernity. In this era of war, epidemics, and austerity, the movie house, which attracted people from all classes, became the new pleasure palace offering escapist entertainment for a few centavos. In Cebu, during these years, while some expressed concerns over the dangers of cinema, most embraced its delightful world of magic and fantasy.

38 “Ang Yaya,” *BK*, June 27, 1919, 5.

39 “Declaracion de Guerra,” *NF*, April 8, 1917, 1.

40 “Austria y Bulgaria y la Paz: Submarions Alemanes en el Pacifico,” *NF*, April 15, 1917, 1. See also: “Amerikano Batok Alemana: Moabot ang Submarinong Aleman sa Pilipinas?” *BK*, April 15, 1917, 3.; “Porbida king mga Submarino,” *BK*, April 15, 1917, 3; “Submarino nga Natundag sa Cavite,” *BK*, April 19, 1917, 4.

41 “Walay Submarino,” *BK*, July 15, 1917, 4.

42 “Amerika batok Alemana,” *BK*, April 12, 1917, 5.

43 “Nangahadlok nga Ipadala sa Oropa,” *BK*, June 21, 1917, 4.

44 “Ang Pagdaginot,” *BK*, April 22, 1917, 5.

45 “Mga Pilipinhong Naangin sa Submarinong Aleman: Duha ka Sugbuanon Namatay,” *BK*, July 1, 1917.

46 “Amerika batok Alemana,” *BK*, April 12, 1917, 5.

47 “La Revolucion en Rusia,” *NF*, April 8, 1917, 3.

48 “Mga Sintas sa Gubat,” *BK*, July 29, 1917, 4.

49 *BK*, July 15, 1917, 5.

50 Cine Ideal ad. *BK*, May 3, 1917, 4.

51 Cine Ideal ad. *BK*, September 4, 1916, 4.

52 *BK*, October 25, 1917, 6.

53 “Ang Pagmama,” *BK*, May 24, 1917, 5.

54 “Mga Paniid,” *BK*, May 24, 1917, 4.

55 *BK*, February 18, 1917, 3.

56 “No More Cebu Cabaret,” *NF*, August 2, 1917, 1.

57 “Nauansa ang Buhatan sa Yelo?” *BK*, May 17, 1917, 4.

58 “*Tanang Aleman Ipadala sa E.U.*,” *BK*, July 18, 1918, 7.

59 *BK*, March 7, 1918, 7.

60 “Sugbuanon nga Atua sa Francia,” *BK*, November 10, 1918, 5.

61 “Espias en Cebu?” *NF*, September 18, 1918, 2.

62 “Ang Gubat sa Sugbu,” *BK*, February 17, 1918, 7.

63 *NF*, July 7, 1918, 1.

64 “En El Cine Royo,” *NF*, July 28, 1918, 1.

65 *BK*, November 17, 1918, 5.

66 “Nganong Dili Badlongon,” *BK*, August 4, 1918, 7.

67 Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1990), 193.

68 Ibid., 219.

69 “El Entierro de la Sra. De Osmeña en Pelicula,” *NF*, January 31, 1918, 1.

70 Joe Quirino, *Don Jose and the Early Philippine Cinema* (Quezon City: Phoenix Publishing House, Inc., 1983), 16.

71 *BK*, January 17, 1919, 5.

72 Cine Ideal ad. *BK*, October 2, 1919, 7.

73 Five in Four ad. *NF*, September 19, 1919, 1.

74 *BK*, June 13, 1918, 9.

75 *BK*, December 6, 1919, 8.

76 “Lopez Contra Policia,” *NF*, March 3, 1919.

77 “Ang 4 sa Augusto sa Sugbu,” *BK*, August 6, 1919, 5.

78 *NF*, September 25, 1919, 4.

79 “Si Marie Walcamp Ania Na,” *BK*, January 31, 1920.

80 *NF*, September 27, 1919, 1.

The case of Isabel Acuña is a vivid illustration of how women around the world historically have been excluded from film historiography.

Opposite page: Acuña and Nepomuceno in their later years.
Courtesy of Nadi Tofighian.

“CALL IT TEAM:”

Isabel Acuña and the Gendered History of Early Film Partnership¹

Nadi Tofighian

In the 1932-1933 edition of *Rosenstock's Manila City Directory*, Isabel Acuña, or Isabel de Nepomuceno (the entry identifies her by her married name), is listed as the vice president of the newly formed Malayan Pictures Corporation.² Yet, current research and historiographical accounts have hitherto overlooked Acuña's status in the early Filipino film industry, placing her in an ancillary role as helper and assistant. Most film historians have downplayed her impact on and contributions to the development of early cinema in the Philippines. She is omitted from Lena Strait Pareja's 1998 study on women in early Filipino cinema.³ In my earlier work on José Nepomuceno and his influence in creating a Filipino national consciousness, Isabel Acuña is not mentioned either.⁴ Nick Deocampo, on the other hand, identifies some of Isabel Acuña's many responsibilities, but repeatedly defines her through her marital status rather than her professional accomplishments: “The labor to produce film was divided between the Nepomuceno brothers and even Jose's wife, Isabel Acuña of Iloilo. [...] Jose's wife was the company's treasurer, casting directress, and hair and makeup supervisor.”⁵

The case of Isabel Acuña is a vivid illustration of how women around the world historically have been excluded from film historiography. Writing about the classical Hollywood era, Erin Hill suggests that women's involvement in cinematic industry has been systematically undermined, not dissimilar to “women's work” in other fields: “Women were never absent from film history; they often simply weren't documented as part of it because they did ‘women's work,’ which was—by definition—insignificant, tedious, low status, and noncreative.”⁶ The past decade or so has seen a concerted and an increased effort to revisit the role of women in film history, and make their invaluable contributions visible.⁷

Isabel Acuña (January 28, 1904 – September 15, 1986) met José Nepomuceno in Manila in 1920 through her brother who had been Nepomuceno's classmate at San Beda College.⁸ Nepomuceno was shooting his third feature film, *Un Capello Marchito* (*The Wilted Rosebud*, 1920), at the time, and Isabel Acuña's younger sister, Luisa Acuña, was starring in the film. Three years previously, Nepomuceno founded Malayan Movies together with his brother, Jesús Nepomuceno, in Manila, where they had previously run a successful

photography studio. Two years later, they made the earliest known fiction film created by a Filipino director, *Dalagang Bukid* (*Country Maiden*, 1919).⁹ Although Nepomuceno's cinematic career was remarkably fruitful, with around 80 films, it is currently believed that none of them survived.¹⁰ This, together with the lack of existing production notes, has made it practically impossible to track the evolution of Isabel Acuña's involvement in the production of these films.

Acuña and Nepomuceno married on June 6, 1920 at the Quiapo Church in Manila a few months after their first meeting. From that time forward, Acuña was involved in the filmmaking process of Malayan Movies. Initially, she primarily worked on costume design and makeup. She was instrumental in elevating the role of costume design and makeup, which became important not only for character construction and development, but also for the mise-en-scène of the film. She is reported to have spent hours on the streets, in bazaars, and in movie houses conducting research on costumes and set designs,¹¹ which helped her to formulate her own innovative ideas for the mise-en-scène. At the time, the issue of women's costumes, on the screen but primarily on stage, was occasionally discussed in the Filipino press. In an interview with Harry Wardell, the manager of Al Jolson, he was asked about his opinion on the vaudeville shows at Rivoli and Savoy: “his first criticism was that the girls on the stage here put on too much dress, and most of them are badly dressed.”¹²

In addition to her attempts to modernize the design of costumes and makeup of the film cast to speak to contemporary audiences, Acuña insisted on using simple words in the dialogue and intertitles to make the films more widely accessible. She took up the role of an informal censor at Malayan Movies as she required no dirty language, as well as keeping a lookout for inappropriate scenes. As a casting director, she was particularly adept at recruiting young actresses. The skill included convincing parents to permit their daughters to be on the screen as many still looked down on cinema as an art form.¹³ The Filipino press of the time gushed about the powerful roles of Hollywood casting directors, who were presented as makers and breakers of dreams. The weekly journal *Graphic*, formed in July 1927, reports: “Talented singers and ambitious young men and women go there. They all have one common aim to break into the silver screen. But there's nothing sure in Hollywood. Uncertainty hangs heavily

around the casting director's waiting room.”¹⁴ *Graphic*, with its focus on visual culture, Hollywood, and movie stars, had numerous stories about Hollywood's job market and “movie-struck girls begging casting directors for jobs.”¹⁵ The persistent interest in the inner workings of the U.S. film industry did not extend to local cinema production and its major players received much less coverage. Although Isabel Acuña shared duties with her Hollywood counterparts, she was not recognized as a casting director by contemporary press, and her important contributions on that front were neglected.

In my archival research on Filipino newspapers, I found two early articles mentioning Isabel Acuña, both published in *Graphic*. A 1928 article titled “Stars that Shine in Philippine Film” provides a brief account of Acuña's role in casting 15-year-old Eva Lyn for José Nepomuceno's hugely successful film *La Mujer Filipina* (*The Filipino Woman*, 1927). Her sudden appearance in the text, not accompanied by a proper introduction, does not fully describe Acuña's central role within the casting process, “Miss Lyn is the type the movie director was looking for, but the fact that her hair is bobbed almost spelled disaster to her movie career. ‘I almost lost out,’ to use her very words. But Mrs. Nepomuceno came to her rescue by suggesting that she wear a wig, and she landed the job.”¹⁶ Similarly, the second article, a 1931 biographical portrait of José Nepomuceno, is telling in the limited role it ascribes to Acuña: “The pioneer film producer, Nepomuceno, married the former Miss Isabel Acuña, sister of Consuelo (Monina) Acuña, Miss Philippines, 1930, on June 6, 1920. The Nepomucenos have seven children.”¹⁷ Here, she is presented as a sister of a beauty queen, a wife of a famous film director, and a mother, with her contributions to the filmmaking process entirely omitted.

A number of articles published in the Filipino press drew attention to the danger the local suffragette movement (women received the right to vote in 1933) and women in creative industries could bring upon traditional gender roles: “Why should we clamor for greater emancipation when the Filipino woman, as she is today, is not a slave, but is still the queen of the home and the princess before her husband's eyes?”¹⁸ Although some articles attempted to challenge the role of a woman as the queen of the home and instead made her the queen of a workplace “prominent in the professions,”¹⁹ these pieces were outnumbered by articles doubting women's professional capabilities. Titles of such articles include “Is Woman Man's Inferior?”, “Is the Modern Filipino Girl as Bad as All That?”, and “What Women Talk About” (the answer here was supposedly babies, education, and dresses).²⁰

Acuña’s role in the Filipino film industry is subsumed by her being part of the prominent Nepomuceno family. Acuña’s range of responsibilities in the studio and during the filmmaking process increased over time. In the 1920s, she worked as a casting director, costume designer, art director, set decorator, and makeup supervisor in the productions of Malayan Movies. The company was the main film producer in the Philippines during the silent era and was largely a family-run business, with the company offices being on the same address, 247 General Solano in Quiapo, as the family residence.²¹ In 1931, the company was dissolved, and in its place, Malayan Pictures Corporation was formed. Isabel de Nepomuceno was listed as the vice president of the new company in the Manila city directory.²² Throughout the 1920s, her name was not mentioned in the city directories’ entries for Malayan Movies. Further research is required to shed light on her enigmatic promotion to the position of vice president and her responsibilities at Malayan Pictures Corporation.

In a 1983 book on José Nepomuceno, Joe Quirino writes about Isabel Acuña’s long workdays, her unfailing presence on set, and how she “did most of the preparatory work before any actual shooting started.”²³ In this book, Quirino repeatedly calls her “the right hand and left hand” of her husband.²⁴ In a rare 1981 interview,²⁵ Acuña describes her role in the film production process as a partner within the Nepomuceno-owned companies and José Nepomuceno’s life-long collaborator: “He had always wanted me to work side by side with him in our film projects. So he taught me the rudiments of casting, scriptwriting, production design and even art direction. That’s why in the States I was considered the first casting director in the Philippines.”²⁶

In this interview, Isabel Acuña challenges an assumption prevalent in Filipino film history that she played a supporting role in Nepomuceno’s ventures. Instead, she speaks

about her work as a valuable contribution to her and José Nepomuceno’s joint projects. Moreover, she asserts that one of her chosen areas of specialization—casting—has secured her an international fame within early film history.

This status as the first Filipino casting director, reportedly attributed to Acuña in the United States, is not part of the history of her contributions to the film industry in her native country. Although it has now become clear that Acuña was an early film pioneer in the Philippines and was highly involved in the production process of Nepomuceno’s films, she continues to be referred to, if at all, as the wife of an important film director. As a result of working in the shadow of her famed husband, much of her work has not been documented, nor has it been properly credited. Further research is required to rectify this lacuna in Filipino film history and to reveal the details of Acuña’s involvement in specific films, as well as her various roles in the history of Filipino film production.

This essay attempts to restore Isabel Acuña’s place as a recognized partner in the Nepomuceno film production companies, the place she rightfully claimed in 1981, when she told the interviewer: “The film projects we undertook were really husband-wife venture, or call it team.”²⁷

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How Ateng Osorio Films In Heres and Elsewheres

Avie Felix

1 This essay is a longer reworked version of a profile I wrote on Isabel Acuña for Columbia University’s *Women Film Pioneers Project*. Available here: <https://wfpp.cdrs.columbia.edu/pioneer/isabel-acuna/> (accessed August 17, 2020).
2 *Rosenstock’s Manila City Directory 1932–1933* (Manila: Philippine Education Co., 1932).
3 Lena Strait Pareja, *Roles and Images of Woman in the Early Years of Philippine Cinema 1912–1941* (PhD Dissertation, University of the Philippines Diliman, 1998).
4 Nadi Tofghian, “José Nepomuceno and the Creation of a Filipino National Consciousness,” *Film History* 20.1 (2008): 77–94.
5 Nick Deocampo, *Cine: Spanish Influences on Early Cinema in the Philippines* (Manila: National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 2003), 257.
6 Erin Hill, *Never Done: A History of Women’s Work in Media Production* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 5.
7 See, for instance, Sofia Bull and Astrid Söderbergh Widding, eds. *Not so Silent: Women in Cinema before Sound* (Stockholm: Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, 2010); Jane Gaines, *Pink-Slipped: What Happened to Women in the Silent Film Industries* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018); Ingrid Stigsdotter, ed. *Making the Invisible Visible: Reclaiming Women’s Agency in Swedish Film History and Beyond* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2019).
8 George Vail Kabrisante, “Jose Nepomuceno: The Father of R.P. Movies,” *Jingle Extra Hot Movie Entertainment Magazine*, May 4, 1981.
9 The issue of the earliest “Filipino” film is discussed and problematized by Patrick F. Campos in *The End of National Cinema: Filipino Film at the Turn of the Century* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2016); Charles Musser in “Nationalism, Contradiction, and Identity; or, A Reconsideration of Early Cinema in the Philippines,” *Early Cinema in Asia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017); Nick Deocampo and others.
10 A few years ago, the independent film historian Teddy Co found a film accredited to a certain “Josh Nelson” and filmed around Zamboanga City in Mindanao. This film bears many similarities to José Nepomuceno’s lost *Moro Pirates* (1931).
11 Joe Quirino, *Don José and the Early Philippine Cinema* (Quezon City: Phoenix Publishing House Inc., 1983), 23.
12 Nicasio Osmeña, “Broadway Theatrical Expert Talks on Filipino Women”, *Graphic*, August 27, 1927, 3.

13 Kabrisante; Quirino, 5, 22.
14 Elisabeth Cooper, “Meeting the Stars in Hollywood,” *Graphic*, October 22, 1927, 4.
15 Lolita Sollee, “Movieland As Is,” *Graphic*, March 17, 1928.
16 M. San Martin, “Stars that Shine in Philippine Filmdom,” *Graphic*, October 20, 1928, 3.
17 “Who is Who in the Philippines: A Biographical Sketch of Jose Nepomuceno, Pioneer Filipino Film Producer,” *Graphic*, September 2, 1931, 16. The couple later had an eighth child. All their children appeared in their films, and their son Angelito became a popular child actor. Another son, Luis, became a famous film director and producer, and made *Dabil Sa Isang Bulaklak* (*Because of a Flower*, 1967), *Igorota* (1968), and *The Pacific Connection* (1974), among others.
18 Amparo M. Neri, “Women Suffrage Synonym of Divorce and Flapperism,” *Graphic*, December 31, 1927, 12.
19 Ildefonsa C. Osias, “The Changing Status of the Filipino Woman: ‘Weaker Sex’ Doing its Bit in the Advancement of People and Country,” *Graphic*, December 17, 1927, 10–11.
20 “Is Woman Man’s Inferior?” *Graphic*, January 7, 1928, 9; Nieves Baens, “Is the Modern Filipino Girl as Bad as All That?” *Graphic*, January 28, 1928, 3; Virginia Pradas, “What Women Talk About,” *Graphic*, March 3, 1928, 7. Also see Tofghian, 88–89.
21 “Who is Who in the Philippines: A Biographical Sketch of Jose Nepomuceno, Pioneer Filipino Film Producer,” *Graphic*, September 2, 1931, 16.
22 *Rosenstock’s Manila City Directory 1932–1933* (Manila: Philippine Education Co., 1932).
23 Quirino, 23.
24 Quirino, 22, 71.
25 Kabrisante writes, “To meet Doña Isabel Zaldarriaga y Acuña for an interview is indeed a rare opportunity. For the past years, Doña Isabel Nepomuceno kept herself in low profile for some sentimental reasons. ‘So far you are the first to interview me about Mr. Nepomuceno’ (she calls her late husband Mr.), she told us.”
26 Kabrisante.
27 Kabrisante.

Consuelo “Ateng” Padilla Osorio was born in 1907 and died in 1986. This fact alone presents her as a subject that cuts across multiple historical periods, both in terms of time and paradigm. To learn about one of only three women directors¹ in the immediate post-World War II period whose prolific career started before the war and lasted until just before the EDSA Uprising is to learn about women and filmmaking in differing historical landscapes. The subject matter, therefore, is as expansive in terms of pedagogic and theoretical potential as it is in terms of research and writing women’s history.

Taking on the task of feminist film historiography is one of complex patchwork of conjecture. It is a massive excavation of archival materials and a *pas de deux* with canons. But in all honesty, for a woman researcher of this contemporary moment, it is primarily grounded on connecting the women of the past to the women of the present and everyone else in between. I consider it a gathering and an attendance to a place of knowing of not only the women of the past but also ‘everywomenelse.’ We connect with Ateng Osorio in such knowledge that as we do so, we gather.

This article is part of a long-term project of recovering women’s film history in the Philippines, beginning with the advent of cinema in the country onwards. The interest of this article is to present an exploratory stage of contemporary feminist film history from the perspective of time and connection in order to invite a woman filmmaker in our present consciousness. This article, so much as it is invested in uncovering and presenting data tapestried from interviews, library research, and viewing Osorio’s extant films, also suggests to students and scholars of film to further engage to women’s histories with the fervor of contemporary theorization.

In this article, we will get acquainted with Ateng Osorio. The premise is that she is our past and we are her future. It is of equal importance to emphasize that she is our past’s present and we are her future’s present rendering this acquaintance as trans-historical and its narrative as a trans-narrative. We take in the metaphor film historians Monica Dall’Asta and Jane Gaines propose in the signifier “constellative,” saying that “forming a constellation with them [historical subjects],” we locate ourselves historically just at the moment that we “find” them by borrowing their signs. So what we “find” when we locate one of these figures is that, actually, we are discovering and locating ourselves in our own historical moment. Who else would we find?”² As Dall’Asta and Gaines reiterate, “They need us as much as we need them. They need us in order to exist historically, exist, that is, as provocative images in and for the present.”³ This article, therefore, is an engagement of constellative nature, highlighting that what we learn from her life and her career is an addition to our learning of our history and ourselves with her and us as bookends.

The challenge is both in the material and in the ideation as we are faced with a highly political and cultural system of archiving and equally selective canon. The nature



Consuelo Osorio. Photos courtesy of Tetchie Moralde and Angela Osorio.

of this challenge isn’t unique though, as we have learned in the articulations of feminist art historians like Griselda Pollock whose work on cracking the canon is insurmountable, as well as Filipinas Flaudette May Datuin and Eloisa May Hernandez who followed a courageous engagement with art history with critical awareness of an existing canon and its nuances.⁴ Our point of inquiry in this article is informed by this challenge and what has so far been done about it by these feminist scholars. We take cue with not only going beyond the collected archives but also indulging in other non-canonical forms of presenting a narrative such as the epistolary technique, or in my case, the fictive dialogue transcript. These unconventional ways of writing about women narrate not only the fact but also thoughts on the fact.

Altogether, these intentions point to an articulation of women’s practices as an elsewhere which Datuin, in a dialogue with the initiations of Pollock and Teresa de Lauretis, appropriates as both resistance and containment. It is inside and outside the margins, not only of dominant discourse, but also of feminism, itself located in the elsewhere of mainstream institutions and practices. Within the elsewhere, the re/presentation of women’s histories and artistic practices becomes a negotiated and oppositional process.⁵

The position of filmmaking as a feminist elsewhere is decisively taken at the onset of this research. Ateng Osorio is an empirical and theoretical entity in that she lived and exercised a practice before the now of feminism. At the current moment, this is where we meet her, in her elsewhere and ours—all as constellates, through accounts of her daughter Angela “Peachy” Osorio and granddaughter Theresa “Tetchie” Moralde, when I interviewed them on March 2019. This also includes my encounter with Ateng through their stories, articles written about her and her context/s, and my experience of watching her films vis-à-vis a lifetime of watching films.

LATE NIGHTS WITH ATENG V.1. WRITING AND SMOKING.⁷

Avie Felix: They say you’re called Ateng because you are like an older sister to all. And some call you Mama Ateng because you are also very motherly to people you work with.

Consuelo P. Osorio: You may also call me Mama Ateng, if you want.

AF: How many packs of cigarettes do you consume when you are writing your scripts?

CPO: I don’t count. When I’m writing, my only companions are coffee and cigarettes. I won’t even eat unless the script is finished. Do you smoke?

AF: Oh, I’ve been on and off cigarettes. Mostly when I am undergoing stress, like right now, I get hooked again. I’m hoping I can quit for good, soon.

CPO: Why do you need to quit?

AF: I don’t want to die of cancer.

CPO: I didn’t know that smoking causes cancer.

AF: Back in your time, nobody knew it then. The same way that back in your time, smoking was a sign of “kahinhinan.”

CPO: Why? What does it signify now for women?

AF: Oh, let me just put it this way. When you present a woman as a stereotypical whore, you can’t leave out the smoking part.

CPO: Oh, my aching bones!

“Oh, my aching bones!” is the expression that Ateng Osorio was most known for by her colleagues and family. Tetchie, who was Ateng’s granddaughter and one of her constant tag-alongs in film shoots from the 1960s onward, shares that they never heard their *Mamang* complain about anything, but they knew she was either tired or stressed when “Oh, my aching bones!” echoed at the studio.

Another recollection of Tetchie of her Lola Ateng is that “she loved her actors and actresses as her own children.”⁸ Not that she needed more children, having given birth to 12. It was probably because Ateng was the eldest of ten children that she became accustomed to dealing with a lot of responsibilities and taking charge of everyone’s needs. This experience allowed her to juggle filmmaking and being a single parent, aside from being a mother on the film set to the rest of her cast and crew as well. Angela, Ateng’s daughter (and only living child at present), describes her mother’s upbringing as “unusual.” Aside from being born on September 1, 1907 of her father, governor Jose Padilla, Sr., and an equally well-off mother, Clarita Ruiz, and being the *ate* of nine brothers, Ateng was brought up to be aggressive, opinionated, and strong. Her father was grooming her to be a lawyer. “She was always unconventional. She’s the kind who advises any girl who gets impregnated not to marry the impregnator. She was probably one of the first women who wore pantsuits. Pantsuits became her uniform,” expounds Angela.

Ateng was sent to Manila to study from her grade school to high school years at St. Theresa’s College (STC), a Catholic school ran by Belgian nuns. Her independent spirit was probably strengthened by living away from her family at such an early age.

Ateng learned to speak French fluently and became a wide-reader while at STC. During her senior year, Ateng was courted by a young lawyer named Salvador Osorio with whom she eloped as soon as she graduated. While starting a family at 18 years old, Ateng also began her writing career and contributed short stories to *Lirwayway* magazine and a textbook, Angela recalls, titled *Pampanitikan*. “We studied her story in school. Her piece in that textbook was entitled “Logis” which is about a *sabungero*.” Ateng practically built her family life and writing life side by side.



Osorio (second from right) at the birthday party of Mrs. Castelo (to Osorio’s left), her classmate at STC.

LATE NIGHTS WITH ATENG V.2. DEPRESSION.

AF: I heard you had depression when you lost your twins.
CPO: Yes. I blamed myself for losing my twins. It was an incomprehensible pain. During that time my husband even had to leave his career as [a] lawyer just to be by my side while I went through that lonely phase.
AF: I know how that feels. Especially nowadays that generations after yours, including mine, seem to be more prone to depression, I can't consider myself exempt from that.
CPO: Have you experienced loss recently?
AF: Yes, as I write this research about you, I just lost a loved one. Which also makes me wonder how you went through grieving and what made you overcome depression.
CPO: Writing did that for me. My brother Carlos saw how devastated I was and asked if I would be willing to write a movie script for him, hoping it can take my mind off my worries. Luckily, I can say that scriptwriting somehow worked.
AF: So, your entry to cinema was through scriptwriting?
CPO: Yes, and the occasions that my brothers got drunk in the middle of directing films. On many of those occasions, I took over and finished directing what they left unfinished. Just like when we were younger, I finished what they started every time they messed up.
AF: Your brothers would get drunk and then have you take over their directorial work?!
CPO: That's right!
AF: Then you probably have directed earlier than recorded!?
CPO: *laughs* And I also acted in my brothers' films earlier than recorded.
AF: Ah, way before people remember you as the teacher in the series *Bagets* back in the '80s.
CPO: The teacher who wore swimsuits! Yes, I had my acting debut way, way back.
AF: And by the way, I also learned that you signed your earlier scripts as Consuelo Ruiz. Why did you choose to drop Padilla?
CPO: So that I will be known without the privilege of my father's nor my brothers' name.
AF: 👍

On the occasions that my brothers got drunk in the middle of directing films, I took over and finished directing what they left unfinished. Just like when we were younger, I finished what they started every time they messed up.

Using the nom de cinéma Consuelo Ruiz, Ateng co-directed three films with her husband under Parlatone Hispano-Filipino Films before World War II. None of these films are extant but documents show that all of them were conceptualized and written by her.⁹
When the war broke out, the couple moved back to Plaridel, Bulacan, but had to live in the middle of their family's rice fields since Japanese soldiers took over the town. During this time, Salvador got very sick. He died when he was only 38 years old, a year before the liberation. The young widow took on a teaching job in the province to support her 10 children. In 1946, when the war ended, Ateng went back to Manila to work for Premiere Productions, then a newly established film studio in Grace Park, Caloocan City.¹⁰ Ateng had to leave her children in a convent while she re-established a career in the film industry. "Dinala kami ng mama ko sa kumbento. Meron kaming kamag -anak na Mother Superior sa St. Paul sa Bocaue (Bulacan). Seven years old ako nun. Doon muna kami nagstay habang si Mamang nagpunta na sa Maynila para magdirect ulit. Hanggang sa nakabili na siya ng bahay sa Manila saka niya na lang kami kinuha. Mga isang taon rin yun," shares Angela.

LATE NIGHTS WITH ATENG V.3. SPACE.

AF: I've been thinking about how strong you are. I can imagine how it felt like to lose a husband, the pressure to take care and provide for all your children, and brave an industry that surely had a fair amount of pressure on you, too.
CPO: I had to press on, I have children to support.
AF: It was a good thing you were able to recover and be financially stable in just a year.
CPO: Fortunately, the film industry was booming. I was able to get a contract at Premiere and buy a house just a block away from the studio.
AF: Yes, I learned that the house you bought is at 10th Avenue, while Premiere was at the corner of 10th and 11th streets.
CPO: I made sure our house was very near the studio so that I could bring my children back and forth or they could visit me whenever they wanted.
AF: Very practical. I myself make sure I can bring my daughter anywhere I work.
CPO: Well, we can't fulfill just one role at one time.



Osorio, Angela, and Bebong flanked by visitors in their home.



Osorio (in dark-colored blouse) with Angela on the way to a location shoot in Antipolo. Later on, her granddaughter Tetchie became her constant tag-along.

Ateng's children regard the studio as the "extension of our home." As Angela recounts, "Doon na din kami kumakain. Nililista lang nung tindera sa canteen ng Premier yung mga kinakain namin 'pag pupunta kami doon. Kinakaltas na lang iyon sa suweldo ni Mamang. On summer breaks, we even spend more time there than at home." She also shares that location shoots were always treated like family outings.
Understanding the concept of space and how women like Ateng Osorio managed and negotiated space is integral to our inquiry on the creative practices of women like her. The demands of motherhood combined with the demands of directing a film necessitate a malleability of spaces to allow the creative process to flow. Motherhood is not something you leave and pick up at your doorstep. You bring it anywhere you go.
As her grandchild Techie puts it, "In order for her to flourish as a mother and as a director, her two worlds should merge." In Ateng's life and career, there was no clear demarcation between home and work, between members of the family or the cast and crew, and between what is personal or professional. In fact, Ateng's children and grandchildren are used to acting as extras. One of her children, Bebong, even turned out to be a famous child star. He said that growing up on the set made acting as normal as playing games for him. At the same time, Ateng's cast and crew were regular guests in her house and joined them in family celebrations.
Datuin, in her discussion of the concept of *maybahay* or homemaker, explains that the home is a problematic space charged with aspirations, concepts of the self, and individual experiences of women who are not necessarily congruent with the largely Western/Eurocentric demarcation of work and home, economic or non-economic.¹¹ Serving as an explanation of the experiences of home-based women creators, Datuin's analogy may also be extended to cover those who are working outside the home. While working outside the home, the woman's space expands, and the conceptualization of the self vis-à-vis her role at home extends as her space expands in the same way that her wealth of experiences expands.
Homemaking and raising children were part of Ateng's filmmaking process and filmmaking was a family activity. Even out-of-town or location shoots served as family activities for Ateng's children and later on, her grandchildren as well. The production crew was part of her family's "vacations," and their role easily transitioned to being extended family. In essence, everything was a family affair.



Osorio (with eyeglasses) in an out-of-town shoot/family excursion. The boy looking down is Bepong who would become an actor and director. The girl in front is Angela and to her left is Andrea, the oldest daughter.



Osorio (with eyeglasses) and Angela, who acted in the film, with the cast of *Kandilang Bakal* (1957): (L-R) Justina David, Gil de Leon, Leo Laforteza, Lily Laforteza, Joseph Estrada, Carlos Padilla Sr., Carlos Padilla III, and Lilia Dizon.

LATE NIGHTS WITH ATENG V.4. RELATIONSHIPS.

- AF: I heard that when you direct films, you always change the dialogues and scenes. It is so much like an improvisational method. What's the reason behind that?
- CPO: Oh, I like to incorporate lines that I hear from real conversations that I find interesting. Plus, I don't give my actors exact lines, I allow them to put their own flavor in the lines they deliver for as long as they convey the point of the scene. I adjust to the cast, whoever is there at the moment of shooting a specific scene.
- AF: Is that also why you usually write the stories for the films you direct?
- CPO: Yes. And even if I am not directing, I am usually present on the set so that I can easily adjust lines, add and edit depending on what's feasible and what's going to improve the film, as we shoot.
- AF: I find it amusing that you accommodate everyone who wants to be a part of the film. I see you are all for giving exposure to more actors and actresses.
- CPO: Yes. I like to give people the break that they want, especially if they deserve it and they perform well.
- AF: What if they don't deliver?
- CPO: Well, I always tell them that if they don't show up, I'll bump them out of the scene or the other actors will know and tell about their tardiness and unprofessionalism. When you are not on time, I'm gonna tell on you.
- AF: I see that you value time.
- CPO: Definitely! Because I am responsible for the entire production, and there are costs to maximize. The cast and crew are responsible for the success of the film. We are a team.
- AF: How can you say that a film is successful?
- CPO: When it delivers in the box office, because that's a clear sign that we are able to connect to moviegoers and that they like what we are giving them. At the end of the day, it's all about the moviegoers enjoying the product of our work.

Ateng's films were hits in the box office, and as Techie puts it, "She always had good relationships with producers because she made money for them." Her filmography reveals that Ateng did not just stick to one or two genres or even the so-called women's genres. She did action, horror, romance, drama, comedy, and mostly a mix of all genres in one film. And because she was addressing popular culture, her themes were derived from observing daily life and the current interest of moviegoers. It was typical of Ateng to catch an interesting bit of conversation from people on the set and include that conversation in the scene she's shooting. The production team and her family often exchange inside jokes about her picking up their actions and words and would say, "Baka mamaya nasa pelikula na ni Mamang iyan!"

Ateng's two extant films exemplify her connection to popular culture. The song-and-dance film *Bang-Shang-A-Lang* (1968), starring Helen Gamboa, Ronaldo Valdez, Tirso Cruz III, and other teen stars, featured the song with the same title popularized in real life that same year by the American fictional band, The Archies. "Bang-Shang-A-Lang" was a dance craze too, being played in The Archie's Show with accompanying visuals of the popular animation characters demonstrating the dance steps. Ateng knew that her audience would love to see their movie idols sing and dance the most popular song of that time.

In the movie, the character of Helen Gamboa who just came home from the United States is caught between her passion for singing popular music and her parents' wish for her to be a professor. When she starts teaching, she finds that her students are very uninterested in going to school because they are more focused on rehearsing for performances. She ends up performing with her students and becomes very popular for her exceptional talent. The film is infused with romance as she and the character of Ronaldo Valdez have a love-and-hate relationship which turns out to be a happily-ever-after toward the end.

Drakulita (1969), another Osorio film, is set in barrio where there is a vampire scare. The news of a vampire killing people at night makes the barrio people wary of going out at night and interacting with those who are new in town. Each scene uses slapstick humor to elicit laughter, but the film is aware of gender politics and social issues albeit very much a product of its time. The star of the show with the funny lines is a transwoman character played by German Moreno. Though everyone loves her, her stepfather is a typical homophobe who disciplines her in the hopes of making her straight. Throughout the film, we hear lines about women demanding respect from men and having dreams of their own.

The plot revolves around three main narratives—the discovery of the *drakulita*, the acceptance of the transgender character, and the love affair between a barrio lass and the rich heir of a late *haciendero* who returns from Manila. The love affair is hindered by two factors. There is another suitor who is a member of the village gang, and then there is the guy's

godmother arranging for him to marry her own daughter for financial gain. Twists and turns lead to the vampire scare, which turns out to be a prank, the transgender being forced to "go straight," and the love affair leading to a happy ending.

In both films, we see a cast of not less than 30 actors and actresses, including famous and rising stars like Nora Aunor, Tirso Cruz III, Efren Reyes, Matimtiman Cruz, German Moreno, and Ike Lozada, among others. Ateng took it as her responsibility as a mother figure to nurture budding artists and help them become popular. As Techie recalls, "She took care of everybody. She cared for everyone. Tinuturuan at tinutulungan niya lahat. Pinaaral niya kung sinu-sino. Pinatira sa bahay kung sinu-sino rin."

Ateng's everybody-is-family mentality continued as she transitioned from filmmaking to creating shows and series for television in tandem with a younger woman director named Mitos Villareal. Ateng and Mitos became so close that the latter was considered as a close family member even by her grandchildren.

The possibility of claiming space such that the entirety of the spaces she navigated with worked in coexistence with her family and career must not have occurred without support from the workforce. Her Padilla name must have given her leverage whether she admitted it or not. In any case, her producers respected and trusted her. The respect and trust that she commanded from coworkers and producers allowed her the luxury of combining her work and with her home which undoubtedly led to the success of her films. Although her success meant that she would be boxed as a commercial director. As Techie claims,

"Ang stigma sa cinema eh, si Ateng commercial 'yan. So 'yong mga art films, 'yon ang may prestige. But her films actually provide a slice of what the society was like during that time. She really presented a slice of life. Pero hindi siya masyadong nabigyan ng credit just because kumita 'yong films niya."

LATE NIGHTS WITH ATENG V.4. RELATIONSHIPS.

- AF: Did you ever face any difficulty in your career because you are a woman?
- CPO: I can't say that. I worked with strong women. My producers were women. There was Aling Miling and Aling Toreng of Leah Productions, Mrs. Chong of JBC Productions, Mrs. Lim at Premiere. With them around, I never felt that being a woman is challenging.
- AF: Could it also be because you started it with your brothers?
- CPO: Probably. But I've always felt competent.
- AF: But why did you leave Premiere and go into freelance directing?
- CPO: My brother Roy who used to live with me at that time led the worker's union against Premiere. My contract was not renewed because of that.
- AF: How about Leah Productions? Why did you stop making films for them?
- CPO: I only stopped with Leah when they started producing sexy films during the '70s.

When asked if she considers her *Lola* a feminist, Tetchie shares, “Wala siyang pinaglalaban (She wasn’t fighting for anything). Feminism was not part of her consciousness, she was just being who she is.”

Part of being who she was, Ateng did not only direct films on the set. She also crocheted bedspreads and garments and did embroidery while thinking about how to approach specific scenes or pondering about the last-minute changes she wants to do on the script. She gave these crocheted works as gifts to her cast and crew as remembrance. She embroidered the clothes of her children and grandchildren and, whenever time permitted, she sewed their clothes for special occasions.

Her multi-tasking of directing, on-the-spot scriptwriting, crocheting, embroidery, and taking care of her children and grandchildren while on production show that Ateng did not compartmentalize her interests or roles and did not put boundaries on what she could and could not do. Filmmaking as an elsewhere for her was a safe space to accomplish and realize her work, her family duties, her interests, and her own creativity within and beyond filmmaking all at the same time.

Ateng was never seen idle. She was always doing something or tinkering with something. Interestingly, Tetchie shares that she does not seem to have a memory of her grandmother eating. “She was so thin and did not gain weight even as she got older. And she hardly slept as her mind was always busy.”

“One thing I fondly remember about Mamang,” Angela says, “is that she never said she was tired or afraid. I even forced her to retire in the late ‘70s because she didn’t want to stop working.” At age 72, Ateng retired from filmmaking. During this time, she was suffering from an eye cataract and could barely see, but unfortunately, she could not get an eye operation because of her low blood pressure. She also eventually lost her hearing. A year or two after her retirement, she had a stroke and was bedridden for a few years. She died at the age of 79 from pernicious anemia in 1986, the year that we now recall as a milestone for women’s leadership.

Ateng’s life and career were intertwined not only in her process but also in how she managed and negotiated the spaces she occupied, allowing for the complete coexistence of creating and living. She orchestrated her actual space to enable an elsewhere without boundaries, undaunted by patriarchal pressures and gender-based constructs. This orchestration gave her the chance to balance compliance and rebellion and the leeway to push boundaries. From wearing pants, bringing her children to work, creating bedspreads while directing or spontaneously revising scripts, and assuring the financial success of her films, it is apparent that Ateng was navigating through the expectations of her work and environment along with her desires and needs as a woman. As these spaces and roles come together in harmony for her practice and life to merge into an elsewhere, we witness an illustration of our own elsewheres.

As is constellated here in this research, my writing and myself in dialogue with readers of this article are constellators traversing elsewheres both in Ateng’s practice as a woman pioneer and my own space as a woman who researches film. Here, we find not only parallel realities but also a familiarity of discourses between the then and the now, blurring differences in time and space. Constellating in this transhistorical conversation, we begin to understand that women’s filmmaking is an elsewhere, much like writing women’s film history is. The progress reached by and for one’s elsewhere is also progress in another time and constellation.



Osorio with Angela.

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- 1 The other two are Rosa Mia and Susana De Guzman.
- 2 Dall’asta, Monica and Gaines, Jane. “Constellations: Past Meets Present in Feminist Film History,” *Doing Women’s Film History*, eds. Christine Gledhill and Julia Knight (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2015).
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 See Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art Histories* (London: Routledge, 1999); Datuin, *Home Body Memory: Filipina Visual Artists, 19th Century to the Present* (University of the Philippines Press, 2002); and Hernandez, *Homebound: Filipina Visual Artists in Nineteenth Century Philippines* (University of the Philippines Press, 2004).
- 5 Datuin, 16.
- 6 All photos are courtesy of Angela “Peachy” Osorio and Theresa “Tetchie” Moralde.
- 7 The series of conversations included in this article is a fictive transcript of what I imagine as a virtual exchange (probably a form of late night chat via Messenger or a similar app). This strategy takes off from the epistolary technique utilized in feminist historical texts to pose ideas derived from research materials. The technique acknowledges the researcher as an active entity approaching “what was” in the manner of “what is.” These conversations are drawn from my interviews with Angela and Theresa, archival research, Ateng’s films, taking into account my own hopes and daydreams.
- 8 All quotes from Tetchie and Angela Osorio are based on my personal interview, held on May 19, 2019, in their residence in San Juan, Metro Manila.
- 9 Ma. Carmencita A. Momblanco, *Philippine Motion Pictures, 1908–1958: A Checklist of the First Fifty Years*, PhD diss., University of the Philippines, 1979.
- 10 Ramon Jocsan, Ellen Bomasang, and Lena S. Pareja, “Osorio, Consuelo P.” *CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art Volume 6: Film* (Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines, 2018), 505.
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DocWOMENTARY Filmmakers:

The Power and Language
of Women Documentary Filmmakers in the Philippines

Jayneca Reyes



Cha Escala preparing for a shoot.
Photos courtesy of Jayneca Reyes, unless noted.

Women have occupied a marginal position in documentary filmmaking and its history until the advent of the 21st century in the Philippines. In general, there are very few accounts of women's contribution in documentary, and the contributions of pioneering women directors are poorly documented. Accounts of whether certain women produced or directed a documentary film are nearly non-existent. Take the case of Bibsy Carballo, a documentary filmmaker in the 1960s. Carballo's documentary, *Recuerdo of Two Sundays and Two Roads that Lead to the Sea* (1969), had just been recently found in New York. Due to the dismal state of archiving in the Philippines and the gendered character of filmmaking, contributions of women documentary filmmakers have been omitted or lost in time.

However, the late 1990s and early 2000s saw the growth in the number of visible women in documentary film production. Among the critically acclaimed women documentary filmmakers is Ditsi Carolino. Her film *Minsan Lang Sila Bata* (1996) exposed the practice of child labor in the Philippine countryside. Another example is Ramona Diaz's *Spirit Rising* (1996) which showcased women's role in the 1986 People Power Uprising. Other women documentary filmmakers followed such as Sari and Kiri Dalena, Avic Ilagan, Monster Jimenez, Adjani Arumpac, Jewel Maranan, Baby Ruth Villarama, Cha Escala, Wena Sanchez, Mae Caralde, and Carla Pulido Ocampo, to name a few. Recently, more women filmmakers have emerged in documentary such as Hiyas Baldemor Bagabaldo, Grace Simbulan, Alyx Arumpac and Pabelle Manikan.

While the list above is not exhaustive, it illustrates that women have occupied a prominent position in the documentary filmmaking scene in the Philippines, especially at the turn of the 21st century. How did this come about? Based on a brief examination of the literature, there seems to be two main gaps in answering this question: one is an explanatory gap and the other a representational gap. For instance, scholars have attributed the resurgence of documentary filmmaking to globalization, the proliferation of digital filmmaking technologies and various forms of support provided by different agencies and organizations as facilitating factors.¹ However, these factors only contributed to the widening of spaces for women, rather than creating them. Their impact is not only exclusive to women but to filmmakers in general. The literature that documents and examines the local documentary scene is devoid of women's voices or perspectives as both subjects and/or framers of history. In many ways, women's contribution to documentary filmmaking and their accounts of its history continue to be invisible.

This invisibility is a recurring theme, as the experiences of early women documentary filmmakers illustrate how they remained outsiders or how their contributions were ignored or undocumented—rendering their legacies to documentary redacted from history. How do we then account for and explain this remarkable development in the Philippines? Given the lopsided interpretation of history and discourse about women in the field of documentary filmmaking, I draw inspiration from contemporary feminist



Ditsi Carolino during a post-screening discussion of *Bunso* (2004) at Cinema Centenario

Donna Haraway. Haraway suggests that the interpretation of women's experiences in society and history must not be founded on universal and transcendental visions and its contending critique (i.e. masculine-modern visions versus feminist deconstruction). Instead, she called for a feminist epistemology which she labeled “situated knowledges.”²

Situated knowledges are predicated on the argument that feminism must be based on limited and partial knowledges instead of relying on universal or relativistic claims. This version of feminist objectivity relies on a woman's way of seeing based on her own lived experience. For contemporary feminists, this is important as it serves to reclaim their versions of history that have been subjugated. This article thus employs Haraway's concept of situated knowledges to privilege and highlight women documentary filmmakers' practice and voices. By using Haraway's enabling concept, the article aims to highlight women documentary filmmakers' subjectivity and produce a feminist retelling of contemporary documentary filmmaking practice in the Philippines from women's perspectives.

This article aims to make two main contributions. First, it aims to present a survey of the contemporary documentary landscape in the Philippines and describe how women have championed the genre for much of the 21st century. The purpose of this survey is to render women documentary filmmakers more visible. Second, it aims to explain why women are drawn to documentary filmmaking and how have they become prominent figures of the genre. In providing this explanation, the article will rely on the “situated knowledges” of select women documentary filmmakers. It must be noted that while the article privileges the perspective of women, it does not represent a singular stream of experience or subjectivity.

Rather, their experiences are variegated and inherently contingent on their positionality and intersection of identities. Being inspired by Haraway, the aim of the article is not to provide an authoritative account for the reader. The surfacing of women's “situated knowledges” serves to facilitate critical conversations. In other words, it is an attempt to surface

subjugated voices and perspectives which ultimately serve to initiate critical conversations, re-examine documentary filmmaking practice in the Philippines, and open pathways for change.

Data for this article were drawn from semi-structured interviews with 10 women documentary filmmakers conducted in the course of two years between 2017 and 2019.³ These were complemented by an exhaustive review of the catalogues of local film festivals such as Gawad CCP Para sa Alternatibong Pelikula at Video, Cinemalaya Independent Film Festival, QCinema International Film Festival, GMA 7's Cine Totoo, and Cinema One Originals. The festivals were chosen based on their relative prominence and accessibility. The article, however, does not cover television documentaries because the stages of its production, source of funding, and creative treatment are constrained by broadcast standards.

Women and the Documentary Filmmaking Space at the Advent of the 21st Century

The late 1990s and early 2000s saw a growth in the number of women in documentary film production. This change coincided with the advancements in technology and consequently, the emergence of independent film festivals. The increasing portability, decreasing prices, and technological improvements democratized the art of filmmaking.⁴ Technology made it relatively accessible for aspiring independent filmmakers to produce films. As a result, independent and amateur films proliferated in the early 2000s; some of which garnered international recognition. In many ways, the digital revolution freed filmmaking from the mainstream and paved the way for alternative cinema. Prior to this, the experience of independent cinema in the Philippines was characterized by “denial, suppression, and ignorance.”⁵ Independently produced films, which often include documentaries, were often hidden from the public eye. Documentary, as a distinct film practice, has likewise enjoyed resurgence because of these developments.⁶ This phenomenon, however, is not exclusive to the Philippines but is also observed in other countries such as Singapore, Taiwan, and Britain to name a few.⁷ Distinct to this resurgence is how women occupied the documentary filmmaking space by producing documentaries that tackle complicated topics but are intimate and relatable.

In the Philippines, women have occupied prominent roles in the documentary filmmaking scene in the 1990s. Notable examples include Ditsi Carolino and Ramona Diaz. Carolino's *Minsan Lang Sila Bata* gained international recognition and influenced contemporary documentary filmmaking in the country. Diaz's *Spirit Rising* (1996) won the Ida Lupino Director's Guild of America Award, a Golden

Gate Award from the San Francisco International Film Festival, and a Certificate of Merit from the International Documentary Association.

The momentum of women directing or producing documentary films continued to the 2000s. Carolino released *Riles* (2003) and *Bunso* (2005) together with esteemed colleague and cinematographer, Nana Buxani. *Bunso* was instrumental in the crafting and passage of the Juvenile Justice Bill. Avic Ilagan's *Sowing Seeds* (2002) was featured in the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival. Diaz also shocked the world with the release of her controversial documentary *Imelda* (2003), a film about the ostentatious Imelda Marcos, the wife of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

Other women documentary filmmakers also came to the spotlight with poetic visual aesthetics—combining elements of experimental with documentary filmmaking in tackling highly provocative themes. Sari Dalena made *Memories of a Forgotten War* (2001) with Filipina-American Camilla Benolirao Griggers. This experimental documentary is a historical narration that made use of archival photos and videos about the Philippine-American war. Dalena's most recent films include *Dabbling Nick* (2015), a documentary-drama featuring the life and work of National Artist Nick Joaquin; *Women of Malolos* (2014), a musical documentary-drama on the struggle of the women in Malolos for the liberation of the country during the Spanish colonial period; *History of the Underground* (2017), a documentary about the Communist Party of the Philippines; and *Guerilla is a Poet* (2013), a documentary she co-directed with her sister, Kiri Dalena, and is based on the life of revolutionary Jose Ma.



Coreen Jimenez, screenwriter Cenon Palomares, Wena Sanchez, Nawruz Paguidopon, Ramona Diaz, Sari Dalena, and Ditsi Carolino at the Masterclass on Documentary Filmmaking organized by Dokyuppees with UP Film Institute, Active Vista, and DAKILA.



Documentary filmmakers Mae Caralde, Pabelle Manikan, Kiri Dalena, Jed Medrano, Jewel Maranan, Anna Isabel Matutina, Mae Calapardo, Baby Ruth Villarama and other participants and organizers of Goethe Documentary Workshop 2012. Courtesy of Goethe Institut Philippines.



Documentary filmmakers Jewel Maranan, Coreen Jimenez, Nawruz Paguidopon, Sheron Dayoc, Clodualdo del Mundo Jr. and other participants at the Goethe Documentary Workshop in 2010. Courtesy of Goethe Institut Philippines.

Sison. Among the contemporary documentary filmmakers in the country, Dalena is quite unique in terms of her film language, which is characterized by a fusion of different genres. Dalena came from a family of visual artists which explains her openness to play and experiment with her films.

Meanwhile, many documentary films made by women came out of the revived Goethe Institute workshops in the 2000s. Among these was Jewel Maranan's *Tondo, Beloved* (2011), a slow direct cinema on life in Tondo—a densely populated and poor district in Manila. The film won a Gawad Urian Award in 2012 for Best Documentary. It also earned the Jury Special Mention in the Chopshots Documentary Festival, Southeast Asia. The third and last of her three-part documentary about Tondo is *Sa Palad ng Dantaong Kulang* (2017) which bagged the Gawad Urian Best Documentary in 2019.

Adjani Arumpac came out strong with her personal documentaries *Walai* (2006), which centered on the stories of Muslim women in Mindanao, and *War is a Tender Thing* (2013), an autobiographical tale of the Mindanao conflict told through the memories of the filmmaker's family. Arumpac also made "Nanay Mameng" (2012), a short documentary about the life of activist and urban poor leader Carmen Duenida produced by Kodao Productions. The film won the Gawad Urian Best Documentary in 2014.

Other alumnae of the Goethe Institute workshop are Lauren Sevilla Faustino who made *Ang Babae sa Likod ng Mambabatok* (2012), an exploration of the life of a legendary tattoo artist named Whang Od; Mae Urtal Caralde with her *Yanan* (2013), an account of the life of a revolutionary woman who died in an encounter with the military; Baby Ruth Villarama who made *Jazz in Love* (2013), a love story between a young Filipino and an aging German; and Kiri Dalena with her "Tungkong Langit" (2013), an experimental documentary about the path to healing of children whose family was killed in a natural disaster.

The emergence of film festivals in the early 2000s, partly due to growing financial support from international

grant giving bodies, facilitated the production of documentaries in the country. The Cinemalaya International Film Festival showcased *Kano: An American and his Harem* (2010) by Monster Jimenez. The film is about an American Vietnam war hero charged with 80 counts of rape. It won international awards and the Gawad Urian Best Documentary in 2011. Malaya Camporedondo's *The Day My Grandmothers Met* (2010) was awarded with the Ishmael Bernal Best Documentary in 2010 in the Cinemalaya International Film Festival and nominated in the Gawad Urian in 2011.

The Cinemalaya Independent Film Festival established in 2005 also highlights documentaries. Despite its initial struggles, Cinemalaya sustained itself as the nexus for independent films and has gained both international and national attention. It decentralized the monopoly of several studios in terms of film production. Documentary is one of the film genres that Cinemalaya supports but unlike its narrative counterparts, documentaries do not receive any funding from the festival. Nonetheless, the exhibition of documentaries serves as an important venue to showcase the genre.

The most celebrated year for documentaries in Cinemalaya history was in 2013. Films included in its program were Pabelle Manikan's "Bukang Liwayway" (2013), an exploration of a community in El Nido, Palawan, and Rica Arevalo's *The Privileged Migrants* (2013), a film about the exodus of the filmmaker's high school batch mates to different parts of the world to become immigrants or migrant workers. In the same year, Villarama's *Jazz in Love* became the first documentary in its history to open the festival. Villarama continues to break the glass ceiling in both independent film festivals and the mainstream film industry. In 2016, her documentary *Sunday Beauty Queen* became the first and sole documentary entry to the Metro Manila Film Festival in its 42 years. It won the Best Picture award at the MMFF and premiered at the 21st Busan International Film Festival in 2016.

Drawing inspiration from Cinemalaya's success, other film festivals were launched. In 2014, GMA 7

launched Cine Totoo—a film festival dedicated solely to showcasing documentaries. Cine Totoo is the first Philippine International Documentary Film Festival presented by GMA 7. In 2014, the festival announced 11 documentaries as finalists for the festival including entries from two women filmmakers: Ivy Rose Universe Baldoza's *Marciano* (2014), a film about a gay overseas Filipino worker who lived and died in Paris; and Carla Pulido Ocampo's *Walang Rape sa Bontok* (2014), a film about a place where women can live without being sexually violated. In 2016, ABS-CBN soon followed by including documentaries in their Cinema One Originals film festival.

Some local governments like the Quezon City government have also established their own film festivals featuring documentaries. In 2014, Cha Escala and Wena Sanchez's documentary *Nick and Chai* (2014) bagged the Best Picture award in QCinema. The film is about parents who lost their children during Typhoon Haiyan. In 2015, the Quezon City Film Development Council (QCFDC) officially included documentaries as a category in the competition called the DoQC International Documentary Competition. The inaugural film line-up included Baldoza's *Audio Perpetua* (2015), a film which presents a series of audio recordings of an unseen America. Women also took center stage in the documentary section of QCinema in the recent years. In 2018, Sanchez launched her personal documentary *All Grown Up* (2018) following her brother as he starts a new life in college. The film won Best Documentary in the Filipino Academy of Movie Arts and Sciences Awards (FAMAS) in 2019. Bagabaldo also debuted with *Pag-Ukit sa Paniniwala* (2018) about neocolonial Philippines' interpretation of

saints and gods. Grace Simbulan's *A is for Agustin* featuring a tribesman who loves to sing but never had the opportunity to go to school premiered in QCinema in 2019 and in DMZ International Documentary Film Festival in South Korea.

Currently, women's roles in documentary filmmaking practice have reached a degree of criticality that they have begun to occupy leadership roles and organize initiatives promoting documentaries, and consolidating the documentary filmmaking community in the Philippines. Arumpac, for instance, initiated efforts to promote "under the radar documentaries" in 2018 by providing them with an alternative space for screening and discussion through the group, DoQ. The group emphasizes the importance of post-screening discussions. Similar to Arumpac's initiative, Maranan founded Cinema Is Incomplete earlier, in 2011, to screen independent films in an alternative space. In 2019, Maranan led the organization of the Alternative Cinema Initiatives Conference, which brought together regional filmmakers from Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao to discuss the history and current landscape of alternative cinema spaces and distribution networks in the Philippines. Dokyupeeps, a loose network of documentary film practitioners in the Philippines with Carolino as the initial driving force, has organized documentary film workshops. Recently, on the occasion of the Philippine cinema centennial, the network led by Maranan, Monster Jimenez, Kara Magsanoc-Alikpala, and Villarama organized DaangDokyu, a film festival that programmed a retrospective of Philippine documentary films from different decades.



Grace Simbulan filming her first full-length documentary *A is for Agustin* (2019) in Zambales.

Women Empowerment through Documentaries

The increasing prominence of women in documentary filmmaking in the Philippines did not happen overnight. The choice to pursue documentary filmmaking was motivated by different factors that include personal histories and connections, exposure to the filmmaking industry, inspiration from predecessors, and opportunities provided by the rise of digital technologies. Despite seemingly different starting points and interests, I have inferred, based on the interviews I have conducted, that their choice to do documentaries was born out of a critical reaction to the masculinist film industry and the entrenched bigotry in the workplace. In a sense, documentary filmmaking provided a safe space where women could pursue and gravitate toward stories that do not necessarily appeal to the capitalistic and masculinist imperatives of the mainstream filmmaking industry but toward subjects that interest them. This is quite evident in the subjects and topics the featured filmmakers pursued. Consciously or unconsciously, the filmmakers pursued subjects related to issues about women, children, or family. This observation, however, is not absolute and does not imply that these subject matters are the exclusive domain of women documentary filmmakers. Rather, it serves to demonstrate the seeming convergence of interests of women in documentary.

The motivation for making documentaries is rarely monetary, as I learned in the interviews. Instead, women are more concerned with issues that they deem important. The motivation to share relevant issues may be associated with their own form of activism. This activism does not necessarily see its liberating potentials in the production of documentaries but in the process by which these documentaries are made. By delving into the lives of people and having their lives intertwined with others, women documentary filmmakers in many ways legitimize the existence of those who have been marginalized and oppressed, just as they were, albeit in different forms.

Nonetheless, Maranan, in our interview, emphasized that being a documentary filmmaker puts a person in a privileged position; the filmmaker can mediate between the subjects she is filming and her audience. Moreover, she insisted that a documentary filmmaker be aware of such power so that she can practice caution when making documentaries. Maranan claimed, “We exercise power toward audiences because we have the screen to show them what we want to show. More than that, we’re exercising power toward the people that we film.”

In our interview, Sari Dalena highlighted how the immersive method requires a high level of commitment and is fraught with dilemmas. The demands of producing a documentary film for Dalena was immense that she even compared it to pregnancy and childbirth. She said, and I quote at length, “Documentary is a good genre for women because we want to tell a story of another person in a very authentic way and in a very respectful way because I think we are very nurturing. We are very respectful of our film, right? We treat them like babies. The same way we carry our child for nine months during pregnancy until childbirth. Documentary in a way demands that kind of commitment.”

The immense challenges embedded in documentary filmmaking as described by Dalena may be seen in the methods by which women filmmakers produce documentaries. Most of the documentary films made by these women took years to complete. For instance, Jimenez finished her film *Kano* in a span of five years; Arumpac’s *Walai* was seven years in the making; and Diaz’s film on Imelda Marcos was produced in two years. While pursuing their stories, women filmmakers also had to navigate personal, social, and political issues. In addition, women were not keen on using methods that were conventional. Instead, they focused on methods that would allow them to be part of an open, creative, and critical process of shaping a story.

As they indicate in the interviews, women documentary filmmakers see the form’s unique and intimate method as a means to become more involved in the process of filmmaking and, in effect, to learn and grow along the way. In this sense, women were both objects and subjects of the documentary filmmaking process. This reflects a mutually constitutive and enriching process for both filmmaker and subject, a process that is arguably absent in extractive and formulaic attempts of producing films.

“We exercise power toward audiences because we have the screen to show them what we want to show. More than that, we’re exercising power toward the people that we film.”

The mutually constitutive and enriching potential of documentary is arguably the reason why women are drawn to it. As Maranan claimed, “I think it’s because documentary as a medium [...] it’s designed not merely to tell or express a story [...]. [Making a] documentary is process heavy and what probably attracts me about it [is that it is] a way of learning about my society, that process of making it [...]. And later on, of releasing it and having conversation[s] with people about this research and [the] discovery that I’ve done and compiled and condensed in the form of a documentary.”

Documentary filmmaking serves not just as a means to deliver an artistic product. It is also a space where women can simultaneously explore their creativity, touch people’s lives, be touched by others, and engage with a wider audience. Documentaries, therefore, are not mere products but tools which can serve as a starting point to create spaces for critical conversations at various levels. This legitimizes the agency of filmmakers as framers of the film and of society. As Jimenez shared, “When you constantly attend film festivals, you will notice how different the motivation of fiction filmmakers

[is] compared to documentary filmmakers. [D]ocumentary filmmakers are concerned with the world [...]. Fiction filmmakers seem like rock stars [...]. There’s a bit of showbiz in that. I like the idea that [documentaries are] a reflection of the times. Your eyes are always open to the next thing that people have to find out more about. The impact is different. It’s like a vegetable for the soul. It’s hard to watch it but it’s good for you.”

And perhaps, this is why women are drawn to making documentaries—it is an expression of empathy given one’s own experience of marginalization.

Women and documentaries: Opportunities and challenges

While documentary filmmaking has provided a space for women to develop and pursue their voice and creativity, structural impediments continue to persist. The interviews revealed some of the existing problems. Access to subjects is constrained simply because the filmmakers are women. Harassment and abuse in commercial filmmaking contexts continue to occur with impunity, prompting women to explore other spaces without, or with lesser, threats from the male-dominated film industry and its established structures. Documentary has provided a relatively safer space for women to make films, but this space is now also being encroached upon or limited by the imperatives of international and local filmmaking institutions which impose formulas or templates for documentaries to be considered good or interesting.

Nonetheless, there seems to be some resistance on the level of the filmmakers as there appears to be a tacit recognition that in the camera lies an inherent power to critically view, expose, and question how society and gender relationships work. While this power has the potential to effect change (as seen in the example of Carolino’s *Bunso*, which contributed to the authoring and passing of a piece

of legislation), it also poses ethical dilemmas about what a documentary filmmaker should do in the face of harsh societal realities.

Women documentary filmmakers occupy a unique position. While they possess immense power through their cameras, the entrenchment of patriarchy in society contributes to their marginalization. Despite this marginalization, their power through filmmaking arguably has the potential to give voice to the voiceless. It is this ability to provide voices to the marginalized despite their own marginalization that makes the woman documentary filmmaker unique. And perhaps, this is why women are drawn to making documentaries—it is an expression of empathy given one’s own experience of marginalization. This empathy seems to be present regardless of the filmmakers’ diverging views on their womanhood or feminism. And it is the mixture of creativity and empathy that arguably makes documentaries made by women filmmakers so compelling. In many ways, the appeal of their films is an appeal to their viewers’ humanity. This is a different exercise of power not based on conflict and contradiction, but one that connects and empowers people.

Currently, there is a strong sense of solidarity among the community of women documentary filmmakers alongside enlightened men to push for the boundaries of documentary filmmaking practice in the country and recognize the contribution of women. However, these efforts are also dependent on funding support from various organizations. The community of documentary filmmakers must establish a network that can sustain initiatives that empower women. Meanwhile, as well, there is also much to be done in order to surface the narratives of women filmmakers who were erased from history and recognize their contributions.

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ON THE FILIPINO ROMANTIC MOVIE THEME SONG OF THE 1930S AND 1950S:

The Use of Music Genres Kundiman, Danza, and Harana
in Romantic Scenes¹

José S. Buenconsejo

Music in the soundtrack is an important element in sound film as a multimedia form. Often understated or unheard², it fundamentally adds subliminally (though sometimes explicitly) to the expressive layer of the represented scene, thus, deepening the intended affect or overall mood of the sound-image sequence³. More importantly, music in the soundtrack indexes specific feelings and attitudes that the various agencies in the film are conveying, from those projected by the characters in the diegesis, those from the various kinds of film narrators (explicit or implied), and to that of the film director in collaboration with the music scorers.

A movie theme song is a special type of music in the soundtrack.⁴ Because the topic of theme song is undertheorized in the field of film music criticism, this essay offers only a preliminary interpretation of the nature of theme song, particularly in the context of Philippine movie productions from the 1930s to the 1950s. This element in the multimedia seems to parallel the function of the hook in a pop song, i.e., it brings important and poignant parts of the narrative to high relief and is what is easily remembered after the film viewing experience. In a normative sense, a movie theme song is not composed before the film is produced. Hence, it is a mere by-product of the memorable musical elements in the soundtrack that is subsequently marketed separately as sheet music or in a standalone commercial recording or part of a larger whole called original sound track (OST). A theme fundamentally functions as a “motto,” i.e., an abbreviation of the soundtrack that generates the remembrance of the general effect or style that a film conveys.

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Practices connected to producing films for the local market in the Philippines depart from the normative utilization of music as theme song. A number of commercially successful movies from the late 1930s to the 1950s used pre-existing music as a kind of lynchpin to spin a story that then got rendered into a film narrative (see Mutya ng Pasig below). Part of this might have to do with ensuring success since the familiarity and popularity of the already composed music material could strongly and potentially be a crowd drawer.⁵

The incorporation of pre-existing popular tunes into film was part of a larger common procedure inherited from the immediate past in the Philippine sound films of the 1930s. Its practice grew from the age of silent films in which stock music came in handy to supply the various moods projected by the moving images. Today, with the standard and value for originality and innovation, “canned music” or “appropriated score” is frowned upon. But, as a cultural practice, it stayed long in Filipino sound films of the 1930s, even beyond the 1950s, during which time the practice of composing original scores already had a firm footing.

Appropriated scores, thus, existed side by side with newly composed ones in the said period. This can be seen in the pre-World War II extant films, such as Octavio Silos’s *Pakiusap* (1939) and Francisco Buencamino’s *Ibong Adarna* (1941). Preexisting recorded sound –not as many though–was used as “background music” in melodramatic scenes (i.e., of Maria in the village inn). It is not known who was the first Filipino composer to write a completely new and original music score to a film because the loss of most pre-WWII titles prevents one from finding this out.

Rolling back to Philippine film history, film adaptations of existing sarswelas happened as early as 1919 in Reyes’ and Tolentino’s *Walang Sugat*. Sarswela-like films would later evolve in the 1930s. One of the best extant examples of which was Carlos van Tolosa’s *Giliw Ko* (1939), with musical numbers supplied by composers such as Ariston Avelino and Juan Silos Jr. This fictional film is, to use the conventional generic designation, in the musical romance genre. Its story is about the thrills and allure of urban social life that was burgeoning Manila. This theme lends itself to diegetic musical scenes of radio studio orchestra, rural subjects serenading harana, and wedding celebration music. In conformity with the musical genre, there are also song numbers that highlight particular romantic scenes. Aside from the sarswela influence, some of the numbers in the said production reveal styles of

American Broadway stage and Hollywood film productions. This is a corollary to the fact of the Philippines was annexed by the US empire for the most part of 20th century and was, therefore, a huge market for its film products.

Filipino’s propensity for musical numbers in locally-produced, “sarswela-inspired” films is a blueprint of the bourgeois taste for sentimental themes in movies that emerged immediately after WWII.⁶ This middle class sensibility cannot be separated from the material conditions that fueled the imperative to produce and consume glossy, glamorous, spectacular, and sensual images. The need to sell an entertainment commodity in the market meant “cosmeticizing” social reality so that they will have a “come on” effect on the audiences and consumers. Obviously, the theme of romantic love provides an easy formula to guarantee returns in the box office. Yet, the theme of romantic love in itself is not sufficient to explain why certain romances would resonate better among individual Filipino film spectators. This sufficient condition brings us to the issue that the romances must have been understood as embedded within singularly Filipino contexts and that they embody certain social values that touched the personal lives of the audiences. Music in Filipino films from the 1930s to the 1950s supported the lucid expression and indication of identities and subjectivities felt and sensed by the idealized characters on the fictional screen. These sonic expressions stand in as, to use Charles Peirce’s vocabulary (as explained neatly by Turino),⁷ “indexical icons” (i.e., “indexical” being a part of the characters’ gestures in particular life-worlds or habitus and “icon” being a replica or copy of the characters’ gestures as a real referent).

Take the case of the contrast in characters between the urbanite landlord son Antonio and the barrio folks Jose and Guia in *Giliw Ko*. In one scene, the landed man sings an American Tin Pan Alley song in the KZRM music studio of Manila where Antonio is the music director of a big jazz band. He teaches this to Guia, the barrio lass who, in a cliché love triangle, is admired by the tenant’s son, Jose. Guia is to have her debut in KZRM radio program. At the last minute during that debut, Guia, filled with jealousy upon witnessing the unfaithfulness of Antonio, refuses to sing the American song and instead sang an “awit sa aming nayon” (song of our place). The song, titled “Tunay na Tunay” (“Genuinely True”) was composed by Juan Silos Jr. and is sung in the *danza filipina* style. The beginning stanza of this song is tinged with a dark sound reminiscent of another



Figure 1. An excerpt from the theme song of *Gilvo Ko* showing features of the danza such as triplets in melody, duple meter, and dotted rhythm in the bass line. Courtesy of the UP College of Music Library.

popular genre called *kundiman*. It is spiced up a bit with the graceful *tresillos* (triplets or rhythm of three against two) in the accompaniment. Together with the dotted rhythm in duple meter played by the bass part, the *tresillos* becomes the *danza*'s most distinguishing feature, with the *kundiman* as the contrast. It is in moderate triple time with simple conjunct melodic directions.

Historically, both *kundiman* and *danza* were popular Hispanic musical types that Filipino inhabitants and *creollos* in the course of colonial domination had assimilated, especially between the late 18th and 19th centuries. *Cundiman*, as it was spelled then, was originally a song with dance. In the 19th century, it underwent stylistic transformation in its lyrics, from jocose to serious. The lyrics of the “Cundiman de 1800” is about mosquitos. In the 1846 “Geronella Notation” (preserved in *Biblioreca Nacional de Espana*), the song was danced and had a coquettish and lighthearted estribillo called *Hele Hele Cundangan*. In 1886, piano teacher and repairer Diego Perez included it in his long medley of 19 popular tunes and dances called “Recuerdos de Filipinas.” This was exhibited in the 1887 Madrid-Philippine exposition.⁸ By the 1890s, the *cundiman* acquired deeper associations, i.e., with love for local culture and native social identity, so did other local popular genres, such as the *balitao* and *cumintang*.

Almost all Filipino composers from that said decade composed in the *cundiman* style. “Jocelynang Baliuag,” a patriotic *cundiman* penned perhaps by the former Spanish regimental band leader Lucino Buenaventura, sort of became a revolutionary song associated with the Malolos Philippine government.⁹ Moreover, in 1897, Julio Nakpil inserted a section clearly dedicated to the memory of Jose Rizal in his piece “Pahimakas.” This was a solemn *cundiman* in 4/4 time. This act clearly showed what the word “*cundiman*” has become a symbol of local collective self by the end of the 19th century.

Hence, it gained gravitas in feeling, which continued to be attached to the genre even until now.

In contrast, *danza* (or *habanera*) did not assume a serious connotation. *Danza* came from the international genre *contradanza*. Although English in origin, it evolved into the Spanish *habanera* in the 19th century and this subsequently gained international popularity, reaching the Philippines by the time of the opening of the Suez Canal in the 1870s. Those who had access to a cosmopolitan education in urban areas such as Manila, Cebu, and Iloilo were the first to assimilate the idiom, together with the ever popular and global 19th century genre *valse* (waltz), into their habitus. From around the late 1870s to the early 1880s, original compositions, such as “Flor de Manila” and “1878” by Eusebio Alins, and “Sampaguita” which is attributed to Dolores Paterno, were already in the salons by the piano-owning bourgeoisie in the city. This was followed later by Julio Nakpil’s “Recuerdos de Capiz.”

Some of the second generation Filipino composers from the 1920s were from the University of the Philippines (UP) Conservatory of Music. This list included Francisco Santiago, Nicanor Abelardo, and violinist and pedagogue Bonifacio Abdon. A notable non-UP composer is Francisco Buencamino Sr., who composed pieces in both genres.

Abelardo’s “Bituing Marikit” is a *danza*, even if it is a love song similar to the *cundiman*. It became the theme song of the 1937 hit movie with the same title by Sampaguita Pictures. The movie essentially relied on the popularity of already well-known songs (see handbill of the screening below) that had certainly been circulated as sheet music before the film was released. Other such examples included Miguel Velarde’s, “Dahil Sa’Yo”, Manuel Velez’ “Sa Kabukiran,” and folk songs like, “Ay Kalisud” and “Aking Bituin” (later known as a *harana* song, “O Ilaw”). I argue that it was



Figure 2. Kundiman of 1800, a folksong with jocose lyrics. Courtesy of Emilia Reysio-Cruz.



Figure 3. *Cundiman* as dance-song idiom in 1846. Courtesy of the Gervacio Gironella Album.



Figure 4. “Jocelynang Baliuag” is a revolutionary kundiman ca. late 1890s. Courtesy of the UP College of Music Library.

precisely in the constant utilization of *danza* music in the film medium that the romantic sentiments became more wedded to it as a genre. But unlike the *cundiman*, *danza* was associated with gay gentility and refined mannerisms that the emerging polite civil society in Manila was cultivating. It lacked the tendency for gravitas that was the constructed identity of the *kundiman*. Take the case of Constancio de Guzman’s *Bayan Ko* and Abdon’s kundiman or “Kundiman ni Abdon”. These were patriotic songs in line with the convention of resistance and patriotism that stemmed from the late 1890s revolutionary movement. No film producers from the 1930s and the 1950s, thus, utilized the said two pieces. This was perhaps due to two reasons: they did not have the glossy, chic, and glamorous element suitable for a film product and because these were overtly anti-American.

The generic distinction between the lightly sentimental danza and the graver sentimental *cundiman* is further demonstrated in the utilization of Nicanor Abelardo’s kundiman but with touches of *kumintang* gestures, “Mutya ng Pasig.” Composed in the 1920s, this became the theme song of the same movie in 1949 or 1950. Nicanor Abelardo was known for his astutely poetic treatment of the subject of the *kundiman*, which is the legendary water nymph (*diwata*) of Pasig River. The music matched the supernatural theme of the later movie. It is as if the song itself was intentionally made for that movie. In the absence of concrete evidence, one cannot assume that the story crafted by Richard Abelardo, the writer and director of the film *Mutya ng Pasig*, was in the mind of the composer and Richard’s cousin, Nicanor. This showed that the reverse process in the 1948 production happened: theme song first before the movie.

The depth of sentiment in the *harana* scene of the 1941 movie *Pakiusap* was, in my interpretation, what prompted the choice of Francisco Santiago’s “Pakiusap” over the *danza*. While one would argue that a *danza* would have been a better choice for that scene, the gravity of the act of *pakiusap* (pleading) by the male suitor (even if his social status was way above the barrio maiden) was what warranted the more serious idiom. In this presentation, the *kundiman* love song is not only diegetic to the scene. It also serves as a motto or a musical abbreviation for the entire feel of the movie and its theme, which is the despair of love across social or status group divisions. The same depth of drama and desperation was what made Lamberto Avellana choose Santiago’s *kundiman* “Anak Dalita” as the theme of the movie, which depicts the struggles and social pain of the poor slum dwellers in Intramuros. Life after destruction due to wars is an ironic metaphor of neglect that the Philippine government had failed to do in that time of reconstruction.

In contrast to the profound sentiments of the *kundiman*, a theme of mere romantic love is suited to a genre like *danza*, with its graceful and laid-back dotted rhythm in the bass. This is shown in the Mars Ravelos’s *Maalaala Mo Kaya*, which had Constancio de Guzman’s *danza* of the same title as its theme. In the dialogues of the said movie, the characters refer to *kundiman* as a song or voice of the inner self (*loob*). But the story about the separated but later reunited lovers does not really need a music that is dark and tragic because everything ended well in the movie. A *danza*, though termed “*kundiman*” is, therefore, more suited with the task.

The romantic love song style with *danza* features would continue to be utilized beyond the *harana* scenes in movies like *Maala-*

ala Mo Kaya. Constant iteration of romantic pictures of the 1950s would further lead to the creation of a new music genre labelled as *harana*, which was always *danza* in style. Examples of these are “Dungawin Mo Hirang” by Santiago S. Suarez and “Awit Ko’y Dinggin” by T. Maiquez.

From the examples of the theme songs in selected 1930s and 1950s Filipino movies, this article discussed how two music genres were utilized as mottos or external sound icons that encapsulated the diegeses of the movies’ fictional worlds. As mottos, they served as a mnemonic to the film viewing experience and, hence, a device for easy recall of the moving images in a summarized form. I had argued that cultural associations fundamentally operate to link the effect of the musical genres to the moving visual experience.

Historically received from the past, the two genres in question were the *kundiman* and the *danza*. They were once easily distinguished from each other in terms of their formal characteristics and features of which were ostensibly emergent to the specific performance contexts of the past. Late 19th century *kundiman* was associated with local selfhood. Thus, it was clearly marked off from the *danza* which was genteel and politically neutral. As a musical symbol, the *kundiman* saw its use in projecting patriotic sentiments, while the charming *danza* remained associated with middle class domestic subjectivity and frivolity. The danza “Buhat” by Miguel Velarde, for example, was the dance music in a scene in 1939 film *Tunay na Ina*. The received kundiman from the late 19th century would have been anachronistic for such leisurely pursuit. The *danza*’s association with lighter sentiment, thus, suited articulating romantic love sentiments more as it had lesser gravitas in effect compared to a lofty and even “sublime” kundiman. The case of sound tracking the harana scene in the movie *Pakiusap* is an illustration. To reiterate, the scene depicts the difficulty and pain of loving across social division. Thus, the *kundiman* fits logically to that scene, even if the event is romantic.

It is common in the 21st century to conflate the traditional Filipino music genres. This article had hinted that it was the film medium of the 1930s and 1950s, with its impulse to market sentiment and love, that muddled the musical associations. As a genre in the late 19th century, the *danza* primarily circulated as a tool for pleasure in the salas among the rich in the form of sheet music for the piano. On the other hand, mid-19th century *cundiman* was a popular song-dance genre which was used as entertainment with its jocular lyrics. By the Philippine revolution against Spain (1896-1898), the *kundiman* had gained gravitas as it was used as a patriotic symbol of incommensurable love of self for the Other which, in this case, was the country. This sublimity was not accorded to the *danza* that became more and more attached to the notion of the middle class’ feeble sentiment and romance. As musical forms, the *danza* and *kundiman* were once quite distinct but they became interchangeable by the 1950s because motion pictures incorporated these two genres into *harana* scenes.

In short, this paper explored the role of motion pictures in shaping the transformation of Filipino musical expressions. It analyzed a number of movie theme songs, such as danzas like “Bituing Marikit” and “Maalala Mo Kaya” and kundiman like “Pakiusap” and “Anak Dalita.” To understand such transformations, there was a need to orient music genres as communicatively meaningful within particular historical contextualization of enunciations and as interactive with various media, particularly film. In tandem, these became vehicles for shaping expressive Filipino popular cultures.



Figure 5. Handbill of the film *Bituing Marikit* in 1937. The film is lost. From IMDB.

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- 1 This article is made possible by the Ateneo-UP Salikha grant.
- 2 Claudia Gorbman, “Classical Hollywood Practice” in *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (London Bloomington: BFI Pub. Indiana University Press, 1987), 73-79.
- 3 Peter Kivy, “Music in the Movies” in *Music, Language, and Cognition: And Other Essays in the Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford, New York: Clarendon Press Oxford University Press, 2007), 62-87.
- 4 Following Chion’s “The Three Borders,” the film’s soundtrack can be categorized according to where it is heard in relation to the moving images: (1) sounds and ambient noises (including music) that are within the frame of the represented scenes (**onscreen**) and are called diegetic, (2) sounds heard clearly outside of the image-frame called **nondiegetic** or extradiegetic (i.e., what is explicitly external to the image), and (3) sounds that are sort of “in and out” of the frame, hovering around the screen (**offscreen**), not quite in the diegesis and not quite far from it. See Michel Chion, *Film, a Sound Art*, English ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 247-261.
- 5 The same thrust is manifested in the Filipino teleseries of the recent decades, such as “Maalala Mo Kaya,” “Pangako Sa Yo,” etc.
- 6 There were other genres of course such as films on historical subjects, epics, and so on.
- 7 Thomas Turino, “Signs of Imagination, Identity, and Experience: A Peircian Semiotic Theory for Music.” *Ethnomusicology: Journal of the Society for Ethnomusicology* (1999), 221-55.
- 8 José S. Buenconsejo (ed.), *Philippine Modernities: Music, Performing Arts, and Language, 1880 to 1941*. (Diliman, Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2017), 17-58.
- 9 Ian Christopher B. Alfonso, *Muling Pagbasa sa Jocelynang Balwaag: Paglutas sa Problemanag Historical ng Tinaguriang “Kundiman ng Himagsikan.”* (Los Baños: Philippine High School for the Arts, 2017), xx-xxi.

EKONOMIYA NG MGA BULAKLAK:

Ang Paghanga sa *Bituing Walang Ningning*

Christian Jil R. Benitez



Bagaman kosmiko sa mungkahing pamagat nito, binubuksan ng *Bituing Walang Ningning* (1985) ang palabas sa pamamagitan ng isang makadaigdig na panimula: isang close-up ng mga sampagitang nakabukadkad, habang maririnig sa hindi kalayuan ang mga hindi rin makikitang ibon. Ang idiliko, gayunpaman, ay kagyat na tinatanggihan, sa pagsabad ng kantang pop habang tumutungo ang kuwadro sa isang medium shot ng mga kabataan sa gitna ng halamanan, pumaparito’t paroon sa mga palumpong. Ang kanilang gawain ay matutukoy sa paglitaw mula sa mga luntian ng isa pang dalaga, ang kanyang pagkakapuwesto sa unahan ng naikuwadrong halamanan agad nang ipinahihiwatig ang kanyang kahalagahan: si Dorina (Sharon Cuneta), na ang kaliwang kamay na bitbit ang isang maliit na bilao habang ang kanyang kanan na pumipitas naman ng mga sampagita ay tumutukoy sa nangyayari—isang karaniwang araw sa sampagitahan para sa mga nagtitindang ito.

At gayon pa man, habang nagsimulang sabayan ni Dorina ang naririnig na rendisyon ng “I Just Called to Say I Love You” ni Stevie Wonder, tinatanggihan din ng pelikula itong ipinakikitang karaniwan: sa paglabas ng pamagat ng pelikula sa gitna, sa dilaw na katulad ng gitnang bahagi ng sampagita, paghuhudyat ng pelikula sa sarili nito bilang isa ngang pelikula, nagsimulang mailahad ang drama.¹ Itataas ni Dorina mula sa mga palumpon at ilalapit sa kanyang tainga ang radyong dala niya, ipapakitang ito pala ang pinagmumulan ng musikang lapat sa eksena. Ang sentral na nasà sa pelikula ay gayong naisasakatawan sa isang kuwadro: na habang nagbabanat siya ng buto bilang isang nagtitinda ng sampagita, mahihinuhang hinahangad pa rin ni Dorina na maging isang tinig na maririnig din sa radyo.

O, tulad kung paano sinasabi ito ni Dorina sa kanyang tiyahin sa susunod na eksena, nais niyang maging isang “superstar singer,” tulad na lamang ng kanyang idolong si Lavinia Arguelles (Cherie Gil), na kanyang masugid na pinag-aalayan ng mga magagandang kuwintas ng sampagita na kanyang binubuo. At nang tinangka ng kanyang tiyahin na sabunin siya sa pagkakaroon ng gayong delirjosong ambisyon, ipinaalala sa kanyang, “Dorina Pineda, iisa lamang ang Lavinia Arguelles,” ang masigasig na dalaga ay makatatanggi lamang sa pagtanggap ito, magiliw na idiniriin sa halip ang isang alternatibo: “Magiging dalawa kami, tiyang.”

Ang sumunod dito ay gayon ngang paglalahad ng doble bilang isang tropo. Sa ilang pagtatagpo, hinihirang ni Dorina si Lavinia sa pamamagitan ng kanyang mga alay na kuwintas ng sampagita; sa likod ng malugod na pagtanggap ng huli sa kaloob ng una, gayunpaman, ay kanya palang tunay na kawalan ng pakialam—liban na lamang sa mga bagay na kaugnay ng kanyang teritoryo bilang nag-iisang superstar singer. Ang mga kalagayang ito, gayunpaman, ay maaari lamang mabulabog: matapos ang pagtanggi ni Lavinia sa mungkahi ng kanyang kasintahan noong si Nico Escobar (Christopher de Leon) na talikuran ang katanyagan para


 Kopya ng komiks serial (1984-1985) ni Nerissa Cabral kasama ang guhit ni Ernie H. Santiago para sa *Pilipino Komiks*.

 Nakaraang pahina: Mula sa film poster ng *Bituing Walang Ningning* (Emmanuel H. Borlaza, Viva Films, 1985). Ang mga imahe mula kay Simon Santos/Video48.

sa halip ay magkasamang bumuo ng sarili nilang pamilya, ipinakilala si Dorina bilang papasikát na mang-aawit, sa ilalim ng kumpanyang itinatag ni Nico kasama ang isang kasosyo, para mabagabag at kinalaunang maalis si Lavinia sa kanyang pedestal, at samakatwid mapapayag siyang paunlakan sa wakas ang mga panghihinuhod ni Nico sa kanya para sa isang buhay domestiko.

Kaya inilayo si Dorina mula sa mga sampagitahan at sa barung-barong kung saan sila nakatira ng kanyang tiyahin, at tungo sa isang maluwag na tirahan, isang bungalow tropiko na nabanggit ni Nico na dating tinirhan ng mga Amerikanong kasosyo ng kanilang pamilya. Ang detalyeng ito, bagaman wari mumunti, ay napakahalaga, bilang ipinapauna nito ang sumunod na montage: si Dorina ay isinuheto sa isang wari kolonyal na pagtitimpla, ang kanyang katutubong dila ay nilinang upang mapatuloy ang katatasang Angloponiko, tulad ng kinalaunang ipapakita sa kanyang walang kamali-maling pagbigkas ng tatlong kabulol-bulol na pangungusap.² Isang paglitaw muli kung gayon ang nangyayari kay Dorina, bagaman sa pagkakataong ito, papalayo mula sa tropikong luntian at tungo sa mga timplang kosmopolitan—mula sa pagiging isang tagatinda ng sampagita tungo sa pagiging umuusbong niyang superstar.

Samantala, ang imahen ng *flora* ay nagbabago rin: hindi na lamang materyal na kasa-kasama ni Dorina sa paggawa sa maaaraw na halamanan, ang bulaklak ngayon ay nagiging pampalamuti, “esensiya ng luho” (“essence of luxury”)³—bilang kanyang pang-ipit sa buhok, halimbawa,



o kaya bilang isang bagay sa silid, tulad ng bilang tampok sa isang pinta o handog mula sa kanya ng mga tagahanga. Sa gayon, bagaman ang mga kaugnayang pandamdamin ng mga tao ang tiyak na pinakapinahaharap, ang *flora* ay mahihinuhang makapagbigay ng isang materyal na pagsasalaysay ng salaysay sa maaaring ibang paraan, na marahil ang kritikal na pagtutuon dito ay makapaglalatatag ng pagsasakuwadrong muli ng pelikula.

Sa pagbaling kung gayon sa *flora* bilang isang epistema, ang nakikita sa pelikula ay hindi pawang tunggalian ng dalawang babae na pinasinayaan ng isang lugmok na mangingibig, subalit isang walang humpay na palitan sa isang ekonomiya ng paghanga, na may bulaklak bilang kurensiya nito: ito ay nasa kuwintas na sampagita na magiit na ipinagkakaloob ni Dorina sa kanyang hinahangaan, sa pumpon ng mga bulaklak na inaabot ni Nico sa kanyang mga minamahal, at sa mabubulaklak na salita ni Lavina para mahimok ang mga tao sa kanyang kapritsuhan.⁴ Sa ganitong paraan ng pagtingin, samakatwid, maaaring maisulat muli ng isa ang puso ng pelikula: ang pag-angat ni Dorina sa kasikatan ay hindi gaanong bunga ng tangka ng isang tinalikurang lalaki sa paghihiganti, kaysa isa muling pagkakataon nitong mangingibig na abutan ang iniibig ng isa pang bulaklak.

Sa ibang salita, ang bulaklak ay nagbabagong anyo kay Dorina *bilang* si Dorina, na nag-aalay kay Lavinia marahil ng pinakaimposibleng kaloob: ang kanyang doble, sa wakas, bilang isang superstar singer. Kung kaya, sa gabing ipinalabas na rin siya sa mata ng publiko, sa pulang wari rosas, kinailangang pormal na simulan ni Dorina ang kanyang karera bilang mang-aawit sa pagtatanghal ng parehong awit kung saan naging kilala si Lavinia, habang inaalay rin ito sa kanya: ito ay kumpas ng paghangang pinakaempatiko, sa malilirip na mungkahi ng isang tagahanga sa kanyang iniidolo ng posibilidad ng kontemporanedad—na siya rin, isang tagahanga, ay maaaring umawit ng parehong awit niya, ang iniidolo, sa katulad ding sigla. Sa ganitong pagdodoble, isang kapatiran ang ipinapanukala: na ang nag-iisang superstar singer ay hindi na kinakailangan pang mag-isa, at na marahil maaari nilang awitin ang parehong awit nang magkasabay.

Kung gayon, habang matataya si Dorina bilang ang pinakadakilang bulaklak na tinatanggang maiabot ni Nico sa

kanyang dating kasintahan, si Dorina ay pagbabagong-anyo ng bulaklak alinsunod sa kanyang sariling pagpapahayag ng paghanga: ano ang kanyang pagtitimpla tungo sa pagiging isang superstar kung hindi pagpapaubaya ng sarili, upang maunawaan na rin at makausap sa wakas ang iniidolo? Kaya nang tanggihan ni Lavinia si Dorina, ang pagtanggi ay pagpapatunay rin lamang ng tagumpay ng huli, sapagkat siya ay nangyari na ngang maging “nothing but a second-rate trying hard copycat”; ang baso ng tubig samakatwid ay *kinakailangang* maibuhos sa mukha ni Dorina, marahil para matiyak kay Lavinia na ang kaharap, sa huli, ay aktuwal. Kaya rin si Dorina ay mapipilitang ibalik ang kaloob: ang karahasan ng kanyang iniidolo ay ginagantihan ng luha—ang kanyang sariling handog na tubig!—kasabay ang pagtatangka sa kanyang sariling antipatya, sinusumpang aagawin ang ningning ng kasikatan ni Lavinia para sa kanyang sarili.

Bagaman itong susing pahayag ay madaling maipagpapalagay na umuugat mula sa pagkabigo ni Dorina sa kanyang pakikipagtagpo sa kanyang iniidolo, sampu ng ekonomiya ng paghanga ay maaaring mataya ang ibang pag-unawa: na ito, sa katunayan, ay maaari lamang pagpapaigting ng imposibleng kaloob ni Dorina ng pagdodoble ng kanyang iniidolo, para sa kanyang idolo, na pinakamapagbigay na umaangkop para tapatan ang nakikita nang kalupitan ng huli. Hindi na ngayon nakapagtataka na sa pamumunga ng kanyang sariling karera, makadudurog din si Dorina ng ilang mga puso: una, ang kay Garry (Joel Torre), ang taga-areglo ng kanyang mga awit na kanya ring higit na nakalapit, subalit nakaunawa ring si Nico ang tunay na iniibig ng dalaga; at ikalawa, ang kay Nico, na ngayon ay nahulog na rin ang loob kay Dorina, subalit matapos mapansin ang pagiging higit na malapit na nila ni Garry ay napagpasyahang lumayo na mula sa dalaga.

At kaya, nang maaangkin na sa wakas ni Dorina ang titulo ng superstar singer sa isang concert kasama si Lavinia, ang doble ay kinakailangang humarap sa kung ano na ang nalampasan na ng kanyang idolo: ikinumpisal ni Nico kay Dorina ang kanyang debosyon para sa kanya, ihinahandog sa kanya ang isang kinabukasan kasama siya, bilang isang pamilya—kung magiging bukal lamang sa kalooban ni Dorina na piliing talikuran na ang kanyang nagsisimula nang katanyagan. Kaiba sa kanyang idolong dinodoble, gayunpaman, taos-pusong tinanggap ni Dorina ang kaloob ni Nico, sa pamamagitan ng pagpapahayag ng isang kakintalan sa bulwagang puno ng mga nag-aabang niyang tagahanga: pagdating sa panahong kinakailangang pumili sa pagitan ng “kinang ng tagumpay” at “katahimikan kapiling ng isang minamahal”, napagtanto ni Dorina na siya ay “hindi angkop na maging isang celebrity. . . at hindi maaaring maging superstar habambuhay” (“not fit to be a celebrity. . . [and] cannot be a superstar forever”).

Sa sandaling ito ng pagsuko, ang resolusyong ito ni Dorina ay mistulang, sa isang banda, kanyang pagbalik sa kanyang naunang kakatwang pagkamuslak bilang isang

tagahangang nagtitinda ng sampagita, kung hindi man tuluyan nang simbolikong pagkalugmok muli ng isang babae sa mga pakana ng isang lugmok na lalaking mangingibig.⁵ Sa kabilang banda, gayunpaman, ang hindi tumaya sa ibayo ng tukso nitong madali (at kung tutuusin, may ilang ulit na rin) na pagbasa ay maaari lamang isang pag-urong ng kritika sa sarili nito, isang pagtatakwil ng krisis na isinasadiwa nitong praktika upang mapasimulan sana ang pagharaya ng mga kaibhan. Kung gayon, *kung* ang kritika ay susulat nang taliwas sa karaniwan, ang posibilidad ng pakikiramay sa pasya ni Dorina ay maaari lamang maisigasig: ang unawain ito, marahil, bilang kanyang taktika kasabay ng sariling ahensiya,⁶ na may puwersa ng kanyang debosyon bilang isang tagahangang kasangkot ang kanyang idolo sa isang hindi mapapatid na ekonomiya ng paghanga.

Samakatwid, maaaring ipanukala ng isa ang pagsulat muli ng nabanggit na sandali sa ibang paraan: sa halip na pag-urong, marahil ay isang paglalabis, tulad ng: ito ang sandali kung kailan ang tinaguriang copycat ay kritikal na pinatutunayan ang kanyang sarili bilang nalampasan na nga ngayon ang pinaghalawan. Sa ibang salita, sa sandaling ito ng waring pagsuko, ang pagtalikod ni Dorina mula sa pagiging superstar at tungo sa maaaring domestisidad ay sa katunayan kanyang pagpapaigting ng sarili sa ibayo ng anino ni Lavinia, ang doble sa pagbubukas ng kanyang sarili sa maaaring lansakan, hindi dahil sa payak niyang pagganti ng pagtatangi kay Nico, kung hindi sa nalilirip na kalakasan ng kanyang loob sa pasiya niyang humaraya at tumaya upang maangkin para sa sarili ang isang kinabukasan matapos ang katanyagan.⁷

Sa pag-awit kung gayon ni Dorina ng kanyang huling awit, sa pagtawag niya kay Lavinia upang samahan siya sa entablado upang maisabit muli sa leeg ng kanyang karibal ang isang kuwintas ng sampagita sa huling pagkakataon, at sa paghaya sa kanyang idolo na tapusin ang awit nang mag-isa, tulad ng ilang ulit na rin nitong nagawa noon—ang mga penultimang kumpas ng paglisan, sa kanilang karingalan, ay parikalang nakapaglalarawan kay Dorina bilang ang pinakabagay pa ring kanyang kasalukuyang tinatalikuran: isang superstar, na ang bombastikong drama gayunpaman ay nakapagsasalin sa kanya mula sa pagiging pigurang sonoriko tungo sa isang mapagkumpas. Iyon ay isang *aktres*: Habang marahang lumalakad si Dorina kay Nico para sa isang yakap, ang nailalahad ay ang sinematiko, na sinaliwan ng paawit na pagsasalaysay ni Lavinia ng pangyayari sa gilid ng entablado.

O, upang maging higit pang tiyak: ang nailalahad ay ang sinematiko *bilang* sinematiko, ang pelikula sa paghuhudyat nitong muli sa sarili bilang isa ngang pelikula. Sapagkat ang nagaganap ay isang pag-uulit kung papaano nagbubukas ang pelikula, samakatwid isang pag-amin sa isang banda ng isang pagsasara sa wakas: ang pinagmumulan ng saliw na awit ng eksena ay nasa loob nitong muli, tulad kung papaanong sa gitna ng sampagitahan ay natagpuang tumutugtog ang isang radyo. Subalit sa pagkakataong ito, ang tagahangang nagtitinda ng sampagita ay sa wakas higit

nang malapit kaysa kailanpaman sa kanyang pinakaiibig na idolo—ang sandali kung kailan titigil ang pelikula, ikukuwadro ang sandali sa isang bituin, at pasisimulang ilista ang mga nagsipagganap; ganap na kung gayon ang pelikula. Na nangangahulugan, marahil, na ang pinakapuso ng pelikula ay sa kung papaano, matapos ang lahat ng pangyayari, ang debosyon ni Dorina para sa kanyang idolo ay nananatili pa rin sa isang banda: siya ay isang bituing walang ningning sapagkat siya ay isang bituing hindi isang bituin, subalit isang bulaklak, may limang talulot at puti, isang pagpapahayag kung gaano humahanga ang isa.

- 1 Ang materyalidad ng pelikula bilang pelikula, at samakatwid hindi katumbas ng realidad, ay idiniriin sa pagpapahalaga ni Joi Barrios sa mga pelikula ni Cuneta: "Oo, pinapanood ko pa rin ang mga pelikula ni Sharon. Ngunit, hindi upang ako'y mag-ilusyong Sinderela ring gaya niya. Sa bawat pelikula, nauunawaan ko kung bakit nananatiling atsay, basurera, o martir na babae ang mga Pilipinang kasabay ko sa pila." Tingnan kay Barrios, "Kung Bakit Lagi Kong Pinapanood ang mga Pelikula ni Sharon Cuneta," sa *Kritikal na Espasyo ng Kulturang Popular*, pat. Rolando Tolentino at Gary C. Devilles (Lungsod Quezon: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2015), 285.
- 2 Tingnan ang pagbasa ni Bliss Cua Lim sa nasabing eksena bilang metonimiya ng kanyang tinatawag na "digmaang pangwika" ("language wars") sa pelikualng Filipino noong 1980s, sa "Sharon's Noranian Turn: Stardom, Embodiment, and Language in Philippine Cinema," *Discourse* 31.3 (2009): 337-44.
- 3 Roland Barthes: "Subalit mga bulaklak? Marahil ang esensiya ng luho, ng karagdagan: ano ang lum-alabis o nagkukulang sa pagiging kapaki-pakinabang na bunga." ("But flowers? Probably the essence of luxury, of the supplement: what exceeds or falls short of being a useful fruit.") Tingnan kay Barthes, "Fleurs/Flowers," *How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces*, salin ni Kate Briggs (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 87.
- 4 Barthes, "Dédicace/Dedication," *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, salin ni Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 75-9.
- 5 Tingnan ang mga katulad na pagbasa mula kay Rolando Tolentino, "Sharon Cuneta at ang Perpetwal na Birhen," sa *Richard Gomez at ang Mito ng Pagkalalake, Sharon Cuneta at ang Perpetwal na Birhen, at Iba Pang Sanaysay Ukol sa Bida sa Pelikula Bilang Kultural na Texto* (Lungsod Pasig: Anvil Publishing, 2000), 63-81; at Cesar Orsal, "Sharon Cuneta: Ang Romansa ng Komiks Movies at Ideya ng mga Pangarap," sa *Movie Queen: Pagbuo ng Mito at Kapangyarihang Kultural ng Babae sa Lipunan* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 2007), 96-101.
- 6 Michel de Certeau: "Ang *taktika* ay isang sukát na kilos, tinitiyak ng kawalan ng isang angkop na luan... Kinakailangan nitong maingat na gamitin ang mga guwang na binubuksan ng mga partikular na dugtungan sa pagmamatyag ng mga kapangyarihang pang-angkop. Nagnanakaw ito mula sa mga ito. Lumilikha ito ng sorpresa sa mga ito. Maaari itong maging kung saan hindi ito pinakinaasahan. Isa itong mapanlinlang na lansi." ("[A] *tactic* is a calculated action, determined by the absence of a proper locus. . . It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the propriety powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse.") Tingnan kay De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, salin Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 36-7.
- 7 Tingnan ang pagbasa ni Neferti X.M. Tadiar sa naunang sinasangguniang sanaysay ni Barrios kay Cuneta, sa "Women Alone," *Things Fall Away: Philippine Historical Experience and the Makings of Globalization* (Lungsod Quezon: University of the Philippines, 2009), 97-102.

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SHAPING FILIPIN* REGIONAL C1NEMA:

FILM FESTIVAL PROGRAMMING IN CINEMA REHIYON

Katrina Tan



This essay examines Cinema Rehiyon’s contribution to the formation and development of regional cinema in the Philippines by looking at its festival programming. Cinema Rehiyon (CR) is an annual non-competitive film festival devoted to screening films collectively known as “regional cinema.” The latter nomenclature generally refers to films made in and about places outside Metro Manila, the film industry’s base. The festival benefits from being mainly funded by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) since its first edition in 2009. For more than a decade, CR has brought attention to films from different parts of the archipelago. In doing so, it has generated discourses on regional cinema that, in turn, provoke a rethinking of Filipino cinema.

In this essay, I analyze CR’s festival programming practices to identify the ways it has shaped regional cinema as a concept and a practice. I propose that CR can be understood as a crucial site in conceptualizing regional cinema and in influencing its production and exhibition practices. I argue that this festival has produced an evolving discourse on regional cinema that is anchored on its articulation of local specificities and sensibilities. CR programming emphasizes local cultural markers, such as setting, language, as well as authorship by filmmakers who have intimate links to regional places. Together with the textual elements, these markers convey the local sensibility in films that CR programmers

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CinemaRehiyon 2013 held at UP Los Baños.
Courtesy of UPLB PelikuLAB.

constantly look for. In addition, I argue that CR has helped sustain the practice of regional cinema by creating and nurturing a network of filmmakers, programmers, festival organizers, and audiences.

The essay starts with a brief discussion of CR’s history then analyzes its programming practices. The analysis focuses on how the selection process, curatorial policies, and resulting film programs have introduced ways of understanding and practicing regional cinema. Sources of data include the CR festival catalogues, Project Assessment Reports (PAR) written by NCCA monitoring and evaluation officers, and interviews with CR’s founding festival director, programmer, and the NCCA Cinema Committee members. I also rely on my first-hand experience of working in various capacities in CR as a regional programmer from 2010 to 2016, festival director in 2013, programmer for Luzon in 2014 to 2015, and a committee member from 2014 to 2016. As a festival insider, I am aware that this position affects the kinds of observations I make about the data. It informs and, to some extent, complicates my critical analysis of CR’s festival programming. Together, these data point to CR’s capacity to produce knowledge about regional cinema and, more broadly, enable a rethinking of Filipino cinema.

A ‘Practical’ Beginning

Conceptualized in 2008 by the NCCA Cinema Committee (hereafter referred to as Committee), CR has since been the Committee’s flagship project. Miguel Rapatan, former Committee Chair, describes its beginning as “practical rather than conceptual.” He relates that the Committee was asked to come up with a project in line with the National Arts Month (NAM) celebration. NAM’s theme during the inaugural CR in 2009 was *Ani ng Sining* (Harvest of Arts), and the Committee thought that a festival presenting a harvest of films from the regions suits this theme perfectly.¹ To gather films from the regions, the Committee sought help from region-based partners and funded local film festivals in Baguio, Naga, Bacolod, Cagayan de Oro, and Davao.² Some of these areas are home to established filmmakers—Kidlat Tahimik resides in Baguio and Peque Gallaga in Bacolod—while some have small filmmaking communities within and outside schools.

Rapatan and Teddy Co, the Committee Vice Chair and CR programmer, selected films from these festivals and programmed them in CR’s maiden edition in 2009.³ Films outside these local festivals were also programmed. Co enlisted regional features produced mainly by competitive film festivals in Manila, such as Cinemalaya Independent Film Festival and Cinema One Originals. These programming practices were retained in the succeeding festival editions.

The first two editions of Cinema Rehiyon were directed by Gabriel Fernandez and were held at the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP). Both carried the provocative theme *Alter Nativo: Films from the Other Philippines*. CR’s logo—three overlapping film strips forming an asterisk—similarly conveys a strong visual identity for the festival.⁴ It symbolizes the festival as an intersection of the diverse film communities around the country. CR’s identity, thus, positions itself as the primary exhibition venue for the often-neglected regional cinema. Fernandez conveyed the latter point in his stirring speech during the closing program of the first CR:

We regional film-makers have come far and wide to gather here at the national center of the arts, the CCP, to declare with our collective voices, said in various languages and tones, that regional cinema has arrived. We will no longer allow regional cinema to be relegated to the back pages in the annals of Philippine cinema. We come to claim what is truly ours: the right to be included in the national discourse on film. We have arrived and we are here to stay.⁵

Such sentiment would have resonated strongly among region-based filmmakers in the audience as most writings on Filipino film history have neglected accounts of regional filmmaking. For instance, the Visayan cinema, which was active in the 1930s until the 1970s, has been absent in many standard Philippine film history books.⁶ CR has, thus, been claimed as the site where Filipino film history could be rewritten.

On its third year, CR was brought to Davao City in southern Philippines, and since then, the festival has been hosted in different towns and cities in the regions: Bacolod in 2012, Los Baños in 2013, Cagayan de Oro in 2014, Cebu in 2015, Dasmariñas in 2016, Nabunturan in 2017, and back to Manila in 2018. After its 10th year, Dumaguete hosted it in 2019 and Naga, in 2020. In these editions, the festival consisted of feature and short film programs, panel discussions, fellowship and networking events, and a local tour. Invited filmmakers, festival organizers, programmers, and other guests would be flown in the host city or town to soak in hundreds of films and enjoy the company of their fellow filmmakers. Because each festival edition is different, each one presents a new festival experience. More recently, the festival has added side events for pitching and even a book launch. In my analysis, I demonstrate how these activities enable regional cinema to thrive and develop as a formidable component of current Filipino cinema.

As a state-funded film festival, CR is constantly in a precarious state because changes in leadership and policies can suddenly mean its end. It is highly commendable, then, that NCCA has supported it for more than a decade already. In 2015, however, NCCA’s commitment to the festival was put to the test when a change in policy stripped Cinema Rehiyon of its flagship status, removing it from the annual NAM celebration. At that time, NCCA restructured its competitive grants scheme and removed funding allotted to flagship projects. In the new scheme, unless someone submitted a proposal for CR in the competitive grants, NCCA would not fund it. The Committee decided to continue conducting the festival and refused to demote it from its flagship status. Its members wrote a position paper addressed to the NCCA Board of Commissioners asking for funding and explaining why NCCA should continue supporting CR. It helped that

the Project Assessment Reports (PAR) contain generally positive evaluation of previous festival editions. Fortunately, NCCA listened and allotted funding for the festival that year. It was held in Cebu City in August, several months after its usual February schedule.

In the following year, CR faced another threat as a change in application procedures made it impossible for many organizations, groups, and individuals to apply for NCCA grants. Because of the national controversy on fraudulent disbursement of funds to non-government organizations and foundations, the Commission on Audit required all organizations asking funds from government agencies to obtain certification from the Department of Social Welfare and Development. But in order to get this certification, an organization has to submit documents that take a long time to accomplish. The next host of Cinema Rehiyon failed to accomplish this new requirement, so they had to give up on hosting the festival. The Committee, however, wanted to conduct the festival, especially after the threat of discontinuing it the previous year. The Committee managed to find an eligible organization to host it, and Cinema Rehiyon was held in November 2016 in Dasmariñas City, Cavite. These two instances show that while having state funding is advantageous, relying on it can threaten its continuity due to sudden policy changes and bureaucratic politics.

After more than a decade of existence, Cinema Rehiyon has developed an audience for regional cinema comprised mainly of students, filmmakers, programmers, and cineastes. The large attendance of students could be attributed to the fact that CR, which is a publicly-funded festival, offers free film screenings. Its highest record of audience attendance was almost 10,000 when it was held in the university town of Los Baños in 2013.⁷ This was the first time that CR had two screening venues to accommodate the growing number of regional films programmed in the festival. More screens were added in the succeeding festivals—a sign of regional cinema’s continuous growth.



Juliet Cuizon (second from left) from Dumaguete accepts the torch from Cinema Committee Chair Teddy Co (left) and Jag Garcia (right). Photos from Cinema Rehiyon Facebook page, unless noted.



Cinema Rehiyon 2019 poster.



As part of its festival program, CR holds post-screening discussions with filmmakers.

Film Festival Programming

As the “core activity of film festivals,” programming enables film festivals to produce knowledge on cinema and shape audience’s experience of it.⁸ Peter Bosma describes programming as the “activity of selecting films and scheduling them purposefully for screening to an audience, whether at a film, theatre, film festival or film archive.”⁹ This description captures the basic tasks involved in programming, but this activity involves complex processes performed by festival programmers in selecting and scheduling films. Roya Rastegar explains that programming involves editorial and curatorial processes. She relates that the editorial stage requires sifting through a large pool of submissions to narrow down the number of films for consideration. In the curatorial stage, the festival programmer selects the festival line-up of films and arranges it in programs.¹⁰ In both instances, the festival programmer evaluates the film’s quality, and several factors influence her final selection.

Perhaps foremost of these considerations is choosing films that address the festival’s mission. The programmers’ cinematic knowledge and taste also play a part in this regard.¹¹ In bigger international film festivals, commercial sales agents who hold authority over the film rights are another factor.¹² The final festival line-up is, thus, a product of complex interplay of subjectivities, taste, and the business of cinema.

Programming varies in purpose depending on the festival’s nature. For instance, big international film festivals, like the ones in Cannes, Venice and Berlin, serve as “cultural gatekeepers” that shape global cinematic trends.¹³ These competitive film festivals shine light on new auteurs or ‘new waves’ in world cinema. They also influence film distribution by disrupting it.¹⁴ Smaller, specialized festivals, like CR, operate differently, however.

Some festivals aim to challenge stereotypes¹⁵ or diversify the kinds of representation in mainstream media.¹⁶ In CR’s case, programming has aimed to challenge the privileged position of Tagalog cinema in Filipino cinema

discourses. This relates to Rastegar’s point that film festivals can contest “exclusionary formations of film culture.”¹⁷ CR showcases various cinematic expressions and circulates new representational and aesthetic practices, opening up Filipino cinema to become more inclusive. Moreover, the festival participates in the formation of Filipino national cinema. Liz Czach argues that “film festival programming informs canon formation” in a nation’s cinema and as such, it functions as one of the mechanisms that defines a national cinema.¹⁸ CR programming can, thus, be considered as a form of “cultural intervention.”¹⁹ The festival intervenes in Filipino film culture by introducing regional cinema and locating the latter’s place in the country’s cinematic discourse.

Shaping Regional Cinema

CR’s festival programming has shaped regional cinema in two ways. First, it helped sustain this cinema, not only by providing a regular exhibition space, but by nurturing a network of filmmakers, festival organizers, and programmers. Second, it has generated an evolving discourse on regional cinema anchored on its articulation of local specificities and sensibilities. In the next sections, I discuss the programming practices that illustrate these points.

Nurturing a Network of Regional Cinemas

Even in the early years of CR, regional film communities have played a role in festival programming. As mentioned earlier, local film festivals serve as catchment for films that can be programmed in CR. In 2010, the Committee on Cinema put up the Cinemas in the Region program, which funds several of these festivals. This program is distinct from Cinema Rehiyon film festival, but it serves an important role in CR’s programming – it is where films are first gathered and selected.²⁰ Other film festivals not funded by NCCA also play this role. In this respect, regional film programming relies



Cinema Rehiyon’s festival program includes other events such as the concept pitching held during its tenth edition in 2018.

on what Rastegar calls a “deeply collective approach”²¹ and a “democratized process”²² since the film selection depends on its archipelagic network of film festivals. Aside from this, however, this network also forms a secondary circuit where regional films can circulate. Films from one local film festival can be programmed in several others, thus, expanding their audience reach.

As film catchments for CR, regional film festivals demarcate their scope based on geographical boundaries. For instance, the Cinemagis film festival in Cagayan de Oro City accepts entries from directors working in northern Mindanao. Some festivals cover a broader scope, such as the Mindanao Film Festival held annually in Davao City. It accepts entries from all over Mindanao, so its scope covers that of the other festivals on the island. In other instances, regional film festivals consider a shared ethnolinguistic identity as basis for their scope. One example is the Binisaya Film Festival in Cebu City, which accepts film entries that use the Binisaya language spoken in the Visayas islands and some parts of Mindanao. Others are themed, such as the Ngilngig Film Festival in Davao City that specializes on short horror films, and the Sinulog Film Festival, which shows religious-themed films. The variety of these festivals corresponds to a variety of programming practices bound by festival guidelines, competition rules, and taste of programmers and jury members serving in these film festivals. These film festivals applying different programming practices ultimately affect CR’s festival programming.

Most NCCA-funded regional film festivals are competitive in nature. Because they receive funding from NCCA, these festivals can give out prize money to the winners. Their competitive nature ensures that short films submitted in the next programming stage of CR have reached a certain quality. These films also abide by certain demands of local film festivals—some require themes specific to a regional place or the use of local language. After eligible directors submit their films, the festival either has an in-house selection

committee, or it convenes a selection jury. From the submitted entries, the assigned panel selects the finalists which will compete in the festival. Then, the programmer arranges the films in film programs and schedules the screening. During the festival proper, a jury comprised of invited filmmakers, actors, NCCA Committee members, critics, and scholars evaluates each film and chooses the festival winners. Prizes include Best Film, Best Screenplay, and awards for technical excellence: Best Editing, Best Cinematography, Best Sound, Best Production Design. Some festivals give awards for outstanding performances of actors. Others hand out a Jury Prize award. Winners of the festival’s top prize are automatically programmed in CR. Then, the regional festival directors submit other outstanding films in their festival, usually the other winning films, to CR’s festival programmer.²³ In this stage, the regional film festival acts like a clearinghouse for short films.

The second stage in CR programming commences when the festival programmer receives the films from the regions. In its first three years, Co served as the main programmer who gathered all films and made the final call on which films to include and exclude. From 2012 to 2017, CR had more festival programmers, with one or two assigned to make the final film selection for each major island grouping: Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. This programming structure was inaugurated in CR 2012, which had the theme, Empowering Regional Cinema. The more democratized nature of festival programming was seen to empower the regions as regional curators select films for the festival line-up. The curatorial policy formalized in 2011 declares its adherence to empowering regional programmers. It gives them “the freedom to thresh out the selection process unique to each region and in a process that will best serve the subregions.”²⁴ This statement implies that regional programmers can assess a film better since they understand its cultural context, and they can locate it within regional filmmaking trends. In other words, programmers can ascribe cultural value to films aside from the critical capital that Czach proposed.²⁵

Emphasizing Local Specificities and Sensibilities

CR programming has defined regional cinema in relation to its articulation of local specificities and sensibilities. This emphasis on cinema’s relation to a local place is apparent in both formal and informal curatorial guidelines applied in CR programming. In a personal interview, Co outlined four criteria he used when selecting films to be programmed. In determining whether a film can be considered “regional,” it should (1) be set or shot outside Manila, (2) use local language, (3) have a director who is connected to a regional place, and/or (4) contain a regional point of view. Co considers the last as the “supreme, most important” criterion among the others. He explains this concept as something that can be felt or discerned while watching the film. Co cites a Polish-directed film as an example which uses Ilonggo spoken in

Bacolod, where the film was shot. He relates that some film crew members were from Bacolod, too. He considers these regional elements enough for him to judge that film as containing a regional point of view.²⁶

Co’s idea of regional point of view is similar to the local sensibility that the formal curatorial policies developed in 2011 emphasized. These guidelines, which was meant to inform the programming team in 2012, was democratized and conveyed a more flexible understanding of what can be considered regional films. In this new framework of regional cinema, sensibility becomes one of its defining characteristics. While the cultural markers that Co mentioned remain crucial determining factors for a film to be considered regional, the new policy gives a leeway for films that do not contain all of them. The guidelines state that films reflecting “the spirit, voice and color of the region” can be programmed even when they do not use the local language or are made outside the filmmaker’s home region.²⁷ Another condition set in the guidelines is if the films exhibit “the sensibilities of the filmmaker’s region or...the sensibilities of a regional filmmaker.”²⁸ However, what “sensibility” means in this context and how it is determined are not explicitly stated in the curatorial policy.

By looking at the cited passage above, one can deduce that regional filmmakers can acquire sensibility of a place other than their own. Filmmakers can imbibe a region’s sensibility by doing research on and immersing in the local culture.²⁹ In CR’s early editions, programming reflected this idea as illustrated by the inclusion of Tara Illenberger’s *Brutus: Ang Paglalakbay* (2008) in the program. Shot on Mindoro Island by a Manila-based Iloilo-native, filmmaker, the film is about Mangyan children smuggling logs from the mountains to the lowlands. *Brutus* demonstrates that a filmmaker who is a cultural outsider to the place she is filming can indeed learn about a region’s particular realities and present it with fidelity in a film. In addition, the short films programmed in the Crossing Regions section in CR attest to the capacity of filmmakers to imbibe local sensibility of a place outside their own hometown. This program shows films shot by directors in places outside their own region and may be about cultures different from their own.³⁰

The guidelines suggest, moreover, that regional filmmakers embody a sensibility, which manifests in the films they make no matter where they make it. In this case, sensibility is seen as something that sits deep within the regional filmmaker. This view considers the centrality of the film’s authorial aspect in determining a regional film. It works under the assumption that because sensibility is embedded within regional filmmakers, they will always produce films that are “regional.” This expands regional cinema’s definition, one which relates to an understanding of cinema as created by auteurs.³¹ As stated in its curatorial policy, CR’s first objective—to “develop and promote the regional filmmaker and showcase their works on a national-level”—supports this

view.³² The policy defines a “regional filmmaker” as someone who is either based in the regional cities or provinces working with the local filmmaking community in making their films.

In addition, a regional filmmaker may be based in Metro Manila “but have regular engagements with their home provinces and regions beyond simple residency.”³³ These “regular engagements” presumably maintain the filmmaker’s regional sensibility. To illustrate, *Amok* (2011) is a film set in Manila about the intertwining lives of its lower-class residents. Directed by Manila-based Lawrence Fajardo, the film was programmed in CR 2012, when it was held in the director’s home province of Negros Occidental. Vicente Groyon supposes that the film’s inclusion “was presumably predicated in Fajardo’s roots, and continuing professional connections, in Negros Occidental.”³⁴ While it is arguable that *Amok* has the Negrense sensibility, its inclusion in the festival line-up indicates that regional film’s authorial aspect has defined “sensibility” in this instance.

For the audience, the way they discern local specificities and sensibilities is through the arrangement of film programs. For many years, CR has programmed films according to geographical categories, i.e. it screened films coming from the same city, province, or region in one program. This way, the audience gets to view different facets of regional places through the films. Each festival day is dedicated to films of one major island grouping. For example, films from Luzon will be shown on Day 1, from Visayas on Day 2, and from Mindanao on Day 3. Within each day, the film programs are arranged by regions, provinces, or regional film festivals. To illustrate, a day for Luzon films would have four or five film programs, and within each program, films are arranged in a way that allows for unexpected connections to take place.³⁵

Arranging the viewing schedule as such casts wide views on each place, region, and the nation, in general. This way, regional films become a vehicle of cultural information where audiences gain awareness and understanding of regional cultures, issues, or concerns. Groyon discusses, for instance, short films from Baguio City in the 2009 festival that reveal a preoccupation among filmmakers in filming the social changes they observe in their city.³⁶ Another example are films from Nabunturan in Mindanao that inevitably feature mining as the town is home to gold mining. Bryan Jimenez’s *Pasuan* (Greed) (2015), for instance, tells a story of an indigenous person who keeps from his friend the location of a river where he freely mines gold. In the end, their greed leads to their death. The geographical focus of CR’s film programming exhibits the variety of regional sensibilities in the country.

In some editions of the festival, its programming for short films shifted to a thematic one. Features continue to have standalone screenings, in general, though in 2015, Co included short films that were shown before a full-length feature. Co explains that this strategy was motivated by a rather practical observation that “filmmakers were just

viewing films from their own regions.”³⁷ Nonetheless, the resulting programming practice offers the audience a viewing experience to identify cultural similarities found in the films. In this arrangement, the film program’s theme is drawn from similarities among the short films selected, unlike in other cases when programmers start with a curatorial argument in coming up with a program.³⁸

In the case of CR 2015 film programs, for instance, some focus on local characters (‘Character (Quite A)’), queer characters (‘Gender Blender’), or male lovers in a same-sex relationship (‘True Bromance’). Some programs contain films that show how broader social issues, like in education (‘Yearning to Learn’) and environment (‘This Land is Mined’), are experienced in regional contexts. Various filmmakers across the archipelago contemplate on the pervading influence of religion in daily life as demonstrated by the films in the ‘Holy Art Thou’ program. The curatorial shift to thematic programming encourages the audience to notice cultural and thematic similarities and differences in the films. It allows them to observe how films from different places articulate common themes or issues. In other words, films grouped thematically make it easier to see how stories, cultural beliefs, or practices resonate in other places. More important, it enables a relational view in which overlapping and intersecting themes, connections, and relations are recognized.

Conclusion

From its “practical” beginnings, CR has established itself as a crucial site in shaping regional cinema as a concept and a practice. In its more than a decade of existence, this festival has built a network for regional film communities that helps sustain its practice. This is significant as exhibition and distribution opportunities for regional films remain limited.

In addition, CR’s programming practices have framed regional cinema in relation to its emphasis on local specificities and sensibilities. This allows a plurality of cinematic expressions and cultural identities to thrive. In this way, CR unsettles a unitary view of Filipino cinema and the nation. It disassociates Filipino cinema from being defined by Tagalog cinema and carves a space for regional cinemas across the archipelago in the country’s film landscape. As more images from different cultures in the nation circulate through CR, ideas on national identities become more complex and not fixed on dominant cultural groups.

What Cinema Rehiyon has shown through its programming is that a film festival can create new consciousness in Filipino cinema—one that recognizes the regions as constitutive of the national film culture. Moreover, it demonstrates that a film festival is more than just showing films gathered in different places. These films also provoke reflection on Filipino cultural identities and our relations.

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2 Miguel Rapatan, “Regional Cinema: 1938-2014,” *CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art*, ed. Nicanor Tiongson (Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines, 2018), 82-91.
3 Vicente Groyon, “Cinemarehiyon 2009,” *A Reader in Philippine Film History and Criticism*, eds. Jonathan Chua et al. (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2014), 177.
4 Gabriel Fernandez, Interview with author (Laguna, July 20, 2018).
5 February 21, 2009, Cultural Center of the Philippines, Manila.
6 Some scholars have recently sought to fill in the gap. See Nick Deocampo, *Films from a “Lost” Cinema: A Brief History of Cebuano Films* (Manila: National Commission on Culture and the Arts, 2005), and Paul Douglas Grant and Misha Boris Anissimov, *Lilas: An Illustrated History of the Golden Ages of Cebuano Cinema* (Cebu City: University of San Carlos Press, 2016).
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8 Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong, *Film Festivals: Culture, People, and Power on the Global Screen* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, 2011), 1.
9 Peter Bosma, *Film Programming: Curating for Cinemas, Festivals, Archives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 5.
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17 Roya Rastegar. “Difference, Aesthetics and the Curatorial Crisis of Film Festivals,” *Screen*, vol. 53, no. 3 (Sept. 2012), 317, doi:10.1093/screen/hjs022.
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19 de Valck, “Finding Audiences,” 30
20 Teddy Co, “Luzon Films: Curator’s Notes,” in *Bacollywood Cinema Rehiyon 2012 Festival: Empowering Regional Cinema Festival Catalogue*. National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 2012, pp. 8-9.
21 Roya Rastegar. “Difference, Aesthetics and the Curatorial Crisis of Film Festivals,” *Screen*, vol. 53, no. 3 (Sept. 2012), 317, doi:10.1093/screen/hjs022.
22 Fernandez, Interview by author (Laguna, July 20, 2018).
23 In 2014, the Committee instituted the Sulyap Kultura Award, which is a special award given to films that provide a perspective on the local culture depicted. Winners of this award were also automatically selected for Cinema Rehiyon.
24 National Commission on Culture and the Arts [NCCA], “Cinema Rehiyon Curatorial Policy,” 2011, 1-2.
25 Czach, “Film Festivals,” 82.
26 Teddy Co, interview by author (Makati, August 13, 2018).
27 NCCA, “Cinema Rehiyon Curatorial Policy,” 1.
28 NCCA, “Cinema Rehiyon Curatorial Policy,” 2.
29 Co, interview by author.
30 Rapatan, “Regional Cinema: 1938-2014,” 83.
31 Filipino film scholar Nicanor Tiongson views the recent rise of Filipino digital independent films as part of the Second Cinema, which centres on art cinema and its auteurs (34).
32 NCCA, “Cinema Rehiyon Curatorial Policy,” 1.
33 NCCA, “Cinema Rehiyon Curatorial Policy,” 1.
34 Groyon, “Cinemarehiyon 2009,” 178.
35 Rastegar, “Seeing Differently,” 182.
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37 Co, interview by author.
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MAPPING MILESTONES IN THE CONTEMPORARY

FILM SCENE IN MINDANAO

Jay Rosas



SHORT TAKE

In October 2019, a three-day Davao film retrospective screening was held at the Holy Cross of Davao College as part of the centennial celebration of Philippine cinema called Sandaan. Although this event was specific to films made by Davao-born filmmakers, it commenced with a screening of *Lakaran ni Kabunyan* (Kabunyan's Journey), Kidlat Tahimik's episode in the omnibus film *Lakbayan* (Journey, 2018) with Lav Diaz and Brillante Mendoza. Like the other episodes that are centered on journeys, Tahimik's episode mirrors the road-movie narrative of his debut film *Mababangong Bangungot* (Perfumed Nightmare, 1977) as he films his son Kabunyan traveling from Baguio to Davao via a camper van. Kabunyan now resides in Samal, an island 15 minutes away by ferry from Davao.

The full-length film program included Sherad Anthony Sanchez's *Huling Balyan ng Bubi o ang Sinalirap nga Asoy Nila* (The Last Priestess of Bubi or The Woven Stories of the Other, 2006), Arnel Mardoquio's *Ang Paglalakbay ng mga Bituin sa Gabing Madilim* (Journey of the Stars Into The Dark Night, 2012), Bagane Fiola's *Baboy Halas* (Wailings in the Forest, 2016), and Arnel Barbarona's *Tu Pug Imatuy* (The Right to Kill, 2017). Among the filmmakers, only Fiola continues to reside in Davao City, though he was born in Cagayan de Oro and has also lived in North Cotabato. Barbarona, for the most part, has lived in Davao City but has recently moved to Davao de Oro (formerly Compostela Valley), where he also shot his last film, the QCinema entry *Kaarway sa Sulod* (The Enemy Within, 2019). Sanchez is currently residing in Manila and Mardoquio abroad, but Mindanao continues to figure in the narratives of their films.

As the programmer, I pondered on this reality of movements and origins when I introduced these films to the audience in trying to make sense of the title of the event. It is a Davao films retrospective yet the opening film is clearly unclassifiable in its regionality. None of the films makes Davao, particularly its urban landscape and peoples,

the center of its narratives. (Fiola's second film *Sonata Maria* [2014], however, might be an example of a Davao City film, with the story entirely happening in the city's downtown area, but it was not included in the program). This difficulty in trying to identify a "Davao cinema" mirrors the difficult task of defining regional cinema as concretely as one would say there is filmmaking in the regions. This task surfaces the complex construction of a Philippine regional cinema that has, for the last decade, demonstrated a fluidity in its movements. Yet more films are now being produced in different regions in the Philippines, with vibrant filmmaking communities in Cebu, Pampanga, Davao, Bacolod, Iloilo, and even in towns like Nabunturan, where filmmaking is practiced by students, teachers, and local government employees.

Mindanao-born filmmakers, as shown in the films programmed, have chosen to tell stories of cultural and socio-political importance that are experienced by Mindanao as a whole, reflecting a consciousness developed by the realities of their origins and the experience of living in Mindanao. Unlike Visayas, Mindanao is an island-region characterized by its interconnectivity. While previous violent incidents have only occurred in remote parts of the region, more developed areas like Davao City are still vulnerable from emerging threats like the ISIS-led violent extremism that triggered the Marawi Siege. In 2016, a bomb exploded at the Roxas Night Market in Davao that killed 15 people and injured dozens more. Jarell Serencio's short film "Mga Bitoon sa Siyudad" (Stars in the City, 2016), about two boys plying the night market stall

Previous page:
Omeles Laglagan, a Matigsalog forest hunter, plays the protagonist in Bagane Fiola's *Baboy Halas* (2016), shot in the hinterlands of Davao. Courtesy of Fiola.

A Manobo family at the heart of Arnel Barbarona's *Tu Pug Imatuy* (2017) about the lingering struggles of Lumads. Courtesy of Barbarona.



patrons for loose change, ends tragically with that bombing incident, while Keisha Halili’s short film “Ang Pagbalik sa Ugat-hinungdan” (The Return to Reason, 2019) examines the effect of the bombing on the lives of those affected through the story of a barbecue vendor.

Emergence of regional film communities and filmmakers

Sanchez’s *Huling Balyan ng Bubi* which became part of the 2006 Cinema One Originals Film Festival is considered to be the first full-length film to come from Mindanao, perhaps in decades. According to Dax Cañedo, the film “brought together many film workers and talents in Mindanao to a feature film production that would, for the first time, compete in a national film festival.” Cañedo, who was part of the production together with some Davao filmmakers, would a year after form the Mindanao Film and Television Development Foundation (MFTDFI). Initially, the group encountered a problem with the festival’s previous name—Guerilla Film Festival following the Guerilla Filmmaking Workshop—as a military guest reportedly mistook the festival as being connected to the New People’s Army (NPA). MFTDFI consequently changed the name to the Mindanao Film Festival but retained the name of the workshop, still owing to the guerilla style of filmmaking in the region. Now on its 17th year, the MFF is the longest running regional film festival in the country.

The emergence of regional film festivals saw the rise of film communities in Mindanao. In Northern Mindanao, the CineMagis Digital Film Festival in Cagayan de Oro City started in 2009 and in December 2019, the Cine de Oro Film Festival, a filmmakers-led film festival was launched. In Zamboanga, the Festival de Cine Paz Mindanao began its run in 2017. In Region 12, although the Lantawan SOCKSARGEN Film Festival in General Santos City which started in 2014 has been discontinued, the Sine Lamdag in Koronadal was launched in 2018. There is also Cine Animo, a student film festival in Ozamiz City, formed in 2014. The Nabunturan Independent Film Exhibition (NABIFILMEX) was launched in 2013. Without the presence of a theater or screening venue, the films produced were showcased in the open-air municipal plaza of the festival. When the Open Air Cinema Foundation learned about the initiative, it donated a 20-foot inflatable screen where the films continue to be projected even as their own Cinematheque was built in 2019. All of these festivals, whether led by academe or a community of filmmakers, started with a focus on showcasing homegrown films but later invited and exhibited films from other regions including those outside Mindanao.

There is also the Ngilngig Film Festival (now Ngilngig Asian Fantastic Film Festival Davao) which started in 2015 as a horror-genre film festival expanding thematically in 2018 to showcase a more diverse lineup of films, including fantasy, sci-fi, and experimental. The rebranded Ngilngig expanded its reach in 2019 with international films in

exhibition and Asian films in competition. The Salamindanaw Asian Film Festival also rebranded three years ago (from “International” to “Asian”) to showcase films from Asia with focus on Southeast Asia. Salamindanaw, launched in 2013, was the first international film festival in Mindanao. Both Ngilngig and Salamindanaw have a workshop component focusing on story and script development. Salamindanaw’s Mindanao Screen Lab birthed the first full-length film from Cagayan de Oro—Joe Bacus’ *Markado* (The Moon Devourer, 2018), which had its premiere exhibition at the QCinema International Film Festival and went on to be screened at the 2019 Fukuoka International Film Festival. Ngilngig meanwhile developed its film workshops into a month-long program. An alternative to formal film school settings, these workshops present opportunities for aspiring filmmakers to develop their craft and provide a platform to find new and emerging voices in Mindanao cinema.

It is exciting to track the development of young filmmakers following their more established counterparts. Following Bacus, who is now developing his second feature film, fellow CDO filmmaker Julianne Ilagan directed her first full-length film *Kauyagan* (Way of Life, 2017), which was produced with a grant from Tofarm Film Festival. Ilagan was the first female filmmaker from Mindanao to have made a full-length film. Also from CDO, Jeffrie Po is developing his fourth short documentary after attending the Yamagata Rough Cut program during the 2017 Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival in Japan. Short filmmakers who are in the process of developing their first full-length films include Ryanne Murcia and Xeph Suarez from Zamboanga, and Jarell Serencio from Davao. Promising short filmmakers continue to emerge from the regional film festivals and exhibit their films in national film festivals. These filmmakers include Edmund Telmo from Ozamiz, whose “3021” competed in the 2018 Cinema One Originals, and Shaira Advincula from Koronadal, whose film “Tembong” (Connecting, 2018) won at the Cinemalaya in 2019 after its premiere and win at Salamindanaw.



Sherad Anthony Sanchez directing *Huling Balyan ng Bubi* (2006), which ushered in the era of digital film production. Courtesy of Mark Limbaga.

Narratives of return and reconnection

Films from these Mindanao filmmakers and other lesser-known ones whose work add relevance to the spectrum of Mindanao cinema continue to mirror the realities faced by the island-region. They also continue to rally for a space in the national discourse, telling narratives that push for a better understanding of the region, beyond the sensationalism and selectivity portrayed in mainstream media. Mindanao films also echo a rich sense of place while portraying the restlessness in and of the region. Mindanao films are also narratives of return and reconnection, of the struggles of grappling with new and emerging realities.

The stories, though told in the point of view of fictional characters, reflect the conditions and aspirations of the marginalized sectors of Mindanao, the Moro population and the Lumads—the indigenous peoples of Mindanao—who have long been affected by the increasing development aggression in the region. Characters in the films are caught in Mindanao’s changing environment—from the priestess in Sanchez’s *Huling Balyan* to the women of Mardoquio’s *Paglalakbay*, seeking for refuge in a protracted conflict, to the characters in the films of Gutierrez Mangansakan—from *Limbunan* (The Bridal Quarter, 2010), *The Obscured Histories and Silent Longings of Daguluan’s Children* (2012) and *Daughters of the Three-Tailed Banner* (2016)—who are caught between traditions and the promise of new and better lives.

These films attempt to examine a present-day Mindanao that is caught between status quo and the threshold of change. The transgender Nora in Mangansakan’s *Daughters* who has lived in the city and returns to the countryside observes that “nothing has changed.” In *Huling Balyan*, we see the slow fading of a culture and people as represented by the figure of the priestess and the stasis experienced by both soldiers and communist guerillas. In *Paglalakbay*, we

witness an attempt to escape from the conflict even while roles played by actors embroiled in the conflict are examined. Off-screen, a war is still being waged and the characters face an uncertain future. In *Daughters*, the film happens on the eve of the supposed installation of a new Bangsamoro government, which then remained at a standstill until the 2018 passing of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) that paved the way for the transition commission tasked to install the new Bangsamoro government. Sheron Dayoc’s *Women of the Weeping River* (2016) offers no clear answers as well—to the future of Moro families that is still caught in conflict whether internally by means of the generations-spanning *rido* (clan feud), or the conflict between the armed forces and Moro separatists. But there is also the prospect of change, and to understand these films is to ask: what is the future that lies ahead of Mindanao? We search for an answer like the exasperated rebels in *Paglalakbay*, and we hope for a better future like the displaced widows in the *Weeping River* who have lost so much.

Also constantly displaced in Mindanao are the Lumads, who are at the heart of Fiola’s *Baboy Halas* and Barbarona’s *Tu Pug Imatuy*. Though employing different narrative approaches, both films depict the constant threat to their natural environments. Fiola symbolizes this disruption in the life of the Matigsalog tribe with the appearance of a foreign animal, a white pig (in contrast to the endemic wild boar or *baboy halas*) that shifts the forest’s equilibrium and drives the film’s protagonist—the hunter Mampog—to madness. While in *Tu Pug Imatuy*, Barbarona points to the pressing problems of militarization and development aggression (in the form of large-scale mining) as concrete threats to the Lumads’ natural domains and indigenous ways of living.



First-time actress Laila Ulao leads the cast of local actors in Sheron Dayoc’s *Women of the Weeping River* (2016). Courtesy of Dayoc.

There is a sense of internalized displacement in the documentary films that tackle the Mindanao conflict. In Dayoc's *The Crescent Rising* (2015), we sense a filmmaker trying to re-familiarize himself with the complex issues hounding Mindanao and seeking answers for himself. The film shares a similarity with Adjani Arumpac's quietly powerful examination of the Mindanao conflict in *War is a Tender Thing* (2013), which looks at the topic through a more personal lens—her parents' separation. Her father says in the film that pointing to religious differences is a failure to probe deeper into the conflict. Through their documentaries, Dayoc and Arumpac, instead of settling for simplistic answers, explore a myriad of questions on identity and history that compel Mindanaoans to not disengage from their own narratives. Their personal journeys, in a way, resonate with the introspection of the characters in Mardoquio's *Paglalakbay*, constantly seeking their place and looking for answers, leaving us viewers with the more daunting task of completing the narrative. As Arumpac narrates and warns in *War is a Tender Thing*, "[It] is hard to feel the war one has grown up with. Chaos internalized becomes silent rage. With time, it settles down into melancholia, immovable."

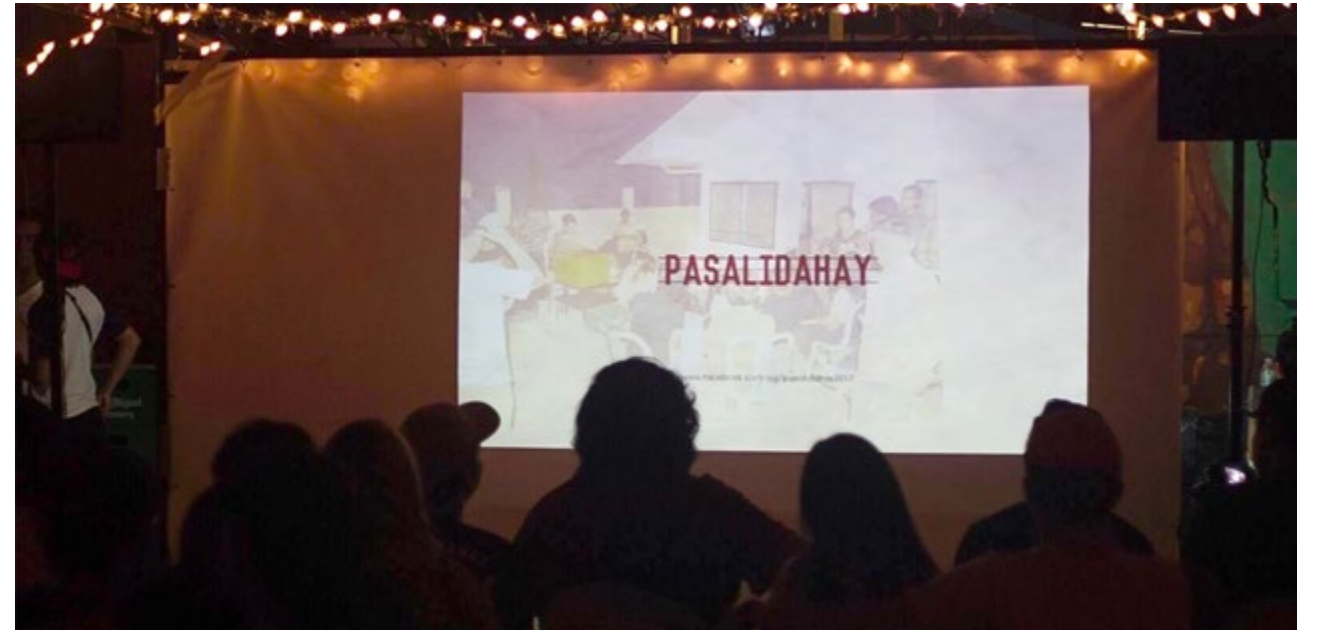
Identity, history, and place are also central questions. Nef Luczon's *Migkahi si Ame Tey, Uli ki Pad* (Father said, Let us Return Home, 2014), an entry into the first Cine Totoo: Philippine Documentary Film Festival, is about a reunion of IP family members who have been separated for years. In the film, Luczon, whose ancestry comes from various places in the country, tackles the dilemma of home and identity.

Similar questions of home and family dynamics are explored in Nawruz Paguidopon's *God BLISS Our Home* (2017), a work which is notable for its "selfie documentary" style about his own story of going back to his hometown in Cagayan de Oro after living and working in Manila. Mostly known as an editor working on films in Manila, Davao-born Charliebebs Gohtia made films about homegrown subjects like the documentary *Kung Giunsa Paghubat ang Binisayang Chopsuey* (How to Make a Visayan Chopsuey, 2014), about the struggle for recognition of a Davao tchoukball sports team, and *Gukod sa Hapak sa Balud* (Chasing Waves, 2015), about a young boy in the hinterlands of Davao dreaming of experiencing the beach, with issues of land-grabbing and insurgency existing in the narrative's fringes. Meanwhile, Jeffrie Po's documentary *The Soil of Dreams* (2015) gives us a glimpse of the new realities that Mindanao faces in the era of climate change following the aftermath of Typhoon Sendong.

There are many more films worthy of examination that reimagine and locate Mindanao in the national landscape. While these examples are mostly full-length features, this appraisal is also overdue for short films, which consist of the bulk of regional film production, to be examined in terms of their thematic resonances and visual articulations of Mindanao.



Adjani Arumpac's *War is a Tender Thing* (2013) tackles the Mindanao conflict through the lens of family and personal history. Courtesy of Arumpac.



Davao film collective Pasalidahay organizes film screenings of independent and regional works in alternative screening venues and schools in Mindanao. Courtesy of Pasalidahay.

Towards an alternative film culture in Mindanao

Mindanao films, like their independently-produced counterparts in Luzon and Visayas, do not have a wide audience, given the highly commercial state of film distribution in the Philippines. Filmmakers from Mindanao who have had the opportunity of producing their films are able to do so mostly because of Manila-based festival grants or other public or private sources. Venues for screening Mindanao films are limited to festival screenings or limited runs in venues like the Cinematheque Davao. Because distribution is limited, very few people even from Mindanao are able to watch these films. Since most of the exhibition of these films are in Manila, only film critics, bloggers, and scholars based in the capital are able to write about and discuss them. Just like the festival films of this and the past decade, Mindanao films remain in relative anonymity and have not become part of the cultural discourse in Mindanao.

In Pasalidahay, a film collective I formed with Fiola and Yam Palma in December 2015, we focus on screening short films as a way of increasing awareness and appreciation of independent and regionally-produced works. The group started with small, intimate screenings in alternative spaces, the Cinematheque, and school tours around Mindanao. The work of Pasalidahay complements what the regional festivals in Mindanao are doing in their respective areas. Ultimately, the group sees Pasalidahay as an alternative model of distribution that hopefully finds sustainability.

More Cinematheques should be built, and these should be put to good use as venues where regional works can flourish. Local programming should be pushed and sustained with various activities that involve the academe and the community. Because ultimately, the growth and

development of regional cinemas like those in Mindanao should not be measured by the number of films produced every year. We should continue to discuss how these regional cinemas and regional filmmaking movements make an impact on Philippine cinema as a whole and in their immediate communities—for them to be truly called "cinemas of home." More innovative and alternative ways to exhibit and distribute films should be explored, nurtured and supported. The community of filmmakers in Nabunturan and some parts of Mindanao has already started doing it. The innovation and revolution we are looking for might already be in our midst—in the open, and open-air, communities where the experience of cinema offers boundless possibilities.

Jay Rosas is a writer and film programmer based in Davao City. He co-founded Pasalidahay, a local film collective which organizes film screenings and workshops. He contributes film reviews to *Mindanao Times* and *New Durian Cinema*. He was part of the Yamagata Film Criticism Workshop in 2015 and the Working Title Program for Asian film curators and programmers in 2017.

ON BUILDING THE MINDANAO FILM ARCHIVE:

An Interview with Dax Cañedo

Patrick F. Campos



The attempts to build and run a national film archive have had a checkered history and its current incarnation continues to function within a precarious organizational structure. The government has yet to legally mandate and underwrite an autonomous, integrated, and fully functional national audiovisual archive. Today, what we have is the Philippine Film Archive, under the auspices of the Film Development Council of the Philippines (FDCP). The archive is in service but currently undermanned and in need of greater funding and better infrastructure. Its collection is yet to be systematized and made easily accessible to the public.

The importance of the film archive for cultural and heritage preservation has not been recognized broadly, as evidenced by the relatively small number of films contained in and accessible via state-run agencies compared to the collection of privately owned archives. Even producers have not had the foresight to preserve their own productions, leaving their movies to oblivion once these no longer yield financial returns.

This bleak situation is underscored by the existence of uncoordinated efforts at archiving. This is exemplified by the likes of the corporate archive of ABS-CBN, whose holdings include a significant fraction of the mainstream Philippine movies that survive; the FPJ Studios that has lovingly kept intact the filmography of Fernando Poe, Jr.; the Facebook page Casa Grande Vintage Filipino Cinema, where director Mike de Leon painstakingly uploads digitized versions of surviving films by LVN Pictures; and the legendary collection of Simon Santos, proprietor of the rental shop Video 48 in West Avenue, Quezon City. These modes of archival preservation and access are made possible by private capital and the enterprising efforts of cinephiles. We have them in place of a functional national archive.

In Davao City, the Mindanao Film Archive (MFA) project was born in 2018. It is a hybrid of sorts, symptomatic of the situation of the national film archive. It was conceptualized by a group of cinephiles and film festival organizers under the Mindanao Film & Television Development Foundation. Its initial funding came from the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), and its access points are housed in FDCP's Cinematheque Centres in Davao and Nabunturan, but it is run by volunteers.

The people behind the project are the same people who began the Mindanao Film Festival (previously dubbed as the Guerrilla Filmmaking Workshop), or the MFF, in 2003, two years ahead of the much vaunted Cinemalaya Independent Film Festival and six years ahead of NCCA's Cinema Rehiyon. The MFF has helped nurture filmmaking in Mindanao by providing a constant venue for exhibition and serving as a point of convergence for the polycentric and continually growing cinema of Mindanao.

The organizers of the MFF are fastidious stewards of the films that the festival has shown in Davao City or programmed for the annual Cinema Rehiyon. Through the years, its collection has grown, and it contains seminal works by now established filmmakers hailing from different parts of Mindanao who started making films in the 2000s. The MFA was conceived in recognition of the urgent need to preserve the collection and make it accessible to audiences and researchers who would help shape and write the history of Mindanao cinema.

In this interview, Dax Cañedo, one of the movers of the MFF, talks about the vision, goals, processes, and current state of the MFA.

Patrick F. Campos is a film scholar, educator, and film programmer. He has also organized roundtables and conferences including Sandaan: Philippine Cinema Centennial Conference, the Pelikula Lektura series, and Interseksiyon: Panitikan, Pelikula, at Wikang Filipino. He is the Director of the University of the Philippines Film Institute.



Photo from the Mindanao Film Archive Facebook page. All images courtesy of Dax Cañedo.

Opposite page:
Dax Cañedo, president of the Mindanao Film and Television Development Foundation.

How did the Mindanao Film Archive project begin?

The idea of a film archive of Mindanao films came about many years before its establishment in late 2018. Oftentimes, we would get requests from filmmakers for a copy of their own film, which we screened in the Mindanao Film Festival, because they have lost their own copies for various reasons. We felt that there was a need to safeguard these films to ensure that they won't forever be lost and so that they can be enjoyed for many more years or generations to come.

Because of the growing number of films in our collection from the Mindanao Film Festival, it was becoming increasingly more difficult to look for particular films that were needed for different occasions such as film festivals, various kinds of film screenings, and research. We felt that the films in our collection needed to be properly catalogued and information about these films stored in a database. We also get a lot of queries from students, researchers, and film enthusiasts as to where they could watch some of the films from Mindanao. It was also apparent that there should be an easier way for interested people to find and watch these films.

On top of these observations, our collection was growing every year and other major film festivals in Mindanao started cropping up with growing collections of their own. It was, therefore, imperative that an archive of Mindanao films be established sooner rather than later.

It took years before we were able to find the necessary funding, but after successfully getting a grant from the NCCA National Committee on Archives, the Mindanao Film Archive was established together with the inauguration of the Archive's first publicly-accessible interactive kiosk located at the Cinematheque Centre Davao on December 23, 2018. Our second kiosk, located at the Cinematheque Centre Nabunturan, was later opened on September 28, 2019, with a third one to be opened some time in 2020 in a library in Cagayan de Oro City. By that time, hopefully, hundreds of films from 2003 to 2017 will be made available.

Whose idea was the MFA?

Although it was my idea for our organization to establish the Mindanao Film Archive, many individuals have also expressed to me the need for an archive. These include Drei Boquiren, Rjay Sta. Teresa, Jay Rosas, Hobart Savior, Bagane Fiola, and many, many more.

Who are the people working on the project?

The Mindanao Film Archive is run by a small team of dedicated people which includes myself, Ivan Tadena, Lucy Sanie, and our curator, Jay Rosas. We also get volunteers from schools as well as organize community archiving activities to do data encoding. We also partner with organizers of film festivals in Mindanao to help in the process.

What are your vision and goals?

The Mindanao Film Archive is envisioned to be a facility that collects, preserves, safeguards, and showcases Mindanao culture and heritage captured in moving images.

We plan on including not just films, but other forms of moving images as well, such as archival footage, news reels or television news segments, and even audio-visual presentations, for as long as they capture the culture and heritage of Mindanao.

In order for people to discover or explore the contents of the archive, it is also our goal to make our database and many of the moving images in the archive accessible via interactive kiosks in as many strategic locations in Mindanao as possible. These kiosks are meant to be a free, publicly accessible resource for educators, historians, researchers, students, filmmakers, tourists, and anyone interested in Mindanao culture.

Another goal of ours is to eventually make the database available on the internet to make it even easier for people to explore what the archive has. If the rightsholders of the moving images so wish it, we can even make videos available for viewing online.

Explain the significance of your logo.

Designed by Drei Boquiren, who also designed the logo of the Mindanao Film & Television Development Foundation, the logo of the MFA consists of a Manobo warrior's shield and a pair of spears.

The shield incorporates a broken-line pattern near the edges that is reminiscent of the sprocket holes found on celluloid film. The circular element in the middle of the shield was also designed in such a way that it would subtly represent a rotating dial on a vault's combination lock. We also like to believe that the three segments of the shield represents the tri-people of Mindanao [the Lumads, Moros, and Christians] and their respective cultures, with the vertical design accent that runs through the middle of the shield looking like the letter "M" for Mindanao.

All together, these design elements symbolize the Archive's goal of preserving and protecting the culture and heritage of Mindanao as captured through moving images.

Do you archive only digital files or also other formats?

At the moment, we can only accept films that are already in digital format as this is the only type that our facility can currently handle. However, we plan on digitizing non-digital films as soon as we have the capacity to do so. With regards to the physical storage of non-digital materials (film reels, tapes, etc.), it is currently not in the capability of the Archive and, thus, there are no immediate plans for us to do this.

Given that archiving has material limitations, how do you decide which films to archive and which ones not to?

The technology we use is scalable and this allows us to grow the capacity of the Archive as more and more moving images are included. However, we understand that the increasingly growing number of materials may outpace the rate at which we can scale our capacity. We are currently just including films that have been screened in the major film festivals of Mindanao

starting in 2003 and will go about it one festival at a time.

We also have a curator that selects notable films and other moving images to include in the Archive even though these have not been screened in any film festival in Mindanao. We also accept direct submissions of works to be considered by the curator for archiving.

What is your process of acquisition?

Our process of acquisition is currently reversed in that we start with a copy of the film that we already have in our possession. We then contact the filmmakers or rightsholders to determine if they want their films to be archived. We then encode information about the films into our database while doing the necessary video transcoding in compliance with our protocols.

For films that we are not already in possession of, we contact the filmmakers or rightsholders and invite them to donate a copy of their work to the MFA.

Describe the current state of the Archive. How many films does it contain? Which filmmakers are represented?

There are currently 56 films in the Archive spanning from 2003 to 2010, all coming from the Mindanao Film Festival. The MFF, however, still has over 400 more films in its collection, and we are slowly adding the rest of them in the archive. The Foundation is currently working with Nabunturan Independent Film Exhibition (NABIFILMEX) to add films from their festival and will work with the other film festival organizers soon after.

How are you dealing with the question of access?

The deposit agreement that the Archive has with the rightsholders of the moving images limits the access and handling of the original materials exclusively to authorized staff and volunteers only. The agreement also allows the rightsholders to expressly specify if and in what manner the public can view their moving images. This can be through our interactive kiosks, film screenings, or online via a website or app.

How are you dealing with the legal questions of copyright, ownership, etc.?

The archive deposit agreement with the rightsholders clearly states that the rightsholders retain full intellectual property rights of the film or moving image. The Archive owns only the specific copy which has been deposited with us, and MFA has the right to handle and use that specific copy in accordance with its policies, protocols, and in pursuit of its mission, for as long as such handling and use do not violate the agreed upon levels of access allowed by the rightsholder or any copyright laws that protect the film or moving image.

How are you dealing with the question of sustainability?

The Mindanao Film Archive currently gets its funding from the NCCA, but the Foundation is currently exploring other sources of funding for the Archive to continue with its mission.

There are no plans to use the films themselves as a means to generate funds, but the deposit agreement with the rightsholders does cover such a possibility, with the potential for them to have a share of the funds raised from the use of their films.

What are the problems you have encountered so far?

We have encountered many problems since we've started in this endeavor. One problem that caused the delay of adding more films into the Archive is the development of our database software. The process has been slow as we identified bugs and tried to find ways to fix or circumvent them. Because of this, we have had to pause our data encoding process many times and have even lost volunteers along the way as they moved on to other projects.

Another problem is contacting the filmmakers or rightsholders of the older films. Even in the age of social media, tracking them down has been very difficult.

If we are able to contact them, we find that one issue is getting filmmakers or rightsholders to see the value of depositing their work in the Archive or at least trusting the Archive. Some worry that their films will be exploited for financial gain without their knowledge or fair share. Others are concerned that their films will be stolen and pirated. Whatever the reason for their hesitation, we completely understand the concerns and are doing everything we can to address those concerns and slowly build that trust.

We foresee many more problems to come, but for now, these are the main ones we have encountered so far.

What would you say are the contributions of your model of practice to Philippine cinema, which has for years faced problems in archiving?

Considering that we are only starting out, it's hard to say which of our efforts can contribute to Philippine cinema. We also do not know enough about the previous archiving efforts in the Philippines and what problems were faced by such efforts. Even though we do try to employ the best practices of other archiving efforts in the Philippines and in other parts of the world, it's possible that we may encounter the same pitfalls.

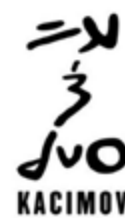
But the thing that we set out to do early on that we believe isn't currently being done by the other archiving efforts in the Philippines, which we hope will be emulated, is opening our archive database to the public and making some of the moving images viewable. So far, we've done this through our interactive kiosks and eventually we intend to make it available on the internet.

We hope that the other archiving efforts in the country can do something similar so that the films in these archives become so much more discoverable and accessible for people to appreciate and celebrate.



DECENTRALIST SENTIMENTS AND STRUCTURAL SUSTAINABILITY: THE CASE OF KAPAMPANGAN FILM PRACTICE

RM Alfonso



Kapampangan Cinema Movement (KACIMOV) founded by Jason Paul Laxamana. All images courtesy of CineKabalen, unless noted.



CineKabalen Film Festival. Image from CineKabalen Facebook page.

Opposite page:
Astro Mayabang (2010)
directed by Jason Paul Laxamana.
Photo from IMDB.

LONG TAKE

Resistance from the regions has shifted discourses regarding Philippine cinema in the past decade. Due to the democratization of film through the emergence of digital film technology, there has been a rise in alternative film practices in the regions in the 21st century. The movement began with the aim of decentralizing culture, breaking apart essentialist and homogenizing nationalisms and returning to the diverse regional roots that make up the heterogeneous Filipino identity. While national cinema began as predominantly Manila-centric and Tagalog-centric, the end goal of regional film movements is to redefine Philippine cinema, from being predominantly nationalist and anti-colonial, resistant to external hegemonic influences such as Hollywood and European cinemas, to being more accurately reflective of the Filipino experience.

One of the regional film practices that emerged in the 21st century is from the province of Pampanga. Kapampangan cinema, although relatively still unpopular in academic discussions of regional film movements, has proven itself to be potent in espousing the decentralization of film culture from the geographical center, Manila, through the promotion and representation of Kapampangan language, culture, traditions, history, and way of life. Its role in building a film culture in the central part of Luzon, through the establishment of the homegrown CineKabalen Kapampangan Film Festival (CKFF) and the Kapampangan Cinema Movement (KACIMOV), has been crucial in recent years.

However, while Kapampangan filmmakers have been assertive and vocal in these objectives, Kapampangan film practice has faced problems in both economic and cultural sustainability. Economic sustainability refers to its capacity to support film practice and the individual actors that make it possible, while cultural sustainability pertains to its ability to maintain its promotion of Kapampangan language, culture, and identity amid the uneven economic structures that maintain the existence of a “dominant core” and “powerless peripheries.”¹ Furthermore, the current conditions of Kapampangan film practice are symptomatic of relevant issues that regional film movements face.

While there are no clear-cut answers to these problems, the goal is to present these issues and to analyze the relationship between Kapampangan decentralist sentiments and the overarching economic structure that affects the materialization and sustainability of Kapampangan film practice. Loosely adapting Steve McIntyre’s model of core/periphery in film cultures, as well as Michael Kho Lim’s cultural economy model, the objectives are as follows: to historicize the decentralist sentiment of regional film movements in relation to nationalism; to provide a brief historical description of the emergence of regional film practices, ultimately narrowing it down to Kapampangan film practice; to analyze the relationship between cultural sentiments from the “regional peripheries” and the economic structures that benefit the “dominant core”; and to raise questions on the sustainability of regional film movements and Kapampangan film practice.²

Decentralist Sentiments and the Roots of Regional Film Movements

Early films produced in the country are debatably regional (although not labelled as such), and only became national as the result of anti-colonial sentiment. According to film historian Nick Deocampo, the emergence of native film practices in the country began with the production of Tagalog films in the 1930s, which “challenged the almost monolithic control that European films had of local movie houses.”³

The national character that became associated with Tagalog films was actually born from the growing anti-colonial sentiments of the elite, who had access to film technology. This began with the production of the first Tagalog sound film *Punyal na Ginto* (1934), followed by the anti-Spanish film *Patria Amore* (1929), and *Si Juan Tamad* (1947) which was based on Philippine folklore.⁴ The intention was to promote nationalist aspirations through the illusion of “oneness,” in order to foster anti-colonial sentiments against Spain.⁵ Later on, these anti-colonial aspirations were extended against American cultural influences, which showed the growing *filipinismo* at that time.⁶



CineKabalen 8 organizers.

As cinema became associated with the nation and national identity, it became a tool for nationalist resistance against the hegemonic Hollywood, through highlighting specificity and difference.⁷

Claiming a particular history of a “national” cinema raises ontological questions regarding the nature of cinema and the nation. The attribution of Tagalog cinema as the national cinema reinforces a problematic Filipino nationalism, which has been criticized for its lack of anchor on any “natural” bond, whether it is a common culture, language, identity, or shared historical past, and its tendency to suppress multiple and diverse ethnic and regional identities in the archipelago for the sake of a homogeneous, national identity.

From an outside perspective, defining a cinema in relation to a particular nation is limiting, especially in the context of other national cinemas, globalization, transnational cinemas, and Hollywood, and because of the fact that cinema is an imported technology from Europe. Meanwhile, a more inward-looking perspective—more crucial to this discussion—sees national cinema in two ways: first, in relation to its function in the historical and cultural formation of identity; and second, in relation to the existing film industry within the nation-state and the economic structures that determine its processes of production, distribution, and exhibition.⁸

The distinction between culture and economy in the latter approach substantiates what is usually perceived as film’s “dual quality.”⁹ Film is a profitable business whose capability to represent and create illusions of reality has become ingrained in the cultural and political practices of nations; likewise, at its fundamental base, it remains grounded in the material economic conditions of the community wherein it is practiced. This dual quality implicates cinema in the creation of the “nation-state,” in which, while “nation” has been more recently conceived as the Weberian “community of sentiment”¹⁰ or the Andersonian “imagined community,”¹¹ the

“state” is much more defined with its distinct geographically bounded territory and sovereign power through established rules.

Filipino nationalism has thus resulted in internal oppositions, with people exchanging nationalist loyalty for regionalist, sometimes separatist, sentiments.¹² In film, the notion of a homogeneous, i.e., Manila-centric and Tagalog-centric, national cinema had become so controversial that it triggered resistance from the regions.

While regional sentiments in cinema have been strong as early as the 1950s during the Golden Age of Cebuano Cinema, sustaining regional film practices has been a challenge. One of the most prominent reasons for this was the lack of access to film equipment during this time. In an article published in *Movement*, Teddy Co expressed the need for better access to film equipment in order to proliferate film practices in the region, which was impossible with celluloid technology. Using bulky celluloid cameras was a physical and financial burden on individual regional filmmakers who would not have been able to recuperate the investment due to the non-existence of a market outside of the popular genre.¹³

Since filmmaking required a huge amount of capital, it was easier for production studios to have an advantage and gain monopoly over the industry and harder for individuals to use the medium for personal and non-profit purposes. Although there were cheaper options such as 8mm, 16mm, the standard for full-length features was 35mm, which cost millions to make.¹⁴ The limited access to technology, the means of production, and the film market allowed the establishment of a “dominant core” in the film industry, while those without access formed the “powerless peripheries” that included independent and regional filmmakers.

This would change with the arrival of digital film technology in 1999, which brought about the democratization of film production and did not only open up a new set of

innovative possibilities but also transformed the foundational structures of the film industry through the “digital revolution.”¹⁵ The subsequent rise in the number of regional films and film festivals across the country suggests that digital technology contributed to the realization of regional sentiments. Co also saw the possibility of utilizing video technology as a cheaper option for the proliferation of film practices in the regions.¹⁶

The first regional filmmaker to utilize digital technology, JP Carpio, who directed the Hiligaynon film *Balay Daku* (2002) and shot it for 11 days in his hometown in Bacolod through a grant from the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), echoes Co’s decentralist sentiments of building filmmaking practices in regions.¹⁷

Metro Manila filmmakers, even those with regional origins, are not adequately exploring the cultures of Filipinos living outside Metro Manila. Thus, Metro Manila perspectives continue to dominate. [...] There is also a lack of exposure for films from the other regions in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao.¹⁸

At present, issues in theatrical distribution and exhibition remain. While film festivals such as Cinemalaya, Cinema One Originals, and CineFilipino, as well as smaller regional festivals, provide distribution avenues for regional filmmakers, concerns regarding sustainability of film practices still arise, especially since regional films commonly do not have the capacity to earn profit like mainstream films. Although part of the resistance is to veer away from profit-oriented standards in order to have creative freedom, regional film practices are finding it challenging to sustain themselves. Grants and sponsorship from private, public, and international institutions also tend to reinforce the core/periphery structure.

Therefore, certain questions remain to be dealt with: Is it possible to reconcile the seemingly conflicting sides of cinema? Can regional film practices be economically feasible and, at the same time, capable of carrying strong decentralist sentiments? To what extent can culture and economy affect one another?

Anti-Tagalog Sentiments and the Emergence of Kapampangan Film Practice

Similar to other regional film movements, Kapampangan film practice sprouted as a result of strong resistance to Manilacentrism and the dominance of Tagalog. Unlike other provinces like Cebu, Pampanga was late in terms of fostering a homegrown film practice. Although there were notable Kapampangan performers in the film industry, such as the iconic Rogelio dela Rosa, it was not until the 2000s that Kapampangan artists began to be involved in making films.

One of the most popular Kapampangan filmmakers that rose to prominence was Brillante Mendoza. His debut feature, *Masahista* (2005), was arguably the first predominantly Kapampangan language film in digital format. Mendoza shot the film in Angeles City, Pampanga and Manila. The film garnered multiple awards from local and international film festivals, including the Golden Leopard from Locarno International Film Festival, and all of the awards from the Young Critics Circle Film Desk.¹⁹ After gaining recognition, Mendoza continued to make films for international film festivals, such as the Cannes Film Festival, from which he got his Best Director Award in 2009.²⁰ His quick rise to fame from 2005 to 2009 led to many critics hailing him as “the auteur Philippine Cinema has been looking for all these years.”²¹ Although Mendoza himself did not have any particular opinions with regard to the decentralization of culture and cinema,²² his bigger-than-life presence was pivotal in building the sentiment among young Kapampangan

filmmakers, who saw the possibility of a film practice that represents Kapampangan pride.

During his pre-industry days, now acclaimed film director Jason Paul Laxamana was an avid proponent of promoting traditional and modern Kapampangan culture through his blog, *The Prodigal Kamaru*, which ran from 2007 to 2009 and featured various topics related to Kapampangan culture and new media²³. While studying as an undergraduate student in the University of the Philippines Diliman, Laxamana immersed himself in film by working as a production assistant for Jeffrey Jeturian and Maryo J. Delos Reyes, as a script supervisor for Delos Reyes’ *A Love Story* (2007), and as a local/talent coordinator and script supervisor for Mendoza’s sixth feature, *Serbis* (2008).²⁴

Laxamana looked up to Mendoza, constantly featuring him in his blog and expressing support for his films. Laxamana²⁵ saw Mendoza’s films as crucial not only in building a Kapampangan film practice in their community, but in promoting Kapampangan identity, culture, and language, which to him was “dying”²⁶ due to “Tagalog imperialism”.²⁷

According to Robby Tantingco, the Kapampangan language has come to be “in such an advanced stage of deterioration” because of the formation of a national language, which “became the medium of media, including TV and cinema” and “wiped out the traditional forms of public entertainment like zarzuela, crissotan and kuriru, which were

the last refuge of classical Kapampangan.”²⁸ Furthermore,

Kapampangan was taken out of schools, which led students to think it is inferior to Tagalog and English, discouraged them from using it in intellectual discussions, prevented it from evolving and expanding its vocabulary.²⁹

The marginalization of Kapampangan intensified regionalist sentiments that resisted conformity to nationalist ideals. Laxamana vehemently expressed his strong anti-Tagalog and decentralist sentiments, recognizing the potential of new media and cinema in the resistance against Tagalog supremacy; thus, his first films were all in pure Kapampangan.

With his group Kalalangan Kamaru, Laxamana produced his first film, *Anak ning Kapri* (2007), and submitted it to the Cinemalaya short film category.³⁰ In the following years, Laxamana and Kalalangan Kamaru produced three more short films: *Sexmoan Adventures* (2008), *Ing Bangkeru* (2008), and *Balangigi* (2009). Laxamana slowly built his network by actively joining film festivals and film events. In 2009, Laxamana was invited as a participant for the first ever Cinema Rehiyon Film Festival, held in the Cultural Center of the Philippines. In his blog,³¹ Laxamana shared his frustration at the lack of Kapampangan participation in the festival. His film *Ing Bangkeru* was only included in a vaguely categorized block “Short Films from Various Parts of Luzon.” Laxamana also saw that Kapampangan films produced in recent years were not recognized. He wrote,

I know why. It’s because these Kapampangan films are not organized, unlike in Davao, Cebu, Bacolod, Iloilo, and other areas. Kapampangan productions sprout here and there, in various competitions, in various places, from Manila to Pampanga. They have all been individual efforts by various filmmakers who represent only themselves or their schools, not their homeland; filmmakers who are not yet well organized into a Kapampangan film community.³²

Because of these realizations, Laxamana organized the first CineKabalen Philippine Film Festival, also called Sinukwan Festival in August 2009. With Laxamana as the festival director, supported by the Holy Angel University Center for Kapampangan Studies and the Circle of Young Angeleños,³³ the festival’s objective was not only to “exhibit existing Kapampangan works but also place in competition fresh Kapampangan works from participants, may they be student, professionals, mere enthusiasts, or ex-patriates”.³⁴ It “seeks to explore, criticize, promote, empower, and/or describe the Kapampangan experience through independent cinema”.³⁵

According to the rules posted on CineKabalen’s Facebook page, the competition requires Kapampangan as its main medium of dialogue, while the filmmakers must be from Pampanga or neighboring provinces such as Tarlac and Nueva Ecija. Residents outside Central Luzon are allowed to enter as long as they are of Kapampangan descent. Only short films that tackle the “Kapampangan experience” are accepted. In the CineKabalen Facebook page, Laxamana wrote in 2012,

[T]o those wondering if CineKabalen will one day cater to Tagalog-language films, I’m sorry, no. There are other film festivals out there which you can join, where the language is not limited mainly to Kapampangan. I believe that there should AT LEAST be one film festival in the world that encourages the use of the Kapampangan language in film.³⁶

Although 2009 was a successful year in establishing CineKabalen in the regional film scene, the festival was not able to have a second run the following year. Still, Laxamana continued to produce short Kapampangan films and was able to join Cinema One Originals Film Festival with his first full length film, *Astro Mayabang* (2010).

It wasn’t until 2012 that the festival was relaunched, reinforced by additional institutional support from the NCCA and the Foundation for Lingap Kapampangan. The 2nd CineKabalen saw an increase in the number of entries, with seventeen short films submitted by fourteen filmmakers, compared to its previous run, which only had seven short film entries. The festival also featured free workshops on cinematography, directing, and acting to foster the skills of especially amateur filmmakers who didn’t have proper training or access to film schools.

2013 saw the most number of entries in CineKabalen, with twenty-eight short films and twenty-five filmmaker participants.³⁷ The festival was also able to screen, for the first time, its films in SM Pampanga, along with Laxamana’s second feature, *Babagwa* (2013), which initially premiered in Cinemalaya Film Festival. 2013 is a crucial year in the development of the Kapampangan film practice. The recent presence of Kapampangans in other festivals such as Cinema Rehiyon,³⁸ which annually featured selected films from CineKabalen’s lineup, as well as award-giving bodies like Gawad Urian,³⁹ combined with the increasing number of entries in the festival from its debut year to 2012 and 2013, led to Laxamana’s conclusion that Pampanga has become a “filmmaking zone.”⁴⁰

CineKabalen witnessed a decrease in the number of its entries in the 4th CineKabalen with only 17 entries but Laxamana said the decrease “[wasn’t] necessarily a bad thing,” noting that collaborations between filmmakers were prioritized over making their own individual entries. He said it was crucial to the increase in quality of film entries. For him, quality is evident in the number of nominations and awards of Kapampangan films, some of which he mentioned: CineKabalen 4’s Best Short Film *Mis Da Ka* (2014) by Carlo Catu was a First Honorable mention for Best Film awardee in the 5th Singkuwento Film Festival, while *Qng Pangacupas Ning Matingcad Cung Cule* (2014) by Jerome Cunanan was a finalist. *Susukdul King Banua* (2014) by Cheska Salangsang also won Jury Prize and Best Editing Award in CineSB. Nonetheless, he also lamented, “an eventual disintegration of the event is looming somewhere on the horizon.”⁴¹

The number of entries for CineKabalen continued to decrease, from sixteen in 2015, to thirteen in 2016, to six in 2017, eventually leading to CineKabalen’s one-year hiatus in 2018. Aside from recurring issues in funding and organizing the festival, the decreasing number of entries was also a huge factor, triggering a “less enthusiastic, if not less certain, outlook about the future of the festival.”⁴²

In 2019, CineKabalen returned for its 8th year led by Carlo Catu as the new festival director, and added two new categories: Central Luzon short film category and Culinary Cinema section. The goal is to increase the number of participants and for the festival to become more inclusive. The 8th CineKabalen received a total of thirty-nine entries—twelve from the Culinary Cinema section, fourteen from the Kapampangan short film category, and thirteen from the Central Luzon category. The festival, initially scheduled to conclude on March 22, 2020, was postponed to a later date due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the struggles in organizing CineKabalen, Laxamana claims Kapampangan film practice in itself has not vanished:

Kapampangan filmmakers [. . .] have decided that the production of Kapampangan films should not stop just because CKFF does. It is for that reason that a number of young Kapampangan filmmakers decided to band together to form not an organization but a movement, called KACIMOV, or Kapampangan Cinema Movement.⁴³

During the peak of CineKabalen, Laxamana formally launched KACIMOV (2013), a collective of Kapampangan filmmakers and CineKabalen participants who vow to promote Kapampangan heritage. Their signed manifesto expresses the initiative of uplifting Kapampangan identity and building a Kapampangan film culture. The rigid rules and guidelines of CineKabalen, which include the strict use of Kapampangan language, the narrative focus on Kapampangan ways of life, and the short format was perhaps limiting to Kapampangan filmmakers. KACIMOV is more flexible with its obligations. For its members, it encourages the creation, or at least participation, in the production of “mainly Kapampangan films [. . .] at least once a year, with or without film festivals, competitions, or requirement by any institution [. . .],”⁴⁴ but not too rigorously to allow room for them to explore opportunities outside the movement.



Carlo Catu’s entry for CineKabalen 2013 won Best Film, Best Direction, and Best Actress.



The 7th CineKabalen Kapampangan Film Festival poster.

After KACIMOV was established, CineKabalen participants and signatories of KACIMOV began to produce their own full-length films. Industry neophytes such as Bor Ocampo, Vargas, and Catu grew from making short films for CineKabalen to entering national film festivals. Ocampo directed *Dayang Asu* (2015) for Cinema One Originals, followed by *Hitboy* (2018) for CineFilipino Film Festival. Vargas debuted with *2 Cool 2 Be 4gotten* (2016), written for the screen by Laxamana, for Cinema One Originals. Meanwhile, Catu released *Ari: My Life with a King* (2015), funded by the Holy Angel University. It was followed by *Kung Paano Hinihintay Ang Dapithapon* (2018), his entry to the Cinemalaya Independent Film Festival; *Ang Mga Anak ng Kamote* (2018), his entry to the ToFarm Film Festival; and *Aria* (2018), the second film funded by Holy Angel University.

Some of these films are not limited to Kapampangan language and their stories are not limited to showing Kapampangan culture. The anti-Tagalog and decentralist resistance of Kapampangan filmmakers, which began with Laxamana, slowly mellowed to upholding a more nuanced Kapampangan identity and film practice.

On the Sustainability of the Kapampangan Film Practice and Sentiment

Despite its struggles, Kapampangan film practice persists; however, so do questions regarding its future. While KACIMOV carries strong Kapampangan sentiments, its design is contingent on the agency of its members. Kapampangan filmmakers may strive to produce films that are faithful to the movement, but institutional concerns still affect and determine its viability.

A lot of regional filmmakers have been dependent on institutional support from both the private and public sectors in the form of grants and sponsorships. However, while grant-giving bodies such as film festivals are crucial in the emergence of regional film practices, this economic model does not guarantee stability for regional filmmaking. For instance, the competition format encourages competitiveness and more established filmmakers with greater reach have greater advantage. Furthermore, it reinforces the particular standards and conventions of each festival in order to determine the winners. When these festivals become obsolete, film practices dependent on them for production, distribution, and exhibition are also adversely affected.

On the other hand, making profitable films means sacrificing regional sentiments of promoting a diverse and plural Filipino culture in exchange for commercial conventions. Laxamana’s ventures in the commercial film industry attest to that. While he was able to enter independent film festivals through his earlier full-length films, the awards he obtained still didn’t provide him with financial stability.⁴⁵ His shift from making Kapampangan- to Tagalog-language films was thus not to let go of Kapampangan sentiments but to conform to the market for the sake of career stability.

Kapampangan film practice has to reach beyond film festival grants and the commercial industry. It is possible, as attested by Catu’s films funded by the Holy Angel University. Academic institutions have the potential to change the game. They encourage creative freedom on the side of filmmakers, and they possess institutional power that makes it possible to economically support film production. Furthermore, academic institutions already have an established audience in their students, which not only secures the market for films but also fosters audience literacy necessary in building new film markets.

Even with that, the future and sustainability of regional film movements remain to be determined in light of economic limitations of regional film practices. Despite the claims that regional film movements have managed to remove itself from the periphery, the economic structure tells otherwise. Kapampangan film practice, as a whole, *remains* in the periphery. While it is impossible to escape the economic burden of making



Kapampangan filmmaker Petersen Vargas attends Locarno Film Festival's Open Doors Hub



An image from *Mitatang* (2018) by the late Kapampangan animator Arvin Gagui

films, it is possible to ease them through more state support. Fostering the national film industry through developing and building a unified and centralized national film policy⁴⁶ has the possibility to stabilize the efforts of regional film practices. On the other hand, this can also lead to the danger of state monopolization of filmmaking practices across the country through state policies and the suppression of dissenting voices. Thus, in building a national film policy, the focus must be on fostering the individual regions in order to give them the chance not only to develop their own voice but also to develop their own economies.

There has always been a great focus in separating economy from culture in film. However, with the recent shifts in academic discussions, new considerations in the relationship of the two have begun to surface. For Lim, instead of “colliding,” culture and economy are actually “connecting.”⁴⁷ While this paper has yet to actually delve into the future possibilities of regional film practices, the aim is to consider economic conditions of filmmaking to establish local film industries in the regions toward a diverse and plural Philippine cinema.

1 Steve McIntyre, "National Film Cultures: Politics and Peripheries," *Screen* 26 (1) (1985), 66–77.
2 McIntyre, "National Film Cultures," 66–77; Michael Kho Lim, *Philippine Cinema and the Cultural Economy of Distribution* (Melbourne: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).
3 Nick Deocampo, *Cine: Spanish Influences on Early Cinema in the Philippines* (Manila: Anvil Publishing Inc., 2007), 318–19.
4 Deocampo, *Cine: Spanish Influences*, 318–19.
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37 This number is based on CineKabalen's Facebook post.
38 Cinema Rehiyon is known for partnering with other regional film festivals in curating the selected films for its yearly line up. In 2012, CineKabalen included five films in Cinema Rehiyon's Luzon block: *5:00 ning Gatpanapun* (2012) by Petersen Vargas *Lakbe* (2012) by Carlo Catu, *Mariposa* (2012) by Arianne Viardo, *Maniglo* (2012) by Patrick Paule, and *Brlye Lakingdanum 1990-2012* (2012) by James Jordan. Laxamana's short film, *Lagyu* (2012), although not a part of CKFF line up, was also included. Vargas and Catu represented Pampanga in the film festival, which was held in Los Baños, Laguna from February 5 to 9. Laxamana, on the other hand, was the Luzon regional representative of the NCCA Cinema Committee, as part of its Executive Council.
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RM Alfonso graduated from the University of the Philippines Film Institute. She wrote her undergraduate thesis on Kapampangan film practice to contribute to the discourse on Philippine cinema and acquaint herself with her Kapampangan roots.

FPJ WAS HERE

From Tablazon's solo exhibit, *And the World Thickens with Texture Instead of History*, 10-channel video and mixed-media installation, curated by Seno, 8–29 November 2018, National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) Gallery, Intramuros, Manila.





These images foreground the nomadic loner and knight-errant tropes evident in FPJ's cinema. They arrest said spaces in their diegetic course and re-present these sections as semantically charged zones and potent states of spectral remanence that can be deployed and exhausted in lieu of event. The hero's body as the locus of identification and subjectivity disappears, paving the way for place to invoke what is absent. As studies in erasure, the images explore the paradoxical role of video piracy as a mode of commemoration and archive.

— *Cristian Tablazon, artist*

Cristian Tablazon lives and works in Los Baños, Laguna where he co-runs Nomina Nuda, a small nonprofit curatorial platform and exhibition space. His works have been shown at GAMeC, Image Forum Festival, Artspeak, Animistic Apparatus, Centro Casa Asia Madrid, CICA Museum, The Wrong Biennale, among others. He is a member of the Young Critics' Circle Film Desk.

Images courtesy of Cristian Tablazon and Shireen Seno, unless noted.



Courtesy of Marlon Hacla



Tablazon mines the filmic medium as a production of fantasy and posits his own take on our hero- crazed world. Taking extracts from pirated copies of FPJ films as his starting point, he manipulates and builds upon the images toward varying degrees of abstraction, offering a haunting alternate universe of possibilities.

—*Shireen Seno, curator*



Shireen Seno is an artist and filmmaker. Her multi-awarded work *Nervous Translation* (2018) was screened at MoMA, Tate Modern, and the Tokyo Photographic Art Museum, among others. She and John Torres run Los Otros, a studio and platform dedicated to the intersections of film and art. She is also part of Tito & Tita, an art and film collective.

PAGSIBOL AT PAG IRAL NG SINENG BAYAN

Kaso ng Pagtatatag ng AsiaVisions
Bilang Politikal na Kolektibong Pampelikula

Rosemarie O. Roque

Mahalaga ang koleksiyon ng mga pelikula ng AsiaVisions Media Foundation noong dekada 1980, kung kailan ito naitatag at nagpalakas bilang isang organisasyong pampelikula na may adbokasiyang politikal. Makikita sa sanaysay ang pinagmulan ng Sineng Bayan—ang kasaysayan ng kolektibong karanasan at kasaysayan ng AsiaVisions bilang politikal na kolektibong pampelikula (KP) na kumakatawan sa nagbabagong kasaysayan ng mamamayan. Ito ay naging batayan ng pagsalungat sa kabalintunaan at panunupil ng diktadurang Marcos at mga kasunod na rehimeng Aquino at rehimeng Ramos.

Ang AsiaVisions, na umiral bilang isang organisasyong di-panggobyerno (non-government organization) simula 1985 hanggang sa pagkalusaw nito sa huling bahagi ng dekada 1990, ang tinukoy ni Rolando Tolentino na “orihinal” na politikal na kolektibong pampelikula na integral na bahagi ng *indie cinema movement* sa bansa at may ugnay sa mga grupong *cause-oriented* o progresibong kilusan ng mamamayan sa bansa.¹

Kaugnay nito, ayon kay Bonifacio Ilagan, may dalawang *pioneer* na video group noong dekada 1980 ang natatag na pangunahing nilayon na “gamitin ang video bilang kasangkapan ng kilusang masa sa noo’y umaarangkadang laban ng taumbayan kontra sa rehimeng Marcos.” Isa ang AsiaVisions, kasama ang Alternative Horizons, sa dalawang grupong tinutukoy.²

Ugat ng Sining na Makamamamayan: Dekada 1970

Tinukoy ni Nicanor Tiongson na mahalagang konteksto ang mga pangyayari bago at matapos ang Sigwa ng Unang Kuwarta (First Quarter Storm) noong 1970 sa pagsulpot at pagyabong ng makabayan at makamasang sining noong dekada 1980, sa pagsisimula at pag-iral ng AsiaVisions at AlterHorizons. Sinasabing nakatanim ang mga organisasyong masa na masiglang itinataguyod ng mga estudyante, manggagawa, at mga propesyonal sa kalunsuran. Nakita ng mga organisasyong masa at indibidwal na mga artista ang pangangailangan na magtayo ng mga grupong kultural, upang mapabilis sa pagmumulat ng mamamayan at pag-organisa ng mga artista sa sining biswal, panitikan, at pagtatanghal.³

Nagsimula sa yugtong ito na bigyang-interpretasyon ang pambansang demokratikong pakikibaka ng mamamayan sa iba’t ibang sining, kung saan malinaw na ang paggawa ng mga likhang-sining ay bahagi ng tungkuling pang-organisasyon at isang pagbabagong-hubog ng sining at buhay. Sa pagpataw ng Batas Militar noong 1972, sinupil ng rehimeng Marcos ang lahat ng kontra dito—mga politiko; mamamahayag sa diyaryo, radyo, at telebisyon; lider at kasapi ng mga organisasyong masa, at mga artistang progresibo.

Tinanggal sa trabaho ng mga pablisar ng *crony newspaper* ang mga editor at kolumnistang lubos na kritikal sa diktadura. Sa mga ginawang pelikula, kung hindi man kumpiskahin tulad ng ginawa sa pelikulang *Sakada* (1976) ni Behn Cervantes ay lubhang isasalang sa sensura upang matiyak na matanggal ang mga imahen ng opresyon. Pinapapatay o ipinakukulong naman ang mga editor o pablisar ng mga palabang pahayagan.⁴

Sa mga kasunod na mga taon, umigting ang kontradiksiyon sa pagitan ng naghahari at kolonyal na kultura, pati ang makamasa at demokratikong kultura ng mga Pilipino. Isang historikal na pangyayari ang pagtatatag ng Free the Artists Movement na pinangunahan ng direktor na si Lino Brocka noong Pebrero 1983 sa isang pagkilos sa Liwasang Bonifacio kasama ang mga artista at manggagawang pampelikula. Kasunod nito ang pagtanto rin ng mga artista sa sining biswal, pampanitikan, at pantanghalan ng parehong kalagayan at adbokasiya kaya’t nabuo ang isang kilusang anti-sensura. Sa paglawak ng kanilang hanay, nabuo ang Concerned Artists of the Philippines (CAP) noong Hulyo 1983.⁵

Matapos ang asasinasyon kay Senador Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino, Jr., dumami ang mga organisasyon ng mamamayan mula sa iba’t ibang sektor at nabuo bilang nagkakaisang hanay laban sa rehimeng Marcos. Lumaganap ang mga demonstrasyon hindi lamang sa Maynila kundi maging sa mga pangunahing lungsod at bayan sa Gitnang Luzon, Visayas, at Mindanao.⁶ Sa panahong ito, lumaganap ang mga pelikulang makatotohanan sa paglalahad ng mga tauhan sa at problema ng lipunang Pilipino. Bilang tugon, itinuon ang sensura ng noo’y Board of Review of Motion Pictures and Television (BRMPT) sa mga pelikulang lantarang politikal na itinuturing nito na “nagpapahina sa paniniwala ng mamamayan sa estado” at “nag-uudyok ng subersiyon o rebelyon laban sa gobyerno.”⁷

AsiaVisions: Paghawan, 1982-1985

Itinatag ang AsiaVisions nina Lito Tiongson, Jose “Jocua” Cuaresma, at Danilo “Danny” Consumido nang huling bahagi ng 1982, na malinaw na gumamit ng dokumentaryo sa kalakhan sa pagsalunga sa organisado at laganap na propaganda ng gobyernong Marcos.⁸ Malaking papel sa pagkakabuo ng AsiaVisions ang pagiging mga kawani ng pamahalaan nilang tatlo, katambal ng kanilang hilig sa potograpiya at/o paggawa ng pelikula at malinaw na paninindigan laban sa diktadurang Marcos.⁹ Nagsama sila bilang kolektibo at ang kani-kanilang ahensiya sa paggawa ng mga produksiyong pampelikula. Ayon kay Cuaresma sa kung ano ang *basis* ng kanilang pagsama-sama: “*Si Marcos!*”¹⁰

Nakita ni L. Tiongson na popular at mas madaling ipalabas ang pelikula, kompara sa teatro na siyang pinanggalingan niya bilang direktor. Ayon kay Mari Luz “Maloy” Quesada-Tiongson, layunin ng panahong iyon na

Opposite page: Video outreach program ng AsiaVisions sa Cabuyao, Laguna noong maagang yugto ng dekada 1990. Lahat ng litrato mula kay Ariel Saturay, maliban sa mababanggit.

gumawa ng mga pelikula para tumulong sa pagpopularisa ng mga isyu at magpalalim ng paliwanag sa mga nangyayari, at magamit ang pelikula bilang “*tool for conscientization and awareness-raising*.” Mahirap humanap ng pondo para sa mga produksiyong panteatro, bukod sa hindi *portable* ang mga ito. May kabuluhan ang mga dulang panteatro sa pagprotesta, at napakamakapangyarihan din ng midyum ng pelikula.¹¹

Sa Tungki ng Ilong ng Kaaway

Si Jose Cuaresma ay empleado ng National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) at humahawak ng kamera (U-matic) ng ahensiya. Samantala si Danilo Consumido ay namumuno ng *media group* ng National Food Authority (NFA) kung saan siya ay may direktang akses sa mga pasilidad at kagamitang awdyo-biswal ng NFA. “Ini-*smuggle*” nila ang mga trabahong para sa AsiaVisions, tulad ng pagbuo ng *slides*. Nagamit nila ang *lighted tables* ng ahensiya at doon na rin nag-imbak ng *slides*. Sa NFA nila ginawa ang *Wings of Deceit* dahil “walang nakatingin” at “walang nakikialam” kaya nakapagtrabaho sila hanggang dis-oras ng gabi. Noong 1983, sa asasinasyon kay Ninoy Aquino, gumagamit pa rin sila ng *stills* dahil wala pa ring sariling gamit ang grupo. Mayroong Betamax camera ang NFA, liban sa U-matic na hinihiram “nang hindi alam ng opisina” at ginagamit nila sa *coverage*. Samantala, mayroong kamerang Super 8mm at 16mm si Lito Tiongson.

Hinalaw ang pangalan ng AsiaVisions mula sa mga letrang “AV” mula sa “*audio-visual*” at malinaw sa pagpili ng “AsiaVisions” ang nakikita nilang dapat tangang perspektiba sa bisyon para sa Asya–midyang Asyano *contra-posed* sa midyang Kanluranin. Para mabuo ang logo ng AsiaVisions, pinadebuho ni Consumido sa *head artist* ng NFA, kay Bobby Mauricio, ang isang *film reel* na nasa korte ng mga letrang *A* at *V*. Ang esensiya ng AsiaVisions, ani Consumido, ay mga pinagtagpo–tagpong progresibong puwersa na nakahanap ng daluyan ng kanilang pagkamalikhain. Paniniwala niya, isang malaking ironiya ito. Malaking bahagi ng mga nauna nilang likha na tumutuligsa sa diktadurang Marcos ay galing mismo sa gobyerno. Aniya, “Ginamit ko ang opisina *without my bosses knowing, because I am the boss*. Kontrolado ko ‘yung *facilities*.”

Dagdag ni Consumido, nagampanan ng AsiaVisions ang layunin nito–ang tumugon sa pangangailangan ng panahon, kung saan bahagi ng pagtatatag ng AsiaVisions ay galing sa gobyerno. Bukod sa malaking papel na ginampanan ni L. Tiongson, napagsama-sama ang kani-kanilang akses sa mga rekurso ng gobyerno at sa inisyal ay nagamit sa pagbubuo ng kakayanan ng AsiaVisions. Naging pundasyon ito kinalaunan upang makapundar ng sariling gamit.¹²

Inanak ng Krisis, Sama–Samang Pagtugon sa Hamon ng Panahon

Sa panayam kay Reuel Molina Aguila, isa sa mga nakatuwang ng AsiaVisions, ito ay nalikha bilang tugon sa pangangailangan na idokumento ang mga noo’y umiiral na

sitwasyong politikal.¹³ Noong panahon ng pagdodokumento ng Lakbayan, isa si Cuaresma sa nadestino sa South Luzon at siya sa North Luzon.

Produkto nito ang *Lakbayan ’84* (1984), isang dokumentasyon ng Lakad ng Bayan para sa Kalayaan. Ito ay isang mahabang martsa-pagkilos ng mga magsasaka, manggagawa, estudyante, propesyonal, taong-simbahan, mga manggagawang pangkultura na naglakbay ng isang linggo, simula ng Marso 1 hanggang Marso 7, 1984, mula Concepcion, Tarlac hanggang San Pablo, Laguna upang ipakita ang matibay na paninindigan laban sa eleksiyon noong Mayo 14, 1984.¹⁴ Nasa konteksto ang pagboykot ng halalan para sa 183 puwesto sa Batasang Pambasa noong 1984 dahil sa laganap na paniniwala ng oposisyon, na dadayain ni Marcos ang resulta ng halalan.¹⁵ Ayon kay Cuaresma, naging bahagi ng dokumentasyon ng Lakbayan sina Jose “Joey” Clemente, Edwin Valenciano, na kanilang makakasama sa paggawa ng *No Time for Crying* kinalaunan, Freddie Espiritu, at Robert Gruta.¹⁶

Idiniin ni Aguila ang unti-unting pagsibol ng AsiaVisions na kolektibong lumilikha ng pelikula, kailangang malinaw ang *milieu* na kinapalooban ng grupo. Sa ilalim ng diktadurang Marcos, wika niya, na “napaka-*fluid ng movements*” ng mga tao dahil sa pagiging “alanganin” ng sitwasyon, maging sa gawaing kultural. Dagdag niya, posible “kunwari ako nag-shoot, hindi ko ma-claim na akin. Kung ma-*claim* ko na akin, yari ako” [magiging biktima ng panunupil]. Aabot ito sa punto na sa pagtagal ng panahon ay “nawala na” at hindi na matutunton sa orihinal na gumawa ang likha. Hindi na pupuwede. Posibilidad ang ganitong kalagayan dahil sa umiiral na represyon noong panahong iyon. Ayon kay Aguila, “isang *major subject* iyan, *authorship*. At ang *authorship* depende sa panahon. *Whether individual* ka, *whether group* ka, *it is the cause*.” Makikita rin ang usapin ng *fluidity* sa pagpangalan ng AsiaVisions at pagtukoy ng kauna-unahan nitong likhang pelikula at ilang pang mga likhang bahagi ng maagang yugto nito.¹⁷

Unang ipinangalan sa kolektibong pampelikulang ito ang CAVS o Creative Audio-Visual Specialists. AsiaVisions ang tinukoy na may likha ng *Arrogance of Power*, na tinuturing na unang likha ng grupo.¹⁸ Ngunit mapapansin sa transkripsiyon ng dokumentaryo,¹⁹ nakatala na likha ito ng CAVS Production,²⁰ kaya’t masasabing ang CAVS at AsiaVisions ay iisa. Kung pagbabatayan ang *IBON Video Catalog 2003*, nakatala ang *Wings of Deceit* bilang produksiyon ng CAVS na likha noong 1982.²¹ Masasabing mas nauna ang nasabing dokumentaryo sa *Arrogance of Power* na nagawa noong 1983. At dahil sa pagtukoy na 1984 nagawa ang *Tbil and Turmoil*, masasabing umiral ang pangalan na CAVS mula 1982 hanggang 1984.

Maipupuwesto ang lahat ng ganitong pagsisikap na itayo ang isang pampelikulang organisasyon tulad ng AsiaVision sa konteksto ng panahong inusbungan nito. Batay sa panayam kay Nicanor Tiongson, mahalaga ang AsiaVisions

para sa panahong ito ng pag-iral ng Batas Militar. Ayon sa kaniya, ang AsiaVisions ang unang gumamit ng pelikula para idokumento ang pakikibaka laban sa diktadura kung saan lahat, maliban sa nasabing grupo, ay masasabing “nanahimik” pa.²²

Matuturing progresibo sa yugtong ito ang isa pang NGO na Communication Foundation Asia (CFA) sa pamumuno ni Father Cornelio Lagerwey dahil sa mga paglalabas/pagporpodyus nito ng mga progresibong akdang video/pelikula noong Batas Militar,²³ ngunit higit na malinaw ang politika ng AsiaVisions. Ganito ang pagtingin ni N. Tiongson dahil malinaw ang direktang ugnay ng AsiaVisions sa kilusang masa.²⁴ Pinagtibay rin ni N. Tiongson ang pahayag ni Aguila tungkol sa kolektibong pag-aakda. Ayon sa kaniya, sa antas ng mga kolektibo pinag-uusapan ang lahat–sa pagpaplano pa lamang marami nang input hanggang sa paggawa ng iskrip tungo sa pag-eedit. Kaya’t “mahirap” diumano “mag-angkin” ng *authorship*. Malinaw na panawagan noon ay “pagiging kolektibo kaysa indibidwalista.”²⁵

Bahagi ang AsiaVisions ng mas malawak na protesta laban sa diktadura. Dudulo ito, ayon naman kay Bonifacio Ilagan, sa malinaw na naging impetus ng pagkakatatag ng AsiaVisions: “maa-*account* ko iyan sa *movement*. *There is a bigger...movement* na kinapalooban ang...*efforts* na ito. At dahil ang layunin ng *filmmaking* ng mga grupong mga ito ay *more than social commentary, as a matter of fact, iyong part and parcel* ng *arousing, organizing, and mobilizing*.”²⁶

Sa pagiging apprentice nakita ni L. Tiongson ang eksploytasyon sa artista dahil kailangang kumita ang pelikula. Ang mga ganitong pangyayari ay bumangga sa mga pinahahalagahan ni L. Tiongson at nagpasya siyang hindi niya gusto ang ganoong mga pelikula. Sinubukang niyang gumawa ng sariling pelikula, na naging *Hubad na Gubat*.

Papel ng Indibidwal at Bisa ng Kolektibo

Si L. Tiongson ay unang naging manunulat at kinalaunan naging direktor ng mga dulang panteatro sa ilalim ng Philippine Educational Theatre Association (PETA) noong dekada 1970. Nagkataon, nakaramdam na si L. Tiongson ng pagnanais na lumipat mula pagdederehe sa teatro patungong paggawa ng pelikula. Sa katunayan, naging *apprentice* ng direktor na si Lino Brocka si L. Tiongson. Ayon kay Quesada-Tiongson, *mentor* na ni L. Tiongson si Brocka sa PETA sa pagsusulat. Nang naging aktibo na rin si Brocka sa pelikula, nadala rin si L. Tiongson sa pelikula. Sa simula, binoluntaryo

niya ang kaniyang sarili bilang *apprentice* dahil gusto niyang matuto sa pagdederehe sa pelikula. Hanggang kinalaunan ay kinuha na si L. Tiongson bilang katuwang na direktor ni Brocka. Isa iyon sa *nodal point* sa tatahaking landas ni L. Tiongson sa paggawa ng pelikula. Sa gunita ni Quesada-Tiongson, taong 1980 o 1981, iniwan ni L. Tiongson ang kaniyang trabaho upang magpokus sa pelikula.²⁷

Sa pagiging *apprentice* nakita ni L. Tiongson ang eksploytasyon sa artista dahil kailangang kumita ang pelikula. Ang mga ganitong pangyayari ay bumangga sa mga pinahahalagahan ni L. Tiongson at nagpasya siyang hindi niya gusto ang ganoong mga pelikula. Sinubukang niyang gumawa ng sariling pelikula, na naging *Hubad na Gubat*. Ayon kay Quesada-Tiongson, isang ironiya ang nangyari. Sa paggawa ni L. Tiongson ng kauna-unahan niyang pelikula bilang direktor, naranasan muli niya ang mga bagay na kinaayawan niya. Matapos gawin ang *Hubad na Gubat*, napagtanto ni L. Tiongson na kahit kilala niya ang prodyuser, na may pag-iisip na progresibo, mag-iisip pa rin ang prodyuser na kumita.²⁸

Sa pagpasok sa pelikulang komersiyal, nakapagpundar ng sariling mga gamit siya paggawa ng pelikula na namaksimisa niya/nila sa paggawa ng mga likhang makikilala bilang gawa ng AsiaVisions. Mula sa mga kinita at ipon niya, nakabili siya ng lahat ng mga kamerang 16mm at 8mm kasama ang de-manong *editing machine*. Nagugunita ni Quesada-Tiongson nang gawin ang *Arrogance of Power* noong 1983 na papatindi ang mga paglabag sa karapatang pantao at nakikita niyang *stimulus* ng pagkakabuo nina L. Tiongson at mga kasamahan ng AsiaVisions. Kabahagi ng paggawa ng *Arrogance of Power*, sa dokumentasyon at pagbibigay ng istatistiks ang Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP). Ayon kay Maloy Tiongson, ginawa ni Lito Tiongson ang lahat para sa dokumentaryo. Sa 8mm ginawa ang pelikula at sa alala niya: “Tinitiyaga niya iyon..., tuwing gabi nakikita ko siya..... Mayroon din akong NGO nung *time* na iyon, so nakikita ko siya talaga na nilalamay niya iyon.... Walang ginamit na *studio in other words. It was really homemade*, kaya nakakatuwa...”²⁹

Sa alaala ni Cuaresma, marami silang nakuhang materyal nang dinokumento nila ang araw ng libing ng pinaslang na Sen. Benigno Aquino, na makikita sa dulo ng *Arrogance of Power*. Panahon ito na nagtetreyning din sila sa Mowelfund kaya marami silang magkakagrupo noon. Ito ang mga panahong marami ang mga nangyayaring kailangang maidokumento, kaya’t kuha lamang sila nang kuha ng materyal.³⁰ Naalala ni Quesada-Tiongson na ginawa ni L. Tiongson sa *basement* ng kanilang bahay ang *Arrogance of Power*.³¹

Bilang bahagi ng UP Repertory Company, nasa pagtitipon si Quesada-Tiongson upang magtanghal sa okasyon ng iskrining ng *Arrogance of Power* noong Disyembre 1983, sa okasyon ng Pandaigdigang Araw ng Karapatang Pantao. Sa kaniyang alaala, hindi bababa sa 300 katao ang naroon. Dahil pelikula, “iba” ang *impact* kompara sa isang

dula. Matindi ang naging epekto ng dokumentasyon sa mga manonood. Bilang naging kabahagi ng produksiyon ng *Arrogance of Power*, “nakapangingilabot” ang pagkakataong iyon para kay Maloy Tiongson, na makita ang imahen na malaking nakaprodyek sa harap ng maraming tao, katambal ng mga panayam at pagtatanghal.³²

Ang okasyong ito, ang naging inspirasyon sa AsiaVisions na tama ang ginagawa nila, lalo sa panahong matindi ang sensura. Dito nagsimulang nasukat ang bisa ng *Arrogance of Power* at iba pang obra ng AsiaVisions. Si Consumido ay miyembro rin ng Galian sa Arte at Tula (GAT). Hilig niya ang *still photography*, kung saan nagsimula ang grupo. Isang salik ang dami ng *subject matter*, na sa panahon na iyon ay “naggigirian na”–Pauwi pa lamang sa bansa si Ninoy Aquino, kaya’t hitik ang sitwasyong politikal noon na “nangangailangan” ng dokumentasyon. Iisang interes nila ang *stills*, na kinalauna’y hahantong sa paggamit ng Super 8.³³

Bago sa pagkakatatag ng AsiaVisions, si Cuaresma ay isang aktibong kasapi ng Kaisahan–isang grupo ng mga artista sa sining biswal at tagapagbandila ng *social realism*.³⁴ Nag-aral ng paggawa ng pelikula si Cuaresma at naging *workshop scholar* ng 1st Manila Short Film Festival (Cinema-as-Art Workshop) na inisponsoran ng University of the Philippines (UP) Film Center at UP President’s Council on the Arts noong 1981 sa pangangasiwa ni Nick Deocampo. Dito nagawa ang *Mahanito* na naging isa sa kalahok sa kauna-unahang Experimental Cinema of the Philippines Annual Short Film Festival noong Nobyembre 1982.35

Isang matingkad na karanasan ni Cuaresma sa kolektibong paggawa ng pelikula ay ang paglikha ng *Sabangan* matapos niyang mag-aral sa Mowelfund sa pamumuno ni Surf Reyes. Sa panayam kay Reyes, sa unang *batch* ng kanilang *workshop* kasama si Cuaresma.³⁶ Kasama rin si Joseph Fortin na naging bahagi ng AsiaVisions kinalaunan. Natapos ang dokumentaryong *Sabangan* at naging *finalist* sa ikalawang ECP Film Festival noong Nobyembre 1983 kung saan nakatanggap ito ng ikalawang gantimpala.³⁷

Kasama ni Cuaresma si Bernadette “Bedette” Libres, noo’y bahagi ng Episcopal Commission on Tribal Filipinos (ECTF)³⁸ ng Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), at kinalauna’y naging haligi ng Kodao Productions, isang politikal na kolektibong pampelikula sa kasalukuyan. Sa kolaborasyong ito, magkakasama sina Libres, Cuaresma, at Espiritu na nagsulta ng iskrip; mananaliksik at tagarekord ng tunog si Gruta, nag-edit si Lito Fischer. Malinaw kina Cuaresma na isang “counter-propaganda” ang *Sabangan*. Isang tampok na bahagi sa dokumentaryong ito ang lumitaw na sementeryo mula sa natuyong dam na nagpapahiwatig ng kung ano ang hatid ng proyekto sa mga mamamayang apektado.³⁹

Sa *Sabangan*, inihapag ang usapin ng “development for whom.” Ipinapanood ito sa lahat ng opisyaleng ng NEDA, kasama na rito si Ramon “Eki” Cardenas. Nakaabot din ang

dokumentaryong ito sa Civil Service Commission (CSC).⁴⁰ Layunin nila ay magkaroon ng alternatibong midya, kaya’t gumamit sila ng Super 8 at Betamax. Malinaw na binabangga ng *Sabangan* ang konsepto ng kaunlaran ng diktadurang Marcos. Sa panayam kay Libres, tinampok sa dokumentaryo ang Kaliwa–Kanan Dam,⁴¹ bahagi ng proyekto ni Gng. Imelda Marcos na layon na pagkunan ng suplay ng tubig para sa Metro Manila. Sabangan ang pangalan ng ilog na pagtatayuan ng dam sa Tanay sa Rizal at lubos na maaapektuhan ang mga Remontado sa nasabing proyekto.

Bahaging pinondohan ng World Bank at Asian Development Bank ang isang proyektong *hydroelectric* na itatayo 25 kilometro mula Maynila hanggang Luzon. Itong nasabing proyektong Kaliwa–Kanan Dam ay makakaapekto sa 29,000 hanggang 50,000 ektaryang lupain na tinitirhan ng mga Dumagat–Remontado, kasama na rin ang mga iba pang naninirahan sa lugar.⁴² Ayon kay Libres, malinaw na anti-Marcos ang dokumentaryo na paraang “hindi head-on” ngunit naipakita nito sa paraang biswal ang mensahe.⁴³

Makabuluhan at matimbang ang karanasan nina L. Tiongson sa paggawa ng dokumentaryong *Signos* noong 1984. Hindi napabilang sa filmograpiya ng AsiaVisions kundi isang nakalista bilang produksiyon noong 1983 ng SineMalaya.⁴⁴ Nasa sama-samang direksiyon ito nina Mike de Leon, Lito Tiongson, Jose Cuaresma, Ricky Lee, Pete Lacaba, Sylvia Mayuga, Ding Achacoso, at Jovita Zarate. Sa panayam kay Nick Deocampo, patunay lamang ang *Signos* na sa panahong ito, may pangalan at paggalang nang inuukol sa AsiaVisions. Para kay Deocampo, kolektibong likha ang *Signos*. “*It is a collective work. In other words, may equal respect* sa bawat isa. Mike de Leon na iyan pero *he needed a team* at wala namang *team* na kolektibo *to make such a daring kind of film* [kundi AsiaVisions].”⁴⁵

Paliwanag naman ni Bonifacio Ilagan, isa sa magiging haligi ng AsiaVisions sa dekada 1990, may panahon sa proseso ng paggawa ng mga artista at mga manggagawang pangkultura ang hindi nagbibigay ng indibidwal na pagkilala (*credits*). Ayon sa kaniya, noong dekada 1970 na wala pang video, buhay na buhay ang kolektibong paggawa sa mga *artistic work*. May malinaw na ugat ito sa diwa ng kolektibismo. Ayon kay Ilagan, ang pagkilala sa organisasyon ay isang mulat na hakbang. Kinalaunan na lamang pumasok ang pagbabanggit sa partikular na manunulat o direktor.⁴⁶

Dokumentaryo ang pangunahing anyo ng likhang-pelikula ng mga kolektibong tulad ng AsiaVisions sa kalakhan ng pag-iral nito, maging AlterHorizons at iba pang mga alternatibong politikal na *filmmaker* noong rehimeng Marcos. Ang laganap na paglabag sa karapatang pantao, na pinalala ng Batas Militar, ay hindi nauulat ng *crony press* at nasuhayan pa ng tila-namuong kawalan ng pakialam at kamulatan ng maraming mamamayan sa mga isyung ito. Nagsilbing ang mga tagapaglikha ng dokumentaryo bilang mga saksi sa kawalan ng katarungan sa lipunan (*documentary realism*).⁴⁷



Mga staff ng AsiaVisions sa pangunguna ni Lito Tiongson (kaliwa sa harap) sa Baguio noong maagang bahagi ng dekada 1990. Nasa litrato sina Marlene Francia (kanan sa harap), Johnny Chua (sa likod ni Tiongson), Gil Magalong (katibi ni Chua), at Norman Mendoza (kaliwa pinakalikod).



Pagpupulong ng AsiaVisions (maagang bahagi ng dekada 1990): Mula sa kaliwa: Ishmael Bernal, Lito Tiongson, Danilo Consumido, Renato Constantino, Jr., Odette Alcantara, Bienvenido Lumbea (dulong kanan, nakatalikod), Jose Lacaba (nakatalikod), at Marlene Francia (nakatalikod).

AsiaVisions: Pormalidad at Higit na Pagtatag, 1985-1991

Si L. Tiongson ang tumayong *executive director* at *board secretary* nang nagparehistro ang grupo sa Securities and Exchange Commission noong 1985. Kasama niya sa nailistang miyembro ng *board of directors* ng AsiaVisions sina Lino Brocka, Jose Lacaba, Romeo Royandoyan, Lutgardo Labad, at Danilo Consumido.⁴⁸ Isa sa naging *staff* si Gil Magalong, na naging *soundman* at kinalaunan ay humawak ng kamera bilang *assistant*.⁴⁹ Susing personalidad din si Marlene Francia, isa sa matagal nang *staff*, para paghalawan ng mga karanasan saklaw ang mga panahon ng higit na pagtatag hanggang sa ng paghina nito. Siya ay naging bahagi ng AsiaVisions noong ika-2 ng Mayo 1988 hanggang ika-31 ng Hulyo 1997.⁵⁰

Sa panayam kay M. Francia, “may mga *defined* roles na ang bawat miyembro ng AsiaVisions *along natural capabilities / existing skillset*.” Sa pagbuo ng produksiyon, kung orihinal na idea ng AsiaVisions ang nabubuo, ang mga pinagmumulan ng inspirasyon karaniwan ay *current events* at mga *feature story* sa diyaryo. May mga samut-saring *raw footage* at iisipin na lamang nila kung paano ang mga ito magiging isang epektibong video–dokumentaryo.⁵¹ Dagdag ni Romulo “Noy” Regalado, nakabatay ang mga proyekto ng AsiaVisions sa mga isyung panlipunan ng panahon na napagkasunduan ng samahan na dapat gawan ng dokumentasyon. Nakikipag-ugnayan din sila sa mga NGO na nagnanais na idokumento ang kanilang mga isyu.⁵²

Noong 1988, naabutan ni M. Francia na masasabing kompleto sa gamit ang AsiaVisions.⁵³ Ayon kay Regalado, noong 1986, nakakuha sila ng malaking funding para sa U-matic (kamera at kagamitan sa editing), na abanteng teknolohiya noon.⁵⁴ Nabanggit ito nina Danny Consumido at Ariel Saturay na nakuha ng AsiaVisions ang *funding* sa Danish Christian Aid.⁵⁵ Sa usapin ng kolektibong pag-iral,

ayon kay M. Francia, dahil binuo ang AsiaVisions ng mga grupo ng mga filmmaker–artista–aktibista sa pangangailangan na idokumento ang umuusbong na popular na kilusang masa na hindi naibabalita ng isang press na kontrolado ni Marcos. Ito ang naging *raison d’etre* ng AsiaVisions. Ayon sa kaniya, “dahil nga demokrasya ang isang pinaninindigan ng AsiaVisions, mas maganda kung *participatory* ang *style* nito sa *filmmaking*.”⁵⁶

Ang pinakamakabuluhang bagay sa pananaw ni M. Francia ay ito: “Dahil bahagi ang AsiaVisions sa malawak na kilusan ng pagbabago, may natural na ugnayan ito sa ibang sektor ng lipunan. Masigla rin ang relasyon ng AsiaVisions sa iba pang mga filmmaker ng kanilang panahon.”⁵⁷ Ayon kay Ariel Saturay, may mga talakayan at pagbabahagian sila ng mga idea, kasama na ang bigayan ng kopya ng mga pelikula sa mga kasapi ng Alternative Horizons, gaya nina Bobby Roldan, Cuaresma, at filmmaker na si Ditsi Carolino. May *mini-library* sa opisina ng AsiaVisions ang pinuno ni L. Tiongson ng mga babasahin tungkol sa pelikula at mass media. Inieengganyo ni Tiongson silang magbasa upang lumawak ang kaalaman sa paggawa ng pelikula. May mga na internal na treyning din.⁵⁸

Ayon kay Saturay, mayroon silang Mobile Cinema–ang *video outreach program* na layunin ay paglunsad ng mga iskrining sa komunidad, na tinawag nilang Sineng Bayan. Isa sa naalala ni Saturay na pinagdausan ng Mobile Cinema ay ang mga komunidad sa Novaliches. Ayon kina Saturay at Francia, nang pumutok ang Pinatubo noon 1991, naglunsad sila ng Mobile Cinema sa komunidad ng mga Aeta sa Zambales. Karaniwang nasa 50-200 katao ang *audience*; nasa 100 katao ang *average*. Nakapaglunsad rin ng mga iskrining sa mga komunidad ng UP Diliman.⁵⁹



Mga kuha mula sa *Mendiola Massacre* (AsiaVisions, 1987). May permiso ng IBON Foundation.

Nagsilbing Mobile Cinema ang isang Toyota Town Ace na *surplus* galing sa Japan. Sa loob ng van, naroon ang dalawang malalaking *hi-fi speaker*. Mayroon ding Dolby at Sansui *amplifier*, mabibigat, malalaki at mga *second-hand* na gamit din, bukod sa isang Sharp *glass projector*. Nailulunan din sa van ang *customized* na *screen*, bukod sa mga kinakailangang mga kable. Sa simula, inaakyat-baba nila ang lahat mula at pabalik sa ikatlong palapag ng *building* ng PSSC sa opisina ng AsiaVisions. Dahil sa kabigatan, kinalaunan nag-*devise* sila ng isang *warehouse* sa Lungsod Quezon. Ayon kay Saturay, nakaapekto ang kabigatan ng mga gamit sa posible nilang abuting mga lugar na mapagdarausan ng pagpapalabas.⁶⁰

Tuwing may iskrining, kailangan nilang magdala ng VHS o Betamax para sa *playback*. Hangga’t maaari, hindi U-matic ang dala dahil mabigat ang mga *playback equipment* nito. Isang taon, tantiya ni Saturay, nakapaglunsad sila ng anim na iskrining gamit ang Mobile Cinema. Mayroon silang mga pagpapalabas na magdadala ng TV at *sound system* kapag hindi kaya ng mas malakihang *set-up*. Ayon kay Saturay, naabutan niya na sinisimulan pa ang pagbili at pag-*assemble* ng Mobile Cinema, noong 1988 hanggang 1989.⁶¹

Hindi lamang mga likha ng AsiaVisions ang ipinapalabas sa Mobile Cinema. Karaniwan din ang mga palabas tungkol sa kababaihan at komunidad. Mayroon silang naipapalabas tungkol sa paggunita sa Pag-aalsang EDSA at tulad ng *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) na isang pelikulang Italian *neorealist*.⁶²

Sa usaping distribusyon at eksibisyon, naipapalaganap ang mga likha ng nasabing grupo sa pamamagitan ng Mobile Cinema, mga internasyonal at lokal na *film festival*, kasama ang pagpapakopya ng kanilang koleksiyon. Karaniwang nakakatanggap sila ng mga kahilingan mula sa mga institusyon gaya ng *church groups* at mga eskuwelahan-akademya. Ayon kay Saturay, iba-iba ang mga humihiling: mayroong nagpapakopya mula sa isang institusyon sa Hawaii; sa UP; mga rehiyon o probinsiya, tulad ng mga library at unibersidad. Dahil dito, hindi nakapagtataka kung mahahanap sa mga library sa ibang bahagi ng bansa ang ilang kopya ng kanilang likha.⁶³

Maasahan ang mga *walk-in* sa kanilang opisina na napapakopya ng mga gawa ng AsiaVisions para sa *finance*

generation. Nagsilbing “bread and butter” ito ng opisina dahil may bayad sa bawat kopya ng VHS o Betamax tape. Nagsimula sa 75 pesos kada kopya. Sa paglipas ng panahon, umabot na ito sa 200-300 pesos. Ito ay depende sa kopya–mas mahal kung galing sa U-matic ang orihinal na kopya at mahal din kung VHS ang kopya kompara sa Betamax. Kung titingnan sa talaan ng likhang pelikula ng yugtong ito, aabot sa halos dalawampu (batay sa inisyal na *filmography* na natipon), makikita ang pagsisikhay ng kolektibong pampelikula na gumampan hindi lamang ng gawaing pandokumentasyon, kundi mag-ambag ng likhang-sining sa pangunahin ng mga pelikulang dokumentaryo at maging mapanlikha sa patuloy na pagtugon.⁶⁴

Malinaw sa mga akda ng AsiaVisions sa yugtong ito ang pagsisikap na matugunan ng kolektibong pampelikula ang mga maiinit na isyung panlipunan at masalamin ang kalagayan ng mga mamamayan. Mula sa mga isyu ng magsasaka (*Harvest of Discontent*, 1985; *Mendiola Massacre* 1987; *Tunay na Repormang Agraryo*, 1988; *Negros: A Social Volcano*, ginawa para sa North-South Films, 1988; *Isang Munting Lupa*, 1989); kalagayan ng mga manggagawa at migranteng Pilipino (*Migrante*, 1987); isyu ng mga bilanggong politikal at paglabag sa karapatang pantao (*Beyond the Walls of Prison*, 1987; *Lean*, 1988; *Bakwet*, ginawa para sa Multi-Monde, 1989; *Fragments*, 1991); usaping pangkapayapaan at katarungang panlipunan (*Peace Caravan*, 1989; *Children of War*, *Children of Hope*, 1989; *International Women’s Tribunal*, 1989); hanggang kalagayan ng mga maralitang tagalungsod (*Kalbaryo ng Maralitang Tagalunsod*, 1991),⁶⁵ makikita ang dedikasyon ng AsiaVisions na maging katuwang ng mamamayan sa pagtindig para sa kanilang interes at karapatan.

Dokumentaryo man ang nananatiling pangunahing anyo, makikita rin ang pagsulong sa ibang anyo tulad ng mga pelikula nitong *Isang Munting Lupa* (1989), isang *short narrative*, at *Fragments* (1991), isang *short visual poetry*, sa pagtatangka at pagsisikap na maging mapanlikha sa proseso ng pagtatala ng karanasan at kasaysayan ng mamamayang Pilipino.



Mga Hamon sa Organisasyon 1991-1998

Sa pananaw nina Reuel Aguila at Ariel Saturay,⁶⁶ isa sa naging dahilan kung bakit maraming bilang ng mga *funding agency* na noo’y aktibo sa pasuporta sa mga organisasyon sa bansa ang nabawas simula ng nawala sa kapangyarihan ang diktadurang Marcos. Usapin din ang paglobo ng bilang ng mga NGO na naghahanap ng mga pondo at grant matapos ang Pag-aalsang EDSA. Humarap ang AsiaVisions sa hamon ng pagiging *self-reliant*, ayon kay Saturay.⁶⁷ Ganito man ang eksternal na kalagayan, may mga internal na salik sa loob bilang organisasyon na mas naging mapagpasya sa pagharap sa mga eksternal na hamon, gaya ng pag-alis ng mga *staff*, at natira ang iskeletal na puwersa. Dagdag ang pangkalahatang kalagayan at pangyayari noong unang bahagi ng dekada 1990 kaugnay ng kilusang masa na may mga epekto, direkta man o hindi, sa naging ugnayan ng kilusan at mga tagapagtangkilik at kaadbokasiya nito.

Ayon kay Ron Magbuhos Papag, isang dahilan ng pag-alis ay ang pagsulpot ng pagkakaiba sa pagsusuri sa lipunan at direksiyong nais tahakin ng AsiaVisions. Nilinaw niya na may positibo pa rin itong epekto. “Nabawasan man sa numero, naging malinaw ang oryentasyon ng AsiaVisions at marubdob ang layuning higit na makapaglingkod sa sambayanang pinagkaitan ng boses sa lipunan ng *mainstream media*—ang mga magsasaka, manggagawa, at iba pang aping sektor sa lipunan.”⁶⁸

Umigting ang hamon sa organisasyon lalo noong kalagitnaan ng dekada 1990. Sa kasamaang-palad, naging usapin rin ang nararanasang problema sa pondo ng organisasyon. Sa panayam kay Rom Dongeto, *executive*

director ng AsiaVisions (1995-1998), sinasabing kakapusan sa pumapasok na pondo ay nagresulta ng kakulangan sa teknikal na kagamitan ng grupo. Nauwi ang usaping ito sa *sustainability* ng organisasyon.⁶⁹ Isang pag-angkop ng organisasyon ay ang pagpalit sa dating “sahod” tungo sa *allowance system*. Paliwana g ni Papag, dumating sa punto na umuunlad na ang teknolohiya at iyong ginagamit ng Asia Visions sa panahong iyon (na U-matic) ay naluluma at unti-unting pine-*phase out*. Ayon sa kaniya: “Ang problema, *during that time* napakamahal pa nung *digital technology, particularly sa filmmaking*. At dahil nga ang AsiaVisions ay hindi naman mayaman na institusyon at ahensya, at pangunahin nga ay serbisyo, nagkaroon ng problema sa *finances* dahil hindi na makapag-*upgrade* ng mga naluluma at nagiging *obsolete* na gamit.”⁷⁰

Bilang isang politikal na kolektibong pampelikula, hindi umiiral ang AsiaVisions para sa tubo at walang komersiyal na interes, sinasabi ni Francia. Paliwanag niya, “May kakayahan talaga si Lito Tiongson na mangalap ng pondo sa pamamagitan ng pagsulat ng *film and project proposals*. Nakakuha ng pondo ang AsiaVisions noon para sa Video Outreach Programme (nakabili ng *film projector*, screen atbp.), *Edukasyon* video, *Migrante*, *Juan Migrante sa Europa* (na hindi na natapos), *Isang Munting Lupa* na nagamit din para sa *operations* ng AsiaVisions. Kapag nawala na ang ganong masigasig at sistematikong pangangalap ng pondo, parang nagiging *hand-to-mouth* ang existence ng isang organisasyon.”⁷¹

Sa isang banda, ito rin ang nakita niyang dahilan kung bakit tumanggap na rin ng *“non-political, quasi-commercial” projects* ang AsiaVisions tulad ng proyekto para sa Bases Conversion Development Authority, UP, at iba pa, “Bagama’t hindi rin naman kalakihan talaga ang mga budget nito,” ayon kay M. Francia.⁷²

Kung tutuusin, ayon kay Rom Dongeto, isang *advantage* ng Asia Visions kahit *allowance system* na ang nangyari, ay may regularidad pa itong natatanggap. Ikalawa, at mas mahalaga, pinapanatili nila ang praktika ng pagiging kolektibo. Sa kanilang malayang partisipasyon sa mga proyekto, tinuturing niyang mas konsultatibo ito at hindi *“production set-up na direktor ang may call labat”* ang umiiral sa kanila.⁷³ Sa usapin ng *sustainability*, nagpatuloy ang AsiaVisions na gampanan ang tungkuling gumawa ng mga pelikulang magsisilbing epektibong kasangkapan ng mamamayan para sa edukasyong masa at lubusang magamit ang anyong awdyo-biswal sa pagsulong ng pakikibaka ng mamamayan laban sa panunupil at pang-aapi.

Makikita sa kanilang mga likha sa yugtong ito ang patuloy na pagsisikap na makatugon bilang kolektibong pampelikula sa mga isyu at usapin ng mamamayan. Ilan sa natugunan ng AsiaVisions ang isyu ng sektor ng edukasyon (*Edukasyon*, 1993), ng sektor ng katutubo (*Tawagin mo Kaming Kabudagan*, 1993; *Lumad: Ipagtanggol ang Lupang Ninuno*, 1994); at ng sektor ng kababaihan (*Images of Filipina in Struggle*, 1995; *Women at Work, Women at Risk*, 1996; *Kababaihan at Globalisasyon/Women and Globalization*, 1997); maging mga usaping pangkalikasan (*A Miner’s Lament*, 1997) at pang-ekonomiya (*Junk APEC!*, 1997).⁷⁴

Ayon kay Papag, humantong kinalaunan ang problemang organisasyonal at pinansiyal sa kanilang pagpapasya na ibigay bilang donasyon ang lahat ng mga gumaganang gamit at *video archives* ng AsiaVisions sa IBON Foundation noong 1998. Ang IBON bilang isa sa mga institusyong nasa *network* ng AsiaVisions at may kaugnayan sa kilusang masa ang “may kakayanan na *i-house* ‘yung *archives*, mayaman na *archives*, at may kakayanan na kahit papano ay *i-maintain* ‘yung mga naluluma na *equipment, particularly* U-matic, Hi8.”⁷⁵

Tangkang Pagsalo ng IBON Foundation at Tuluyang Pagkawala, 1998-1999

Sa panahon na sinalo ng IBON Foundation ang AsiaVisions, *deputy executive director* ng institusyon si Rosario Bella “RosB” Guzman, na nangasiwa sa pag-aayos ng ugnayang IBON at AsiaVisions. Si Amy Padilla, isang *staff* galing sa IBON, ay *executive director* ng AsiaVisions. Kinalaunan si Gilbert Sape para sa IBON ang sumalo ng mga gawain, at si Guzman ang *executive director* ng IBON. Tinawag ang pinamunuan ni Sape na Special Projects na pangunahing responsable sa paglabas ng mga video sa tambalan ng IBON at AsiaVisions. Sumunod na nangasiwa si Rimando “Mandy” Felicia, at tinawag ang dating Special

Projects na Audio Visual Department.⁷⁶

Masasabi na kung titingnan ang puwesto ng IBON Foundation sa ganitong pangyayari, napakahalaga at susi ang papel nito sa pagsisikap na patuloy na pairalin ang esensiya ng uri ng paggawa ng pelikula ng AsiaVisions sa panahong hindi ito nakakayanan ng dating kolektibong nanguna sa ganitong adhikain. Kasama ng pagkilala sa malaking kahalagahang mapanatili ang arkibong awdyo-biswal ng AsiaVisions ay ang mismong kahalagahan ng papel ng IBON kaugnay nito. Ayon kay Guzman, “Nasa *crossroad* o *junction* ang IBON kung saan, sa isang banda, may isang institusyong pabagsak na may mga kasaping propesyonal at maalam sa *video production*, kasama ang mga gamit, mga rekursong sa panahong iyon ay wala pa ang IBON. Sa kabilang banda, may pangkalahatang pagsulong sa pagsulpot ng *digital video production* na kinalaunan ang mismong institusyon (IBON) ay nasa posisyon rin na nakapagpundar ng sariling mga kagamitan, aktuwal na nakagawa ng mga *video production*, at naghain ng mga serbisyo sa iba kaugnay ng *video production* (pagpapahiram ng mga gamit pamproduksiyon, atbp.)”⁷⁷

Ayon kay Amy Padilla, siya ang tumayong *officer-in-charge* at *executive director* ng AsiaVisions noong nasa pangangalaga ito ng IBON Foundation noong 1998. Si Padilla ay isang mananaliksik-manunulat sa IBON bago ang naatang na responsibilidad para sa AsiaVisions.⁷⁸ Maliit lang ang ang kanilang *crew* noon. Para sa kanilang mga proyekto, nagkakaroon sila ng pulong kung saan tinatalakay ang tema at layunin nito. Mula rito, nagtutukoy sila ng tatayong *scriptwriter*, direktor, *camera person*, at *executive producer*. Ang iba pang bahagi ng produksiyon (gaya ng pag-arkila ng *lighting equipment*) ay nilalapit nila sa ibang kakilala sa propesyon na hindi masyadong mataas maningil ngunit maayos ang trabaho. Nagkakaroon sila ng talakayan sa pagbubuo ng iskrip. Ayon kay Papag, bilang isa sa dalawang *staff* ng AsiaVisions na nanatili hanggang sa panahon ng *receivership*, hindi nag-iba ang kalakaran at moda ng kanilang produksiyon sa panahon na nasa pangangalaga ang AsiaVisions ng IBON.⁷⁹

Sa panahong naging bahagi siya sa mga proyektong audio-biswal para sa IBON, hindi naging *full-blown* ang *publicity work* noon sa pangunahin dahil may *target audience* ang mga proyekto na mga paaralan. Limitado sa *non-theatrical releases* ang kanilang likha dahil ang mismong proyekto ay *udience*. Masasabi mang humina, malinaw na nananatili ang oryentasyon ng AsiaVisions hanggang sa mga huling panahon nito na “makapaglingkod sa kampanyang masa sa anyong audio-biswal.” Malinaw ito, ani Padilla, “(m)as pinatitingkad na isang komitment at hindi simpleng trabaho ang pananatili sa grupo at ang paggampan ng gawain sa bawat proyekto. Lahat kami sa grupo ay aktibista. Ang mga adhikain at oryentasyon namin ang gabay sa lahat ng aspekto ng gawain.”⁸⁰ Sa ilang pagkakataon, sinikap ng IBON na buhayin ang AsiaVisions. Makikita sa talaan ng mga likhang pelikula na ikinakabit sa pangalan ng AsiaVisions ngunit sa katunaya’y



Kuha mula sa *Mendiola Massacre*.

likha na ng IBON Videos. Kasama nito ang *Daluyong* (2001), *Kwadradong Daigdig* (2001); *Misedukasyon* (2001); at *Lupa ay Laya* (2002).

Nagsara man ang AsiaVisions, ang mga *staff* nito ay “nagpatuloy sa adhokasiya sa pamamagitan ng pagbabahagi ng kanilang kaalaman at kasanayan upang ang maraming pang ‘Asiavisions’ at kahalintulad nito ay mabuksan.”⁸¹ Naging binhi ang AsiaVisions upang yumabong ang iba pang *multimedia group* tulad ng Kodao Productions at STeXposure (isa sa naging unang *staff* ay mula sa AsiaVisions, si Ariel Saturay; sina Ron Magbuhos-Papag at Jola Diones- Mamangun naman sa Kodao). Sa pagsasara ng kabanata ng AsiaVisions sa unang dekada ng bagong milenyo, nagbubukas ang espasyo sa panahon ng *digital filmmaking* para sa mga politikal na kolektibong pampelikula.

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Nakapagtapos si **Rosemarie O. Roque** ng B.A. Communication Research at M.A. Araling Pilipino sa Unibersidad ng Pilipinas Diliman. Isa siyang katuwang na propesor sa Kagawaran ng Filipinolohiya sa Politeknikong Unibersidad ng Pilipinas, kasalukuyang hepe ng Center for Labor and Industrial Relations, at miyembro ng Society of Filipino Archivists for Film (SOFIA).

POLITICAL VISIBILITIES:

A REVIEW OF SCENES RECLAIMED: CCP 50 X CINEMALAYA 15

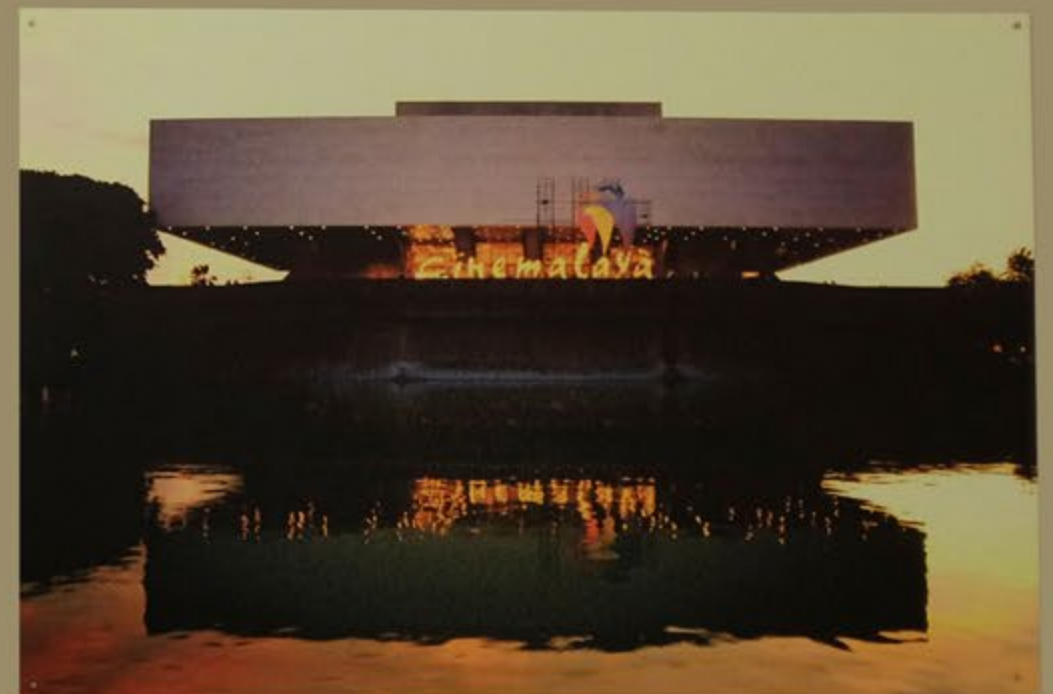
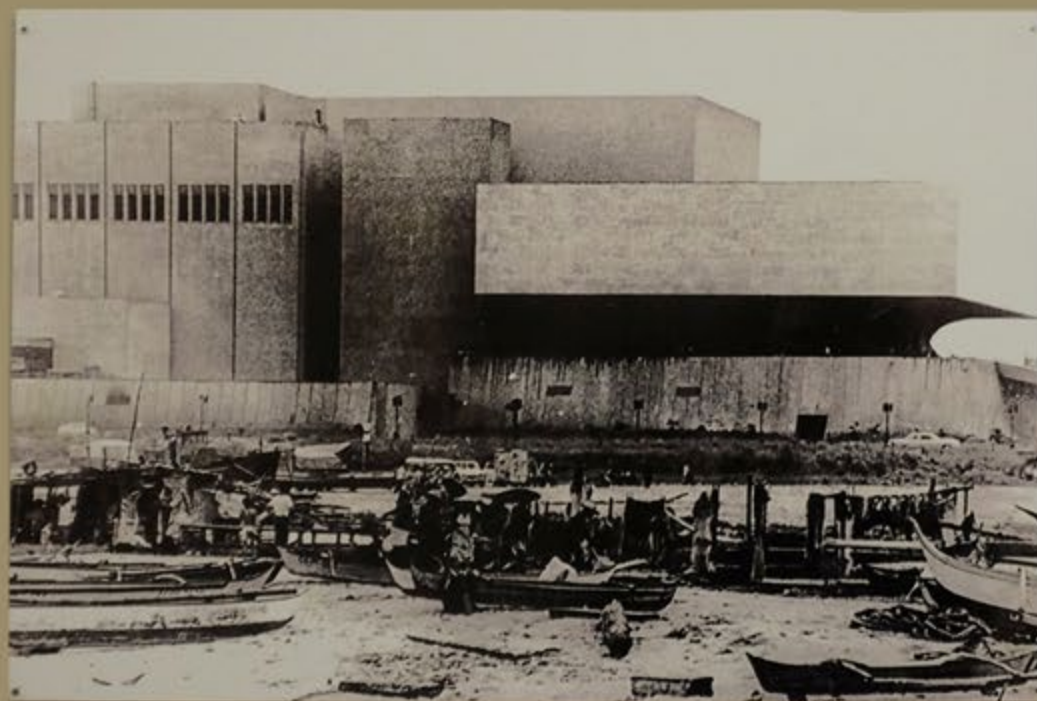
JULY 30 – SEPTEMBER 25, 2019.
BULWAGANG JUAN LUNA (MAIN GALLERY)

Laurence Marvin S. Castillo

The contradictions and tensions that inform notions of artistic independence are at the center of the curatorial vision of *Scenes Reclaimed: CCP 50 x Cinemalaya 15* (2019). Installed in celebration of the fifteenth edition of the Cinemalaya independent film festival, and more than fifty years of the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP), this exhibition is curated by Patrick F. Campos, Karl Castro, Tito Quiling, Jr., and Louise Jashil Sonido, with the CCP Visual Arts and Museum Division and the CCP Film, and New Media and Broadcast Division. At once an institutional biography of CCP, a political genealogy of artistic practices in the Philippines for the past half century, and a retrospective of the indie film movement, the exhibition assembles a multimodal array of audio-visual artifacts—from projections of newsreels and film scenes, screenshots, quotations from various personalities in arts and politics, to memorabilia such as cameras, costumes, and film posters—to trace the dialectics of incorporation and disengagement, complicity and refusal, agency and structure, and dictatorship and democratization that shapes and continues to shape cultural politics in the Philippines.

Scenes Reclaimed examines the history of intimacies between Philippine cinema and Philippine politics across historic fluctuations in the degree of artistic autonomy and political democracy. It takes as its starting point the conjugal dictatorship of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos, and their romance with technologies of visibility such as cinema, and the edifice complex. Artifactual displays of Marcos vanity projects like biopics, paintings, and dance performances alternate with news clippings of Marcosian brutality—from the death of construction workers in Imelda’s “Parthenon of Film” to the mysterious killings of government official Guillermo de Vega—revealing the sinister underside of this cultural megalomania.

But here, the exhibition refuses the seamless narrative of the state-cinema complex that forecloses agency and resistance in the face of dictatorial patronage and state regulation, and teases out the uneasy yet real coexistence of complementarities and tensions between the motives and impulses of state functionaries and artists. In this account of cultural politics under the dictatorship, artistic and political contestations that revolved around the issues of national identity and culture, as well as freedom and human rights, took place within the very edifice of artistic hegemony and cultural control.





The exhibition, for instance, features the filmic outputs done through the Experimental Cinema of the Philippines (ECP), which, through its support of New Cinema auteurs in producing films that also served as thinly-veiled critiques of the dictatorship, exemplifies the possibility of aesthetic and political subversion in the context of a restrictive cultural sphere. Along with these forms of artistic protest performed in and through state auspices, filmic practices that contested the hegemonic visibility of dictatorial politics emerged through independent artists' formations. *Scenes Reclaimed* foreground these forms of dissent across different fronts, and reveals the creative ways by which artists implemented tactics of complicity and circumvention in their participation in the anti-dictatorial resistance, and in their figuring of alternative nationalist politics.

The (dis)continuities between the dictatorial “distribution of the sensible” and post-EDSA cultural politics shape the exercise of artistic autonomy in a nominally democratic order built on, and sustaining, elite rule. After EDSA, CCP embodies the contradictory impulses in the country’s frustrated and protracted quest for genuine democratization; the exhibition shows how the edifice is at once the site of anti-dictatorial film screenings and other politically progressive artistic endeavors, as well as the space of Marcosian rehabilitation as ritualized through, among others, a recent tribute to Imelda. Meanwhile, wider, commercialized access to profit-oriented broadcast media platforms among the population has shaped a political system that is more intimate with, and dependent on, the spectacularizing dynamics of celebritification that the dictatorial regime earlier mobilized. The exhibition thus treats the figures of Kris Aquino, Joseph “Erap” Estrada, Noli de Castro, Fernando Poe Jr., and more recently, Bato dela Rosa as embodiments of show business’s participation in the accumulation of political capital, especially in the context of media-saturated electoral politics.

In tracing how filmmakers and artists participate in the de/re/construction of political imaginaries through visual culture, *Scenes Reclaimed* complicates the question of artistic independence in the contemporary independent film movement, of which Cinemalaya is a significant marker. The exhibition conveys the varied insights of film practitioners, cultural activists, critics and scholars to reveal the multidimensionality of claims to autonomy.



These dimensions—commerce, artistic liberty, ideology, audience reception, among others—underpin, not just the formulation and application of an alternative framework for film practice, but also the relationship between art and politics, creative expression and democracy, complicity and resistance—relationship significantly shaped by the recent half century of dictatorship, democratization and another imminent dictatorship. In this sense, the exhibition regards Cinemalaya—and the indie film movement, in general—as an aesthetico-political formation in which such volatile relationship is made, unmade and remade according to the tempests and temper of the times.

That *Scenes Reclaimed* is installed in the CCP in the context of the looming dictatorial threat under the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte, and the rehabilitation of the Marcoses, renders even more provocative and relevant its critical formulation of the usefulness of cinema—and art in general—to both fascist politics and democratic aspirations. The exhibition displays a visual corpus of violence that includes recent films and television productions that sanitize the bloody drug war, as well as the spectacle of Duterte's State of the Nation Address helmed by mainstream and indie film directors, ushering in the spectres of fascist visibility. Through the examples of dissident artists and filmmakers who worked within and without the state apparatuses of culture and the arts, *Scenes Reclaimed* also instructively points to the ways in which such regimentation of the political imaginary through the arts can be undermined. Even in the very interstices of cultural hegemony, scenes are, and can be, reclaimed to convey emancipatory visions in these dark times.

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A Review of
**Martin Heidegger's
 Being and Time
 and Manuel Silos's
 Biyaya ng Lupa**
 by Edward Delos Santos Cabagnot

Adrian D. Mendizabal



From the book Cover of *Martin Heidegger's Being and Time* and Manuel Silos's *Biyaya ng Lupa* (2018).
 Courtesy of UP Press.

Edward Delos Santos Cabagnot's *Martin Heidegger's Being and Time and Manuel Silos's Biyaya ng Lupa* (2018) might be the first of its kind published in the Philippines.¹ It is a work that deals exclusively with cinema and philosophy, focusing on the basic tenets of Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927) with Manuel Silos's film *Biyaya ng Lupa* (1959) serving as its space of critical analysis.

Cabagnot is not so much interested in looking at the intimate link between philosophy and cinema but is rather keen on showing that such relation between entirely different fields can be situated in everydayness. True to Heideggerian spirit, Cabagnot explicates this intersection from his personal point of view, his everyday experiences. Indeed, there is a conscious effort on the part of Cabagnot to bridge the world of philosophy and cinema with sensitivity, self-aware of the cultural disparity between his philosopher-interlocutor and the world of his film-in-focus. It is not surprising that Cabagnot has gone to lengths to make sure that Heidegger's thought translates to its Asian philosophical and experiential counterparts. That is why, he emphasizes that Heidegger's philosophy can be read vis-à-vis Asian philosophies like Zen Buddhism through a set of multicultural lens.

The book is as a great new addition to the long list of literature on Philippine cinema and can be a useful starting point for Filipino scholars who want to do the same thing—a close reading of a film using the philosophical principles and ideas of a philosopher. With its clarity and accessible textual language, the book can actually work as a reading material for undergraduate and graduate students who want to learn film-philosophy.

Cabagnot's playful approach to making accessible the arcane and difficult philosophical language of Heidegger to its readers is admirable, making the book a good introductory text to those who have not yet read Heidegger, or only acquainted with Heidegger from a distance. Cabagnot refers to vast amounts of extant materials from both the primary and secondary literature not only on Heidegger but also on the whole gamut of Heideggerian scholars like Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, and Michael Zimmerman, among others.

Cabagnot's focus in the book is to trace Dasein's latitudinal traverse between philosophy and film. His explication of Dasein builds on its foundation from Heidegger's original text, *Being and Time*, appropriating it and bearing its image of thought to suit his film philosophical agenda of creating a pluralized image of Dasein. This pluralized image of Dasein is not without consent from Heidegger, which Cabagnot took on prior to assembling his own idea.² At the onset of the book, the author's use of Dasein already functions both in its metafilmic and extrafilmic constitution. It is metafilmic in a sense that it bears a seal of transmutability. It takes the shape of any filmic character or persona in *Biyaya ng Lupa* and in other filmic references that Cabagnot sees suitable.

Cabagnot's Dasein, both in its inauthentic and authentic form, manifests as a pliant generality that also lives beyond the film. When he discusses the ethics of care, temporality, and death, his notion of Dasein bears the extrafilmic image of the general consensus. The Dasein of "They," of Being-with-Others, most emphasized in his discussion of Dasein's authenticity versus inauthenticity, is Cabagnot's correlative image of the vacuous

dominant social strata involving the world beyond the filmic space of *Biyaya ng Lupa*, marking the author's self-awareness of the world-at-large, the everydayness of the world, beyond the walls of film-philosophy.

Cabagnot finds it meaningful to interrogate the interrelationship of the concept of Dasein, Manuel Silos's *Biyaya ng Lupa*, and the world-at-large as contiguous layers. His playful digressions and fluid representational politics make the book enjoyable to read if taken lightly, but Cabagnot's playfulness also hinders him from fully explicating the deep but conflicted interrelationship between philosophy and film in the book.

One thing that Cabagnot does not discuss is the notion of *mediality*, or the dissimilarity between a philosophical medium and a filmic medium. Gilles Deleuze has made it clear in his essay "*What is a Creative Act?*" that a filmic image is entirely in a different constitutional plane than a philosophical image.³ The former, the filmic image, not only carries narrative information, which Cabagnot finds useful in his filmic analyses, but also non-narratological and non-linguistic percepts that are independent of the work of art itself. The latter, the philosophical image, is a non-imaginal universality that functions trans-historically, usually rendered legible in textual form. This instance of taking for granted the nuance of the division between the filmic image and the philosophical image can be attributed to the lack of self-conscious effort on the part of the author in dealing with these conceptual issues prior to writing the project.

Aside from this, Cabagnot also depends predominantly on large chunks of, and often decontextualized, direct quotes and passages from philosophical texts. This writing strategy has endangered his position as an interlocutor between his philosopher, Heidegger, and his film of choice, *Biyaya ng Lupa*. This practice of uncritical film-philosophical writing is a manifestation of the writer's unself-conscious effort to constitute an original reading of both materials. Although he discussed some, if not all of the main tenets of Heideggerian philosophy with playful clarity, he missed the opportunity to write a book that critically engages with the intricacies of both the film and the philosophy. In other words, what Cabagnot has produced is an aggregate of annotations that young readers can read to acquaint themselves with the philosophy of Heidegger and the film of Manuel Silos.

As a whole, Cabagnot's book is a highly recommended secondary literature for beginners in film-philosophy and for those who want to get acquainted with the basic knowledge on Heidegger through film. It is also one of the few exemplary books in the history of Filipino Cinema Studies that focuses on a close analysis of a single film.

Adrian D. Mendizabal has published essays on Philippine cinema and the local media industry in *VCinema*, *Asian Politics & Policy*, *Plaridel*, *Kino Punch*, *NANG 2*, *La Furia Umana*, *New Durian Cinema*, *Transit Journal*, *Sinekultura* and *MUBI Notebook*. He is completing his master's degree in Media Studies (Film) at the UP Film Institute. His main interest is film-philosophy.

¹ Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2018.

² Ibid., 25.

³ In *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews, 1975 - 1995*, trans. D. Lapoujade, A. Hodges, and M. Taormina (New York: Semiotext[e], 2004), 313-314.

still lives

a digital video movie

pelipula

in cooperation with
blue cord

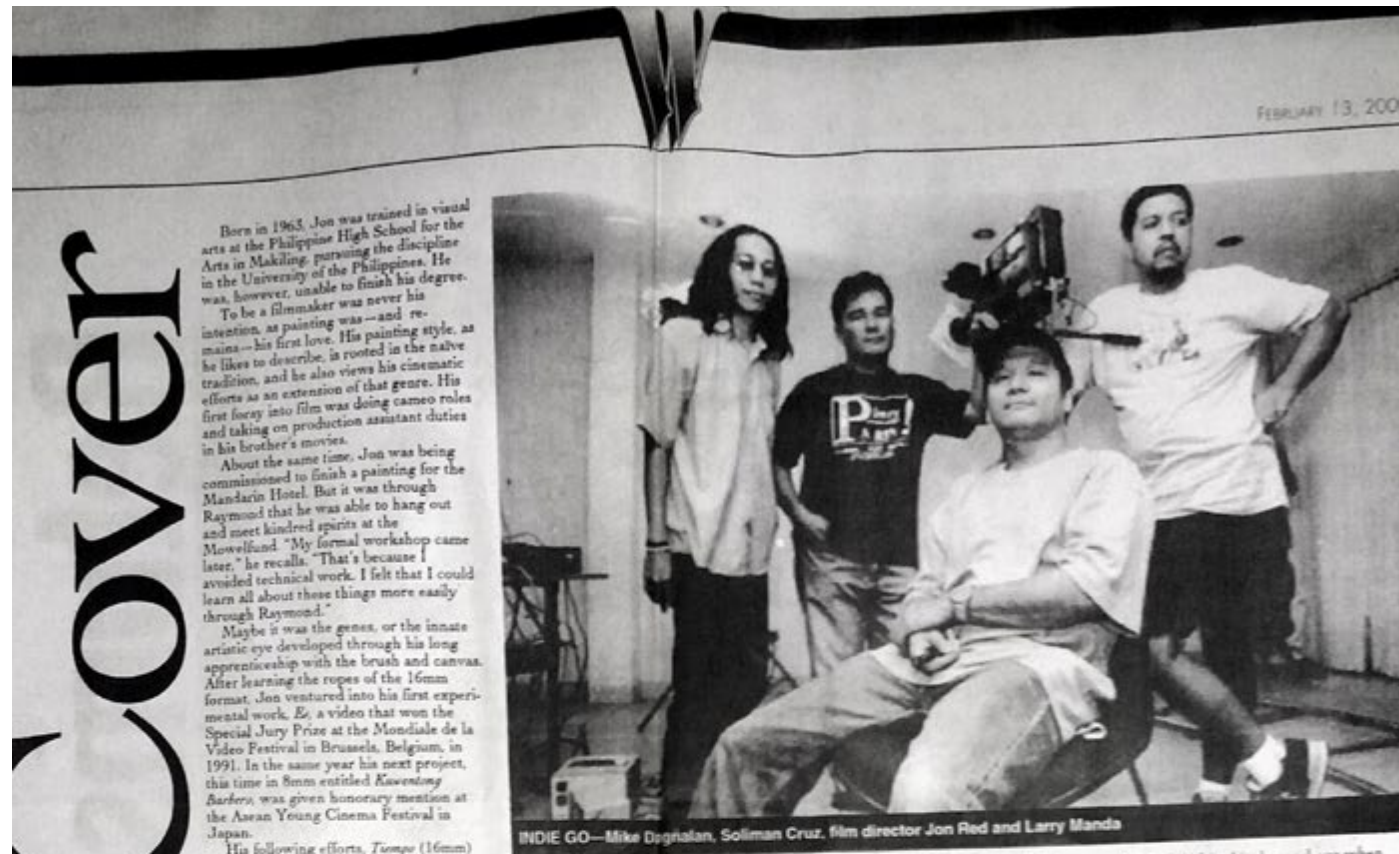
cast

ray ventura
nonie buencamino
joel torre
ynez veneracion
allan paule
caridad sanchez
archie adamos
raymond keannu
mel martinez
richard quan
nathan forrest
jon confiado
andy punsal
jason red
benjie felipe
leon miguel
jun ureta
ian victoriano
soliman cruz

crew

director / writer / producer **jon red**
co-producers **lawrence cordero** and **seleena cordero**
supervising producer **carol bunuan red**
assistant director **bombie plata**
production designer **danny red**

editor **lawrence cordero**
lighting director **ruben lee**
camera **chuck escasa**
sound **nolet clemente**
music **bong rosario**



FEBRUARY 13, 2000

Cover

Born in 1963, Jon was trained in visual arts at the Philippine High School for the Arts in Makiling, pursuing the discipline in the University of the Philippines. He was, however, unable to finish his degree.

To be a filmmaker was never his intention, as painting was—and remains—his first love. His painting style, as he likes to describe, is rooted in the naive tradition, and he also views his cinematic efforts as an extension of that genre. His first foray into film was doing cameo roles and taking on production assistant duties in his brother's movies.

About the same time, Jon was being commissioned to finish a painting for the Mandarin Hotel. But it was through Raymond that he was able to hang out and meet kindred spirits at the Mowelfund. "My formal workshop came later," he recalls. "That's because I avoided technical work. I felt that I could learn all about these things more easily through Raymond."

Maybe it was the genes, or the innate artistic eye developed through his long apprenticeship with the brush and canvas. After learning the ropes of the 16mm format, Jon ventured into his first experimental work, *E*, a video that won the Special Jury Prize at the Mondiale de la Vidéo Festival in Brussels, Belgium, in 1991. In the same year his next project, this time in 8mm entitled *Kawentong Barbera*, was given honorary mention at the Asian Young Cinema Festival in Japan.

His following efforts, *Tumap* (16mm)

INDIE GO—Mike Degtalian, Soliman Cruz, film director Jon Red and Larry Manda

The 20th Anniversary of *Still Lives*

Dir. Jon Red, 1999

The 1990s was no Golden Age of Philippine Cinema, with most films adhering to the same family-friendly formulas concocted to treat the nation's trauma since World War II. Sex and action flicks were still popular, though noticeably in decline since its heyday. By 1999, the decade had seen fewer defining moments than in previous eras.

Recognized by many as the first Filipino digital feature, Jon Red's *Still Lives* was written for celluloid. Red is also a painter, and the film's title is a play on "still life" painting. The painting featured in the movie poster and in the film hanging on the wall was by the director himself. *Still Lives* was first previewed at the Mowelfund Film Institute in early December 1999 inside the house where all the workshops were conducted. A small crowd was in attendance that evening, including filmmakers Lav Diaz, Mike de Leon, and Cesar Hernando.

Budget concerns made it necessary for Red to shift to digital, but the adoption of the new technology inspired him to employ a stationary camera position all throughout the film. Conceived as a crime story, the shift made the characters rather than their crimes the focus of the film, which acted as an investigation of their lives in situ. In that sense, the film—rather than belonging to the decade it first appeared in—can be regarded as a prelude to what many consider a new Golden Age that came in the 2000s.

ERWIN ROMULO

FRANCIS E. MEDINA

JOHN ENRIQUE DE VERA

JOHN ENRIQUE DE VERA

—Erwin Romulo

one part about it is that all the actors looked like they were in a movie. I was just lucky these people were sympathetic to what I was doing. Some of them I met through my mainstream work. Others were just filling friends," says Red.

As expected, the acting was top-notch, with some improvised parts performed to be hit by these respected names in the profession. Red describes it as a mixture of a soap opera, crime thriller, a situation comedy and a documentary—all whipped up into an experimental salad bowl. The nonlinear narrative brings to mind Quentin Tarantino, as well as the irreverence and the spontaneity of the disreputable, and the rare occurrence of gun pointing in pure John Woo (whose style Red admires).

Into the main narrative, the director weaves docu-style interviews with the characters, probing beneath their facade and giving us a brief insight into their personal dilemmas. But the sure-fire audience-pleaser would be the hilarious faux advertisements inserted between plot developments: commercials promoting the use of shabu (as endorsed by stage actor Soliman Cruz).

The interesting aspect of *Still Lives*—which runs for 90 minutes—is that the camera never moves. Come to think of it, it is a kind of artistic statement that defines one of the basic tenets of cinema, that the camera should tell the story. Pretty much

during of Red in this day and age when intelligent cinema is deemed by fancy camerawork and other time-consuming aspects of cinematography. "Dito kami na din, kagay rinah, mung gumagana ang pikula, ang mung kahon ng-i-improve na ang equipment," he explains.

The overall production effort of *Still Lives* is a throwback to the director's earlier "guerrilla filmmaking" days. Another consideration was "Back to basics," he adds. "The point I'm trying to get across is that the camera is not the point. It's still the story."

Red insists that all the people involved, including the production staff, also worked gratis. The project was made entirely out of borrowed equipment. The only thing Red had to pay for was the lighting rig.

His producer is a small outfit called BSC. A postproduction facility armed with high-tech editing tools. The company boasts of having cut music videos of bands like Parokya ni Edgar, Eraserheads, Rivermaya and Tron Faith, as well as award-winning short films and full-length features, commercials and AVTs. But true to the independent spirit, the photography for *Still Lives* was completed in two days.

Red has no grandiose ambitions of marketing *Still Lives* commercially, but "it would be a big bonus if we could blow it up to video."

Yet it'll still kick the butt of any pit-pit effort anytime.

Into the main narrative, the director weaves docu-style interviews. But the sure-fire audience-pleaser would be the hilarious faux advertisements inserted between plot developments: commercials promoting the use of shabu.



'Still Lives' docu tackles shabu problem head-on

BY POCHOLO CONCEPCION

THE heat is on. Burning hot: the issue of drug trafficking and its main men, so-called drug lords whose identities point to the very top echelons of power.

Implications

Heavy are the accusations and their implications that could explode with a bitter truth—that the Philippines, especially its law enforcers, have virtually turned a blind eye on the proliferation of shabu, the most dangerous substance to hit the streets since heroin.

It's the perfect opportunity to take stock of the viewpoint that drug abuse is a problem that won't be solved any other way than through education. And that one great learning tool is watching movies.

Written and directed by Jon Red, "Still Lives" is documentary evidence that artists could provide some of the answers to the ignorance and confusion that the shabu problem has inflicted upon our society.

"Still Lives" is a movie that tackles the subject head-on, with a straight face, unblinking eyes and loads of humor. The story, taken from true-to-life files and inspired by Red's directorial stint in Erwin Tulfo's "Most Wanted" TV crimes series, unfolds like a soap opera, action flick, sitcom and docu-drama all rolled into a serious commentary on how the use and abuse of shabu has permeated day-to-day existence.

Pushers

The plot focuses on Enteng (Nonie Buencamino), an erstwhile tricycle driver who gets into the stuff as member of a gang of mid-level pushers led by Salvador (Ray Ventura). Enteng wants out and plans a clean exit on the pretext of going home to visit his mother in the province.

He gets permission from Salvador, but only after Enteng kills an associate, Pol (Allan Paule), who has fallen from the graces of the syndicate.

Enteng succeeds, but he finds himself unable to leave the house that has turned into a den full of addicts coming in and out to sniff their fix for the day.

These addicts, composed mostly of young people, provide the meat of the story. Each of them has a story to tell, and director Red allows these characters to narrate events by talking straight into the camera.

Melodramatic monologue is avoided through the deft use of humor—and this appears not as a put-on

theme music ("Kagatan" by Juan del Cruz) provides: "Durugin mo hanggang sa ika'y maging bato..."

Although the story's pacing lags near the end, it is only a minor drawback considering the superb acting turned out by a cast comprising some of local filmdom's more recognizable names. The talk is that everybody worked for free, because they believed so much in the project and gave their "unquestionable dedication." This is perhaps one of the rare moments in which you'll appreciate the aforementioned actors, with Joel Torre, Ynez Veneracion, Mel Martinez and most especially Caridad Sanchez portraying off-beat yet natural characters.

Biggest star

But the biggest star that deserves mention is the camera used in the movie: a single digital video cam that does not move but captures the movements of every character. The decision to use only one camera may have been dictated by economic factors, but then again, it apparently serves as a metaphor—as in the characters "trapped" or "stilled" by shabu addiction. It is, incidentally, quite a clever way to contrast the hyperactive behavior of shabu users.

In the end, Jon Red told his audience during a sneak preview of "Still Lives" not too long ago at the UP Film Center, people will appreciate the revolutionary wonders of the DVC—and how independent filmmakers like him may be able to do what they want without the constraints imposed by the the film industry establishment.

Red collaborated with friends to produce this fine, small-budget work in 1999. Lately it has been quietly making the rounds of small-audience venues (like some clubs in Malate).

We suggest that Viva Films or Star Cinema acquire the rights to screen "Still Lives" in commercial theaters—if only to put across its relevance to the day's headlines. Aside from that, of course, the bottom line is that this movie could be as financially rewarding as it is entertaining.



Lights, digital camera, action!



THE OUTSIDER

By Erwin Romulo

and a leading figure in the independent film scene, his attempts to convince a commercial film outfit to finance a project that strayed (even if not too far away) from the formulas already stagnating the industry were met with resistance and were not successful.

When, about a year ago, a producer, who initially expressed interest in a script that he pitched, backed out at the 11th hour, Red — understandably frustrated at the turn of events — decided to make the film anyway. To cut costs, he made two important decisions: first, the camera would remain in one position throughout the entire film and, second, he would use a digital camera. The result was *Still Lives* — the first full-length feature film shot entirely on digital video in the Philippines.

Of the two innovations in Red's film, the use of digital technology seems the more significant one when viewed in the context

of local filmmaking. It signals the start of what has been termed the "digital revolution" — a phenomenon that, while considerably new here, has already matured abroad, both in the West and our Asian counterparts. Cheaper than celluloid, digital film making allows just about anybody to make his own movies.

Compare the numbers: for a 10-minute 35 mm short feature, you will need about at least three rolls costing P5,700 each, P16,000 for equipment (per day), about 60 to 70 thousand pesos for processing and printing (minus opticals and sound), P20,000 for editor's fees (inclusive of use of editing equipment). All these figures are of

Filmmaker Jon Red has long been trying to make a feature film.

Despite being an acclaimed director



Is the future of film filmless? Jon Red's *Still Lives* shows an exciting digital future in filmmaking.

course rough estimates for the cheapest possible cost. For a 10-minute digital feature, all you need is a digital camera (rental fee: P4 to P6 thousand per day), a digital eight recordable cassette (about P150 each and reusable) and any PC (Pentium 3) with roughly 128 MB of RAM and hard-drive space of about 17 gigs plus a broadcast-quality capture card, for a total cost of roughly P100,000. Using any editing software like Adobe Premiere, which you can buy cheap pirated discs, you can virtually create as many movies you like with special effects and in full stereo sound.

Red estimates that if he had made *Still Lives* with film, the rolls alone would cost him about P1 million. If he had made it the traditional way, with the backing of a big commercial studio, a possi-

bility he seriously doubts, the cost of production could easily reach a minimum of P3 million. What all this points to is that the chances of an independent filmmaker to make a feature-length film on film and outside the commercial circuit is very slim.

While essentially trumpeted as an independent filmmaker's tool, digital technology has made inroads into the mainstream. Commercial cinema abroad has actually embraced the development of digital filmmaking.

George Lucas is set to shoot *Episode Two* of the *Star Wars* saga using a digital camera, while current Hollywood practice these days is to edit movies non-linear, using software like Avid. Of course, who can forget last year's

The Blair Witch Project?

"Kodak has already announced that film will be phased out in about 10 years," says Chuck Escasa, who along with two other filmmakers, Ed Lejano and Nonoy Dadvivas, has just finished making a digital feature called *Motel*. This statement is still suspect, according to Escasa, but is a sign of where the industry is heading.

Film purists are of course naturally alarmed. One even remarked: "Can you imagine if *Citizen Kane* or some other masterpiece like *Maynila sa Kuko ng Liwanag* were shot on video?" (Note: It is curious to point out that the cinematographer of *Maynila*... and the director of such Filipino film classics such as *Itim* and *Kisapmata*, Mike de Leon, made the first video feature *Bilanggo sa Dilim* in 1986.)

Red said there are certain materials that suit the look of digital video. "*May binabagayan at pinipili na istorya ang video.*" The voyeurism inherent in the stories of both *Still Lives* and *Motel* suits the surveillance camera feel and urgency of video: the former being a look into an illegal trade, while the latter is a movie told in three parts but all set in the same motel on Valentine's Day. Red goes as far as interjecting segments within the narrative wherein the actors are interviewed in silhouette, a parody of investigative documentaries. In a sense, a film shot on digital video

combines the rush of snuff video and the finesse of traditional filmmaking, cinema with a knowing wink.

Of course, digital cinema will eventually give rise to a whole new set of standards and aesthetics quite divorced from celluloid filmmaking.

In a magazine article for *Wired*, *Neuromancer* author William Gibson writes of what he calls the "garage Kubrick" who will make films in his computer, wherein he will create everything from elaborate sets to the wireframe of his characters' bodies, a truly solipsistic cinema.

In Europe, movements such as the much ballyhooed Dogme 95, though not exclusive to video, have given rise to much-lauded digital video works as Thomas Vinterberg's *The Celebration* and recent Cannes winner Lars Von Trier's earlier effort *The Idiots*, films so idiosyncratic and dependent on digital video's inherent qualities that it would hard to imagine them on any other format. Also, as practitioners in both media would attest, there are really quite a myriad of differences between the two.

So, is the future of film filmless? As has been noted, cinema is the one art form whose progress can be traced to technological development. Whatever happens, the answer will still largely depend on the filmmakers themselves and if the audience is only all too willing to take the ride.



Erwin Romulo is an award-winning writer, editor, music producer, and creative director. Known as the founding editor-in-chief of the Philippine edition of *Esquire*, he also produced the musical scores for films such as *On the Job* (2013), *Honor Thy Father* (2015), and *Buy Bust* (2018), including the sound design of *Hele Sa Hirwagang Hapis* (2016).

BINISAYA: Ebb and Flow

Mariya Lim

Exquisite corpse is a surrealist game among artists where one sheet of paper is divided into equal sections from top to bottom. Each artist takes turns drawing or writing within their assigned space, folding the paper before passing it on, ensuring that their work is unexposed until everyone has contributed. The resulting “cadaver” appears oftentimes strange yet oddly cohesive.

The *Adlaw Adlaw* series is Binisaya Film Festival’s version of exquisite corpse. Here, pre-picked directors collaborate on omnibus films named after a day in a week. The first of these anthologies was *Biyernes Biyernes*, premiered in 2011.

The 48-Hour Shootout is a recurring, albeit less regular, side program of Binisaya. Within two days, small teams are to write, shoot, and edit a short film built around a specific genre or theme. Does it glamorize the inhumane working hours of actual productions? That’s a buzzkill discussion for another day, but cinema served Amazing Race-style is undeniably a crowd hit of a gimmick. Like the 48-Hour Shootout, *Adlaw Adlaw* is a participatory platform that demystifies movie-making. Unlike it, there are no required props or lines, no on-the-dot deadlines and no prizes to win. *Adlaw Adlaw* is a slower burn, deeper dive into the craft. From directors with day jobs to film students to names better known in other media, the series connects disjointed individuals. Here’s hoping there would be some spillover in support for film folk after Cebu’s recent designation as a UNESCO Creative City of Design.

Binisaya has always positioned itself as a place that nurtures distinct voices. Over the years, the films in competition and exhibition have continuously challenged sensibilities in the same city that hosts the Sinulog Short Film Festival. The latter showcases documentary and narrative family fare that align with the larger religious and cultural event held every January. Where Sinulog is the one-dimensional celebration of a sanitized colonial history, Binisaya highlights the gritty and encourages what’s weird. What Binisaya lacks in manpower and funding, it compensates with a unique prestige: it is a festival for and by filmmakers.

2017’s *Martes Martes* was produced by a particularly young batch. It also had a twist, setting it apart from previous and succeeding editions: a pre-production workshop by the beach, tying in nicely with Binisaya’s logo of repeating waves in lieu of laurel leaves. At that multi-day film lab, the directors and their teams developed their concepts with mentors, before shooting around the area. The finished shorts were then strung together as one feature and premiered as part of the opening program. Binisaya is slow to ride along this trend of film camps, despite its touristic Cebu base. Other locales have succeeded in inviting weary capital-based professionals to take working vacations through these incubators.

Who then gets to seize the day? With *Adlaw Adlaw*, you usually do not elect yourself, you are chosen. The selection process is similar to the content. There is a suggestion of some standard in either storyline or style, but the exact coordinates will elude you. Is there a meaning behind the repeating title? Are the films supposed to occur on the same day, in one cinematic universe? Anything goes, so nothing is ever clearly defined or rigorously enforced, perhaps to preserve the Binisaya signature of punk-presenting nonchalance. The couldn’t-care-less irreverence peaked in 2018.

For cinematheque-less Cebuanos, the next best option is still the mall movie theater, which is hard to fill and expensive to secure. To counter this, Binisaya has developed a habit of repurposing public spaces as alternative screening venues. In school auditoriums, art galleries, food parks, backyards, and basketball courts—even as a caravan fashioned after agit-trains that tour remote barangays—all it takes is a laptop and a projector. However compromised the viewing setup may be, these makeshift accessible substitutes aren’t total downgrades. Taken out of sterile, perfectly controlled boxes, the movie night is transformed, turned into an interdisciplinary thing of purer storytelling.

It brings to mind the terms “inato” and “kinowboy” which can typically be heard in social gatherings that involve food. They’re announced before guests to help manage expectations or downplay preparations with unobtrusive humility. It’s a tropical, less romantic take on the Danish concept of *hygge*, with an emphasis on roughing it and making do with what’s available. So just how committed is Binisaya to this ethos? A one-time yacht club press launch would suggest it is

not opposed to going off-brand every now and then. The 2019 installment of *Adlaw Adlaw* is an Arri Alexa-shot triptych on the drug war beyond urban centers. The polished *Hurwebes Hurwebes* is a stark step up compared to every Day Day that came before it, just as the directors Don Frasco, Kris Villarino, and Januar Yap aren’t neophytes the way their predecessors were.

Now that Binisaya is a decade old, it’s wise to reflect on its tendencies and inconsistencies for the benefit of the following: those who wish to pattern themselves after their model, and the ones with more single-minded programming who want to learn how to do it differently. While Binisaya’s recent run was rather political, it has been a purveyor of other things, like so-called Bisaya humor and experimental-leaning, gratuitously glitchy films. Its scope covers the parts of Visayas and Mindanao that speak the same language, but it would be disingenuous to deny the Cebu-centric favoritism. There should be space, room, a seat at the table for underrepresented provinces. After all, Binisaya is one of the festivals that field regional films into the national Cinema Rehiyon. A counterculture that stands up against the mainstream is still capable of gatekeeping, especially when there are even smaller players excluded.

To clarify, there is no civil war or coup behind the scenes, no public furor over the movement. This analysis of a perceived identity crisis could be nothing more than growing pains. When there’s an annual moving-up, moving-on ceremony from one festival director to another, the vision-mission cannot realistically stay intact. Moving forward, can we expect Binisaya with a genre focus? Binisaya in social realist drama advocacy mode? Binisaya, but exclusively video art and virtual reality?

As a seasonal volunteer and all-around errand girl, I’m not privy to the planning, assuming that’s happening already. I do know though that while the in-house culture here is more last-minute than long-term, the show somehow does go on. The disarray—initially unintended—is repackaged as a planned accident, an orchestrated mess. Fans from afar and followers up close need not worry. The shapeshifters shall return.

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A virgin makes a deal with the devil in Neil Nanta’s “Pisting Yawa” for *Miyerkules Miyerkules* (2018).

Opposite page: Quirky content and coloration: A still from Christyl Abellaneda’s “Draft_gikapoy nakooooo,” a short film from *Martes Martes* (2017). Photos courtesy of Mariya Lim.

Aria:

Reliving the Kapampangan Resistance Movement

Justine Dizon

It was 2 o'clock in the morning when I got a chat message from a friend who worked in the film industry. He asked me if I could play the role of an anti-Japanese guerrilla in a full-length feature being produced by Holy Angel University.

Guerrilla. The word, its spirit and essence, instantly put a grin on my face. If I cannot be one in real life, it would be an immense honor to be one on screen and to portray the life my paternal grandfather had. I asked my friend what the film was about and promised I would give him my reply soonest.

The film is called *Aria*, a reference to the long, accompanied song written for a solo voice in an opera or oratorio. It has two timelines. One tells the story of a prewar zarzuela star Pining (Liya Sarmiento) who falls in love with David (Jay Garcia), a labor union organizer with communist ideologies. The two find themselves fighting for workers' rights and joining the underground armed movement against the powerful Kapampangan elites and the Japanese invaders.

The second timeline is the present. *Aria* depicts the present struggles of former Hukbalahap guerillas who fought against the Japanese forces during the Second World War. During its Pampanga premiere in January 2019, *Aria* writer and Kapampangan historian Robby Tantingco spoke of the stories of war veterans, whose pensions from the government come in late or don't arrive at all.

Aria, being a period film, tells a truthful account of history: the plight of the Kapampangan working class against the greedy and oppressive bureaucrat-capitalists who eventually turned to become Japanese collaborators. But *Aria's* strength as a film doesn't only rest in its historical accuracy but also its relevance up to the present. I got to chat with my good friend and *Aria's* award-winning director Carlo Enciso Catu in a quaint bar under the Abacan bridge in Angeles City during a film showing-cum-donation drive for Taal survivors organized by Kapampangan filmmakers. Between short films and bottles of beer, Direk Carlo and I enthusiastically discussed how *Aria* can be a tool to reflect on our current political situation.

Decades have passed yet, despite the absence of Japanese occupation, the Filipino working class continues to struggle for liberation—this time under a different oppressor. In Pampanga and the rest of Central Luzon, the Philippine National Police, in partnership with the Philippine Economic Zone Authority, has started to put up stations inside various economic zones under the Joint Industrial Peace and

Concern Office. Authorities say this aims to monitor and, eventually, prohibit the formation of labor unions as they are said to be recruitment grounds of the CPP-NPA-NDF. The Commission on Human Rights already warned against this policy, reminding the government that it is everyone's right to join or form a union as guaranteed by the constitution.

Bureaucrat-capitalism continues to be a problem in Philippine society, along with imperialism and feudalism. Present collaborators, mostly those from the government, may not be working with Japanese soldiers anymore but with different aggressors and ruling powers disguised as “foreign investors.” While foreign military forces are not anymore present I our territory, the influence of imperialist countries continue to impact our economy. Meanwhile, peasants and workers remain at the mercy of landlords and capitalists as depicted in the film.

In this present situation, *Aria* is indeed a reminder of how the proletarian movement once struggled and continues to struggle not only for the interest of the labor sector but for the rest of the Filipino people. It also speaks about why it is justifiable to take up arms against the autocrats to achieve liberation and, on the individual level, self-actualization.

For Direk Carlo Catu, *Aria* represents a historic moment in Kapampangan history which tells why we continue to contend with conditions caused by the worker-capitalist relationship. It also gives us a glimpse on how we can remove our chains and move forward to the realization of our democratic aspirations as a sovereign nation.

It was seven o'clock in the evening, and I was seated in a corner chair inside a jam-packed theatre in Clark, Pampanga. Socialites, students, members of the academe, cultural workers, and fellow journalists all gathered to witness *Aria's* first ever homecoming.

The guerrilla scene, which I had glimpsed in part through the script, flashed on the big screen. I wasn't there. I wasn't able to say yes to the role offered to me due to the daily grind in our news organization.

But despite my absence from that sequence, I was able to see myself in the whole film—a Kapampangan, a worker, someone thirsty for freedom, and someone who will make sure to get it. That's more than an honor for me.

Opposite page:
Kumander Liwayway (Cindy Lapid), known for wearing red lipstick during battles, is a high-ranking official of the Hukbalap.
Photos courtesy of Carlo Enciso Catu.

Huk guerrillas led by Kumander Liwayway enjoy a night of music by the bonfire.

Justine Dizon is a Kapampangan community journalist who used to write for the Philippine Daily Inquirer and CNN Philippines before rejoining local TV station CLTV36 in Central Luzon. He has done several short films and now focuses on his journalistic practice, pursuing a master's degree in Journalism at the Ateneo de Manila University.

The Personal in Cinema

IN "INTERLUDE: ARE YOU HAVING FUN?"

Heinrich Domingo



It is said that the film-viewing experience is personal and subjective. Viewers relate to the characters and settings portrayed on the screen. But this personal nature of film is often felt only by a limited population or group. Growing up in a rural town in Isabela with neither film production houses nor movie theaters, I often had difficulty relating to what I saw on the big screen. “*Interlude: Are You Having Fun?*,” a short film by Mervine Aquino, is the first film that made me see myself in cinema. Its discussion of rural life through the use of familiar characters validated my personal views and experiences.

“*Interlude*” is a 12-minute narrative film that tells the story of a family reunion in a rural setting. It is set in Nueva Ecija where the residential areas are interspersed with agricultural lands. It follows a big family celebrating a birthday party. While the film follows the viewpoint of a child protagonist, it provides a sketch of various characters found in a Filipino family. By doing so, it presents to the audience a study on filial dynamics, relationships, and the idiosyncrasies of Filipino life in the barrio.

The film’s setting plays an important role in telling the narrative. The human experience presented in “*Interlude*” is tied to its setting in that the film’s elements would be starkly different when set in an urban locale. For one, the way of life of the people including their food and rituals are different from those belonging to different areas or social class. Nueva Ecija’s population, many of whom are farmers, have different concerns from, say, fisherfolks in Mindoro.

Contemporary mainstream Filipino films often focus on the middle-class experience of mestizo-looking characters. The lives of these characters revolve around the busy nature of the city, where they seek to solve grand problems and crises. “*Interlude*” counters these typical cinematic narratives as it tells an unassuming tale of a family gathering. There is no crisis to solve. Instead, life is captured as is. The film’s conflict is as simple as how a power outage stopped the party—goers from using a karaoke machine.

In the first few scenes, the audience can see the awkward “acting” of the cast, most of whom are non-actors. As the performers try hard not to look into the camera, they appear as stiff figures unable to convey emotions. Given this, the viewers may find it hard to suspend their disbelief. But this is the intention of the film. Hand-held shooting, zoom-ins, and mixing actors with non-actors form the home movie aesthetic of the film. The audience realizes that they are not watching a drama unfolding, but they are seeing an actual family revelry and are taking part in it.

While the use of home movies is not new to Philippine cinema, recent digital films like “*Interlude*” are

testaments to how local films can capture the lives of everyday Filipinos. What is real and present can be filmed as is. There is no need for extensive production design and lighting.

As the story progresses, characters become more comfortable on the screen. The line distinguishing them as mere cinematic personas begins to blur. “*Interlude*” does this by including non-scripted scenes. At one point in the film, the protagonist even gestures to the presence of the camera as he instructs others around him to not “look into the camera.” This kind of scene builds an emotional connection between the audience and the film. The audience is not watching an actor, but it is witnessing a real event.

The film also puts onscreen activities that may seem trivial. Ordinary activities that may be deemed unworthy of the costly process of film production are the highlight of “*Interlude*.” It allows people to look at cinema differently—not as a form of spectacle but as a record of everyday life. The formalities and borders of cinema are diminished.

For those who have lived a rural life like me, this form of family gathering is nostalgic. I can relate to the children characters playing by the rice fields. I am familiar with the reverence for the freshwater eels caught in fishponds because seafood is scarce in my region. Meanwhile, for those who grew up in a different setting, the film remains relatable as it showcases familiar scenarios. College students being asked when to graduate, young adults discovering alcohol, and the elderly exchanging gossip are examples of what happens during family reunions. Anyone who has observed or is part of a Filipino family can connect to the filial tale told by the movie.

It is high time for Filipinos who live in rural areas to see their stories told onscreen. In the film, the family gathers in a house beside a rice field—a site recognizable to those who live or have lived in the province. The activities revolve around an agricultural backdrop—a reality shared by more than half of the Philippine population. These minute details mean so much for an audience that has been exposed to films set in the concrete jungles of the metro. “*Interlude*’s” depictions validate such an audience’s experience, making the viewers feel that their view of Filipino life is as legitimate as the view of the middle-class mestizos that rule their media.

As filmmakers from local communities and marginalized groups get access to film equipment and technologies, we get to see more nuanced and complex narratives. As filmmaking becomes inexpensive, we get to see more local stories told in films. Narratives that have been set aside in the past get to be framed and eventually preserved by cinema.

Opposite page:
Screengrab from *Interlude: Are You Having Fun?* (Mervine Aquino, Kumukulong Sabaw, 2016). Courtesy of Heinrich Domingo.

Heinrich Domingo is currently taking his MA in Media Studies (Film) at the University of the Philippines Film Institute. He also reviews films on *Cinetactic*. He hails from Quezon, Isabela.

sucking in the 2010s

Dodo Dayao



Heneral Luna (Jerrold Tarog, 2015). Poster design by Mike Sicam, courtesy of TBA Studios. Courtesy of TBA Studios.

That Thing Called Tadhana (Antoinette Jadaone, 2014). Poster design by Karl Castro, courtesy of Cinema One Originals and CPI.

Yield (Toshihiko Uriu and Victor Delotavo Tagaro, 2018). Poster design by Tagaro, image by Emil Mercado, courtesy of T.I.U. Films.

Background photo: Interior of Cinema Centenario, a micro-cinema in Diliman, Quezon City. Courtesy of Hector Barretto Calma.

Consensus has it that the last decade in domestic cinema was marked by three movements that were not necessarily movements in the strict sense and not equal in any sort of across-the-board aesthetic pedigree but were more ubiquitous than the outliers and cross-pollinating renegades and glorious oddments and regional upstarts: maindie, rom-coms (which has an abhorrent coinage that I refuse to use), and documentaries. I don't disagree, but zeitgeists are finicky things and trying to draw a circle around what the tenor of a national cinema was over the course of ten years tends to lose a lot of nuance.

Like how consensus leaves out micro-cinemas, funnily enough, since their proliferation may arguably be the single most crucial development in domestic cinema and this cinema's distribution in the last ten years, for how it brings the films to the audiences they deserve, which the mall cinemas couldn't care less about facilitating, and gives films

the longevity they deserve, too. In a decade whose distribution paradigms were constantly unsettled by exhibition politics and dysfunctional marketing, having a chain of potential first-run venues that come with adherents and regulars seemed to have gone over everybody's heads. Does the math not add up? Are they just not sexy enough? Old school thinking? I don't know. But yeah, maindie, rom-coms, and documentaries.

Maindie is a conflation of two terms that are in the end meaningless, because what is mainstream exactly and what is indie really, except varying degrees of budget and creative leeway, but yeah, maindies can be boiled down to: edgy(ish) narratives told (more often than not) conservatively. Rom-coms need no explaining and have always been a cash cow but somehow it mutated into a license to print money, the local industry equivalent of American superhero tentpoles, in the sense that there's almost nothing else being made out there but also in the sense that they're the only sort of local film that can go head-to-head with superheroes.

Documentaries need no explaining either, but of the three, their resurgence is perhaps the most culturally and artistically vital, because in the last decade and maybe even farther back than that, documentaries have become more and more a part of the global cultural conversation, and in a country such as ours, documentaries are this almost necessary language, a mode of inquiry into supposed larger truths on one hand, and on the other, an art form that I argue is the closest we have gone to a propellant for evolving narrative.

I became a filmmaker in the last decade, a slightly narcissistic angle from which to approach this piece, sure, but in the decade before that, I was also a film critic, though I prefer the term film writer, and for the most part literally, a film blogger who wanted to be a filmmaker but couldn't quite figure out how. Meaning, I was specifically attuned to this anything goes sense of punk slash DIY abandon that seemed to run like a current through everything, because of the emancipation it implied, and that's a word that everybody who was talking or writing about that heady time when it was happening was fond of using—emancipation from having to shoot on film, from gatekeepers, from traditions. I'd always been prone to over-romanticizing matters, but it's difficult to refute that it was a diverse and protean and mercurial time. At some point, the only pigeonhole our cinema could fit in was that our cinema was not easy to fit in a pigeonhole, reflecting in many ways our mongrel psyche, that tendency to be many things at many times. For better or for worse, the decade that came after that may have brought our cinema closer to being an easy pigeonhole. I don't know how to feel about that, honestly.

The go-to folklore when a film critic crosses over to become a filmmaker has always been how the Cahiers critics became the ramparts of the French New Wave in the Sixties, but that has no function as an aspirational standard for being so lofty and removed. Besides, none of them continued to write, far as I know. Movie stars and musicians and even novelists fared better when they crossed over and did both, gone bilingual, if you will; film critics, not so much. Perhaps it has to do with the assumption that a film critic's judgment is bound to be impaired after going through what a filmmaker goes through when making a film. Perhaps it's to do with the wrong-headed notion that filmmakers and film critics are rival sports teams. I did stop actively being a critic after I made my first film, but only because I didn't have that much time left on my hands to do both.

But having made a career out of making films, I have developed a layer of empathy for films that were not really there before, as objects of industry, as products of collaborations, as visions with different priorities, and with this empathy came a deepening resolve to engage every film in the conversation it deserves, something beyond if I liked it or didn't, which is immaterial, and certainly beyond how many stars I rank it out of this many stars.

In the last decade, domestic cinema went from something that was restless and adventurous and form-pushing into something that is for the most part conservative and compartmentalized and commodified and perhaps even complacent, as energies poured seemingly into finding different ways to color inside the lines, boxing ourselves rather than picking up where the decade before left off. I did find it anticlimactic and disappointing, if not heartbreaking. But I also revere at least 75 films from the last decade, mostly the outliers and cross-pollinating renegades and glorious oddments and regional upstarts, a lot of documentaries and some maindies and rom-coms. While I still think an envelope is there for pushing and a cultural status quo is a tiny death, ten years is a long time to not like a lot of films, and sometimes you get complacent, too.

But something rather wonderful happened in the last few months of the last year of the last decade, when QCinema curated a short film program, made up of six films by seven (one was co-directed by two) relatively young and new filmmakers with fresh, distinct voices, oblivious of each other to a certain degree, but coming off like a collective riposte in the way they seemed to push the form, going out on narrative limbs, coloring *outside* the lines, picking up where the decade before left off. The irony of finding myself in the grip of an oddly profound nostalgic reflex for the decade before the last, while watching something as forward-looking, isn't lost on me. But it was an inspiring coda that could very well be (please let it be) a wishfully thinking prologue. Oh, and by the way, I saw the program in a micro-cinema. Place was packed.

Dodo Dayao writes films, writes about films, writes about other things, directs the films he writes and sometimes paints. His first feature, *Violator*, was released in 2014 and the short film, *If You Leave*, in 2016. He is currently in post-production with his second feature, developing his third, and finishing a book of essays. He lives in Quezon City and is always working on something.

What I Did During the Reelvolution

Edward Delos Santos Cabagnot



From the MMFF 2016 campaign poster to keep the films in the theaters.
Photos courtesy of Edward Cabagnot.

"The devil's in the details."

One of the more indelible film highlights of the 2010s was sparked by a scandal.

This scandal unleashed a tsunami of public outrage calling for the reevaluation of a high-profile annual film event and its much beleaguered governing body. It also ignited a vibrant, though short-lived, revolution—a #reelvolution that brought into sharp relief the relationship between an independent cinema bursting at its seams and the inertial forces of the profit-at-any-price mainstream.

We're talking, of course, about the *Honor Thy Father* scandal of 2015 that gave rise to the 42nd Metro Manila Film Festival (MMFF) of 2016 (a.k.a. The Year of Change) and its mother agency, the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA). Erik Matti's *Honor Thy Father*, a gritty thriller about a family who gets into trouble because of bad debts, was summarily disqualified just hours before the MMFF 2015 jurors sat for deliberation. The grounds for disqualification was in itself "sketchy"—nondisclosure for being the opening film of Cinema One Originals Film Festival—despite the producers claiming letters were submitted days prior the event. More interesting was the fact that it's only disqualified from competing in the Best Film category. Matti's oeuvre eventually bagged eight awards, including Best Director.

With the controversy having reached tabloid levels of publicity, "concerned" politicians were quick to jump into the fray and hastily called for a series of hearings. As a result of the *circus maxima*, the MMDA was categorically instructed to either "shape up or ship out"—the direst consequence being the possible dismantling of the industry's annual cash cow, the MMFF. This led to the resignation of most of its ExCom (Executive Committee) members, save for a couple of seats in order to maintain some level of continuity.

Perhaps at this point it's best to review what then made up the membership of the MMFF Executive Committee. Film sectors tend to be heterogeneous, with subsectors having varying goals, strategies, and missions. Thus, any long-running festival with a national scope strives for a balanced representation of its sectors. As in previous editions, the incoming 2016 ExCom included representatives from the government, including both Houses of the legislature, the Movie and Television Review and Classification Board (MTRCB), the Bureau of Broadcast Services (BBS), the Philippine National Police-National Capital Region Police Office (PNP NCRPO), and the Film Development Council of the Philippines (FDCP); from the private sector (made up mostly of key individuals representing facets of the industry, further subdivided into the creatives and the business people), including film producers, distributors, theatre owners/managers, film artists and craftsmen, and representatives of the burgeoning independent film sector; and from the academe. I've always referred to the synergy and balance

between the three as the driving force behind Cinemalaya's early successes.

The new ExCom sat down on March 29, 2016 at the MMDA Boardroom and was presided over by agency head, Atty. Murph Carlos. Still reeling from the 2015 debacle and the hearings that it engendered, the MMDA made it clear that any effort to revitalize the scandal-ridden festival should start from a clean slate—a tabula rasa.

The initial getting-to-know-you was supposed to last for only a couple of hours. It dragged on for eight.

The best thing that came out of this initial meeting was, because the newly installed members followed different polestars, the decision to do a re-Vision/Mission Workshop of the MMFF, with the hope of redefining its goals while taking into consideration its motley history as well as the needs of times, to find common ground from whence a new, revitalized version can arise.

To cut a long story short, the workshop results were groundbreaking. Despite their diverse backgrounds, the committee began by identifying two premises that would define the flow of the next two days:

1. "There are no enemies here." It was agreed that all present were after the same thing: the revitalization of the Metro Manila Film Festival; and, by extension, the further development of Philippine Cinema as a whole.
2. "A thing can be two things at the same time." During the very first session, it was agreed that artistic quality did not preclude commercial viability. In the words of Ms. Boots Anson-Rodrigo, "An excellent film does not automatically mean box-office poison. And vice-versa." This was a significant jumping point for subsequent discussions, particularly when it came to the two or three "usual suspects." It was decided that, first and foremost, the MMFF reboot shall be inclusive, blind to distinctions such as "indie" or mainstream, regional or not.

In practical terms, the most significant reformulations—to be reflected in its rules, regulations, mechanics, events, and timetable—were as follows:

1. Reinstating artistic excellence and not commercial viability as the primary criteria in the selection of entries for exhibition and competition. This came after revisiting the festival's history and its *raison d'être*.
2. Reverting to finished film submissions and not scripts. This was resolved for three reasons:
 - a. "It's prone to abuse," claimed distributor/producer Wilson Tieng, citing a particular case when the resultant film bore little resemblance to the selected script it was based on.
 - b. The MMFF is not a grant-giving festival like Cinemalaya, Cinema One Originals,

and QCinema, which monitor, in varying degrees, the production process of their grantees.

- c. Finally, at least as far as this writer knows, most other festivals require finished film submissions and not screenplays or works-in-progress.

The tweaked rules and regulations were released publicly at the beginning of June 2016. Entry to the 42nd edition of the MMFF would rely on the following: Story, Audience Appeal, and Overall Impact (40%); Cinematic Attributes and Technical Excellence (40%); Global Appeal (10%); and Filipino Sensibility (10%).

But by the October 31, 2016 deadline for “Letters of Intent” to join, the festival received a record number of submissions. These came from both big players and relative unknowns nationwide. The ExCom was still in its extended honeymoon stage, buoyed by the buzz of excitement that flooded social media regarding these submissions. This 20 September 2016 Facebook post from the *Saving Sally* team, which ends with a link to the *Saving Sally* trailer, sums it up very well:

So we submitted to MMFF today. There are over 60 projects vying for 8 slots. 7 of those slots will most likely go to the big players. The odds are tough. It's like trying to hit the moon with a slingshot. I just hope it's a fair fight. We have neither clout nor money. Just the film which we hope the panel would like and we get to fulfill our promise of sharing this film with you folks this year. Fingers crossed. For now we wait as we always have (Or do we make noise? Let MMFF know this is something people need to see? How do we even go about that?)

Indeed, the next job was making sure that the MMFF 2016 had a stellar Selection Committee. It took a while but a panel of worthy experts were soon assembled, chosen for their integrity and reformist spirit.

The Selection Committee waded through 27 finished film submissions, and the results of their intensive deliberations made MMFF history: *Ang Babae sa Septic Tank 2* (#ForeverIsNotEnough) by Marlon Rivera; *Die Beautiful* by Jun Lana; *Kabisera* by Arturo San Agustin and Real Florido; *Oro* by Alvin Yapan; *Saving Sally* by Avid Liongoren; *Seklusyon* by Erik Matti; *Sunday Beauty Queen* by Baby Ruth Villarama; and *Vince & Kath & James* by Ted Boborol. Some of the highlights of MMFF 2016 included the following:

1. Unsurprisingly, none of the “usual suspects” made it to the final eight.
2. For the first time in the 42 years of MMFF, a documentary, *Sunday Beauty Queen* by Baby Ruth Villarama made it to the finals. It also bagged the year's top prizes during the December 28, 2019 Gabi ng Parangal held at the New Frontier Theatre,

including Best Picture, Best Editing (Chuck Gutierrez) and the Gatpuno Antonio J. Villegas Cultural Award.

3. Possibly the MMFF entry with the longest production history (12 years in the making!), *Saving Sally* pushed the technical capabilities of Pinoy full-length animation by combining live action and 3D effects for a young-adult narrative.
4. A majority of the films tackled sociopolitical issues: the LGBTQ+ experience (*Die Beautiful*), extrajudicial killings and political corruption (*Kabisera*), the tension between a village's sustainability versus environmental imperatives (*Oro*), child abuse (*Saving Sally*), corruption in religion (*Seklusyon*), and, of course, the plight of overseas Filipino workers and domestic helpers (*Sunday Beauty Queen*).
5. Genres were well-represented: comedy (*Ang Babae sa Septik Tank 2*, *Die Beautiful*), romcom (*Vince and Kath and James*, *Saving Sally*), political thriller (*Oro*), family drama (*Kabisera*), and horror (*Seklusyon*).
6. One of the films, *Oro*, found itself in the middle of a controversy over the alleged killing of animals during the shoot. It was so widely publicized that it waylaid the January 24, 2017 Senate Hearings convened to evaluate MMFF 2016's reforms (and, specifically, its earnings).
7. The ongoing ascent of Pinoy regional cinema was most evident in the Shorts Category. Out of the eight titles—*Birds* by Christian Paolo Lat, *EJK* by Bor Ocampo, *Manila Scream* by Roque Lee and Blair Camilo, *Mga Bitoon sa Siudad* by Jarell Serencio, *Mitatang* by Arvin Jezer Gagui, *Momo* by Avid Liongoren, *Passage of Life* by Renz Vincemark Cruz and Hannah Daryl Gayapa, and *Sitsiritsit* by Brian Spencer Reyes—four hailed from the regions. *Birds* came from Cebu, *Mga Bitoon sa Siudad* from Davao, and *EJK* and *Mitatang* from Pampanga.
8. There was an increase in the level of social media discourse not just on the entries but also on the issues related to the conduct of the festival itself as well as to larger challenges defining the current Pinoy film scene.
9. Last, but certainly not the least, it proved that Pinoy audiences nationwide were hardly stupid, were fully capable of appreciating efforts that do not insult their intelligence, and were willing to make noise regarding the inequitable MMFF distribution scheme.

But as they say, “rust never sleeps.” The 42nd edition of the Metro Manila Film Festival, particularly its aftermath, pushed to the foreground the cracks and imperfections that define the sad state of Pinoy cinema. The forces of greed and entropy have an insidious way of eating away at things,



Festival postmortem with the MMFF 2016 Selection Committee: (L-R) Mae “Juana Change” Paner, Krip Yuson, Moira Lang, the author, Nic Tiongson, Krisma Fajardo, Joy Belmonte, and Law Fajardo.

including seemingly cohesive teams tasked to change the state of things. In the case of the MMFF 2016 ExCom, this came in stages.

The following months were poured into intensive meetings on a variety of festival concerns—logo design and theme song competitions, invitations to international jurors, guest appearances in various media, etc. But around mid-November, the ExCom was hit with the news that our theatrical partners were only giving the eight chosen entries a two-day no pull-out guarantee. That meant, after December 26, 2016, theatres can replace “underperforming” titles with ones with better box office potential.

Barely a month before the festival, this naturally came as a shock.

Again, let me reiterate: not a hint of this scenario was *openly* discussed during any of the previous meetings in months, the presumption being, since we were a change committee tasked to revitalize a corrupted festival, all sectors—since their representatives sat at the same table—would abide by our collective decision, or, at the very least, express sectoral concerns during these ExCom sessions so these can be addressed as one united body.

Nobody told us that certain sectors of the industry were above the rules set forth by the MMFF governing body, or were beyond honoring the very spirit of the festival/ completion—which means, at least in decent society, equitable treatment of all films. It was then we were hit with the realization regarding who actually called the shots of this festival, the true power behind its machinery.

The next stages happened in quick succession.

While the eight full-length films, along with their accompanying short films, were being “shuffled off” randomly to various destinations nationwide, we were made aware that



Senate Hearing on MMFF 2016 issues.

not all theatres were participating in the prescribed exhibition. Then, during our very first ExCom meeting in December, we were summarily informed by—and this is the unkindest blow of all—a fellow ExCom colleague that the MMFF would only run for ten days and not the usual two weeks. The reason cited was that this was the rule of law as specified by the POs creating the MMFF. Barely controlling her temper, Ms. Lang was quick to retort, “But the actual practice for decades has been 14 days? *Bakit ngayon lang?*”

But the saddest act of complicity was the ExCom's just shrugging its shoulders at the idea of non-MMFF titles—namely, *Super Parental Guidance* and *Enteng Kabisote 10*—being allowed to screen during the festival window, a window supposedly reserved for the final eight and its accompanying shorts.

After nine months of working with each other, all of a sudden we were appraised of our folly. Our impotence against market forces. The triumph of greed over reform.

How very naïve of us. To have gone through the process with good will, and all of a sudden. . . *Eat Bulaga!* At this point, the conspiracy theorist in me smelled the possibility of rats plotting in the dark, and of trusted colleagues whom we believed to be on the side of reform to be, in fact, among the shadow walkers.

By the end of January 2017, the MMFF was again brought up at the Senate hearing, this time to discuss the poor box office performance of the edition. But did MMFF really lose that much money? Upon scrutiny, the answer seems to be in the negative.

1. Non-MMFF titles were screened alongside the legitimate eight festival films. In past years, the final box office tallies included *all* titles screened

during the two-week window. Thus, a more accurate accounting of MMFF 2016 should include the other two titles to reflect a more accurate picture of total spending of Pinoy audiences during the said period.

2. There was no equitable distribution of screens for the eight titles. Some titles were shown preference by distributors and theatre owners because of perceived box office potential or other more secretive reasons. In certain regions, certain titles were never shown at all despite audience interest.
3. The best point raised in the brouhaha was that the edition was a success in terms of the total earnings of the legit eight versus the previous year's non-"usual suspects" titles.

Hence, the insistence that MMFF 2016 was a dismal failure is an example of fake news or selective reporting at best.

In any case, 2017 saw a return of the old guard. Adding insult to injury, the incoming ExCom added four seats devoted solely to theatre managers—for obvious reasons. By December 2017, the "usual suspects" were back in full swing. The gains of the #reelvolution of 2016 were short-lived, but it shone a light on the true relationship between the burgeoning indie film scene and the seemingly threatened mainstream.

Personally, I would say at this point that any attempt to reform a festival-cum-cash cow is an exercise in futility. But having said that, I think it's too important a sociopolitical/cultural ritual to simply dismiss as a lost cause. The implications of allowing certain powers-that-be to dictate "taste" and what should be watched by a general public—a public they've dismissed as incapable of improvement—is simply not right. One can connect the dots between such dangerous thinking with the current muddled state of Pinoy society.

A part of me believes maybe MMFF is truly a lost cause and should be junked completely before it does any further harm to the Pinoy psyche. But that, of course, means allowing Hollywood blockbusters their triumphal holiday return.

However, the gains of 2016 have proven that Pinoy audiences have, indeed, become more "woke," readier to fight for what they think they deserve, hungrier for a better deal. Thus the better attitude should be to retreat from the battle for now, allow the forces of change to replenish, and come back again to fight the good fight another day.

In the meantime, some takeaways:

1. True reform can only manifest if *all* parties sit together sans individual agendas and work for Philippine Cinema. Goals should include the encouragement of new talent, the creation of excellent works, and the development of a more enlightened audience nationwide.
2. If certain sectors refuse to cooperate, some degree of

legislative (or executive) intervention should be put in place. Formerly mentioned suggestions include

- a. no "first day/last day" imposition on Filipino films: they should be guaranteed at least four days to one week in the theaters;
 - b. moving opening days from Wednesday to Fridays as is the practice internationally to encourage weekend audiences;
 - c. expansion of the implementation of Senior Citizen, PWD, and other beneficiaries' movie-viewing benefits; and
 - d. changing the MMFF festival modus from a per-cinema arrangement to a festival type of programming where all films share the same theaters.
3. Create a system where private sector companies can work with the academe to create subsidized screenings through different strategies such as block sales, etc.
 4. Take advantage of the window to further audience development via post-screening Q&As in designated cinemas, as well as more involved in-site fora to encourage deeper levels of appreciation.
 5. Demand more transparency in the administrative and financial management of the festival.

This list names but a few possibilities. That "one brief shining moment" may seem lost, but it's forever etched in the hearts of all true lovers of Pinoy Cinema. A reminder that we've done it once. An inspiration that we can do it again.

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Philippine Cinema is Dead, Long Live Philippine Cinema!

Rolando B. Tolentino



Tinawag na Third Golden Age of Philippine Cinema ang edad ng digital technology na nagdemokratisa sa medium ng pelikula, at ang panimula at pamamayagpag ng independent filmmaking via PPP o public-private partnership sa inakda at inaakdang template ng Cinemalaya. PPP ito dahil may kolaborasyon ng resources, salapi, personel, at personalidad ng pilantropong negosyo at pampublikong institusyon para likhain ang hindi efisyenteng nalilikha ng singular na inisyatiba ng negosyo o gobyerno—ang akdain ang pag-unlad ng pelikulang Filipino, lalo na ng industriya ng pelikula nito. Maari rin itong inisyatiba ng isang ahensya ng pamahalaan o pribadong negosyo sa mga individual na filmmaker.

Ang epekto ng pandaigdigang ekonomiyang krisis ng 1997 dulot ng impetus ng pagbagsak ng mga ekonomiya sa Southeast Asia ay mararamdaman sa pelikula ng maagang 2000s nang magsimulang bumagsak ang taunang produksyon ng pelikula sa bansa, mula taunang 140 pelikula noong 1960 hanggang 1999, naging 73 pelikula nalang noong 2000 hanggang 2009. Noong 2010, 24 na mainstream na pelikula ang naprodyus, at 34 noong 2011. Bukod dito, tinatayang nasa 20% na lamang ang bahagi ng box office ng lokal na pelikula.

Ang una at pinakaestablisadong indie film grant-giving at exhibition platform ang Cinemalaya Philippine Independent Film Festival. Simula 2005, ito ang pumanday ng template ng cottage industry ng produksyon ng porma, kalidad, estilo, at substansya ng indie films sa bansa. Parang nagpopondo ng kabuhayan showcase ng napiling filmmakers: mula sa mga napiling konsepto, pagagawin ng script, pipiliin ang sampung pelikula para bigyan ng seed funding, paghahanapin ng katumbas na pondo, babantayan ang mga yugto ng produksyon ng monitoring team ng Cinemalaya, at matapos ng mga apat hanggang anim na buwan, ipalalabas

ang mga pelikula sa Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP), bibigyan ng sandakmak na award ang lahat ng aspekto ng produksyon maging mga short film entry, at, sa rekomendasyon ng mga imbitado at dumalong programmers ng art film festivals, pipili ng magiging “it” films para sa internasyonal na palabas at parangal, at magiging pag-aari ng Cinemalaya ang mga pelikula.

Kokopyahin ang modelong kolaborasyon ng pribado at gobyerno at pribadong indibidwal at korporasyon sa Cinema One Originals Film Festival ng ABS-CBN simula rin 2005, sa QCinema ng lokal na pamahalaan ng Quezon City simula 2013, sa Sinag Maynila ng Solar Films simula 2015, at sa Sineng Pambansa ng Film Development Council of the Philippines, isang ahensya ng gobyerno, noong 2011 hanggang 2014.

Taong 2005, ang pelikulang *Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros* ni Aureus Solito ang sinasabing nagbukas nitong ginintuang edad ng indie cinema, subalit hindi ito ang nanalo bilang pinakamahasay na pelikula sa unang Cinemalaya Philippine Independent Film Festival sa parehong taon. Ang branding ng Cinemalaya ay patungkol sa pag-ambag sa sining ng pambansang cinema, at pagbubuhay sa industriya ng pelikula. Kapag ba ang independent ay naging industriya na, wala nang indie cinema?

Simula pa 1990s, hindi nababalanse ang sining at kita sa pelikula, lalo na pagpasok ng edad ng indie cinema. May kita pero walang sining noong 1990s hanggang 2004, at may sining pero walang kita noong 2000s hanggang sa kasalukuyan. Inilugar ng panguhaning awtor at awtoridad ng indie cinema ang posisyonality ng sarili sa isang utopia: dahil hindi naman maaabot na ang indie na sining at katipiran sa budget ay magiging mainstream, mananatili itong tapat sa kanyang debosyon bilang pinakamatagumpay na cottage industry entrepreneur at modelo ng produksyon at exhibisyon.

Ang sinasabing rurok ng golden age ay ang taong 2016, nang manalo ang pelikulang indie sa tatlong pinakamatatayog na mga art film festival: si Jaclyn Jose bilang best actress sa Cannes Film Festival para sa *Ma’ Rosa* ni Brillante Mendoza, si Lav Diaz para sa best film sa *Ang Babaeng Humayo* sa Venice, at muli para sa *Hele sa Hiwagang Hapis* sa Berlin. Ang isinasaad din nito ay ang malinaw na tiering sa indie cinema na hindi lahat ay pantay sa cottage industry na ito—na sa rurok nito ay ang antas nina Mendoza at Diaz na nakakapag-combo meal ng lokal at dayuhang pondo para sa kanilang mga pelikula. Ang kasunod dito ay ang iilang nanalo sa accredited na internasyonal na art film festivals sa maraming nagtangkang sumali at makagawa ng indie films, kasunod ang iilang kinilala ng mga kritikong grupo, kasunod nito ay ang mga direktor at pelikulang kinilala ng mismong festival na nagbigay ng pondo rito, at ang kasunod nito ay ang nakagawa na ng pelikula sa mga festival na ito, at ang pinakamalaking bulto, ang “others.” Ang isinasaad din ng pamimigay ng kumpletong lineup ng parangal sa grant-giving cum award-giving indie film festival ay sila mismo ang umaaktong filtering mechanism para salain ang kaangat-angat para sa internasyonal na rekognisyon at sirkulasyon, kundi man bilang calling card ng mga susunod na henerasyon ng filmmakers para sa studios ng pelikula o advertising firms sa bansa.

At dito nakaangkla ang mga problemang patuloy na dinaranas at umiigting sa pelikula simula 2010s hanggang sa kasalukuyan. Ang pangakong pondo ay hindi lumalaki at nakakasabay sa pag-alagwa ng halaga ng produksyon; nananatiling presyong kaibigan o profit sharing sa mga investor, artista, at production staff na kadalasan ay hindi nauuwi sa may paghahatian; nananatili ang produksyon ng indie film na kahalintulad ng pinakamalupit na modelo ng produksyon sa studio—ang pito-pito production na sa loob ng pitong araw lamang ang shooting ng pelikula; sa daan-daang indie films na nagawa simula 2005, mabibilang lamang sa dalawang kamay ang mga indie film na naipalabas sa cineplex at kumita; pumasok na ang star power sa produksyon ng indie cinema bilang executive producer at artista kundi man bilang mismong prodyuser ng pelikula; marami sa naipalabas sa art film festivals sa ibang bansa at pinarangalan ay mga pelikulang wala namang akses ang maraming mamamayan o hindi sila ang naisaalang-alang bilang manonood ng mga pelikula. Masyadong naging codifiable ang mga marka ng estilo at kuwento ng indie film na madali itong nakopya ng mga kompanyang pamproduksyong pampelikula na kinalabasan ng “maindie” o mainstream-produced na indie film.

Matapos mapunla noong 2005, rumurok na hindi pa muling napapantayan noong 2016, tila nagiging madilim at malagim ang mga pelikulang ginagawa at pinaparangalan sa mga indie film cottage industry units sa bansa. Noong 2019, ang ginawarang pinakamahasay na pelikula sa Cinemalaya, ang *John Denver Trending* ni Arden Rod Condez, ay tungkol sa pisikal, verbal, emosyonal, at social media bullying ng isang



Poster design by Carl Jerome Velasco for Arden Rod Condez's *John Denver Trending* (Cinemalaya Foundation, 2019). Courtesy of Southern Lantern Studios.

bata na magpapatiwakal sa pagtatapos ng pelikula. Ang *Iska* (2019) ni Theodore Boborol ay tungkol sa matandang lola na kailangang balansihin ang pang-araw-araw na trabaho at kita sa pangangalaga sa apong autistic. Dahil sa media coverage sa imbestigasyon ng akusasyon ng pang-aabuso sa apo, pinaghiwalay ang lola at bata ng mga social worker ng gobyerno. Pero ibinalik din ito nang lumala ang kondisyon ng bata. Sa pagtatapos ng pelikula, ang akusasyon ay naging katotohanan sa pangangailangang ikadena ng lola ang apo para makapagtrabaho at kumita, nanggigitata ang bata sa sarili nitong dumi. Ang *Fucchois* (2019) ni Eduardo Roy Jr. ay tungkol sa pag-blackmail ng malupit na baklang politiko sa dalawang bikini search contestants: ayaw i-delete ng politiko ang mga video footage sa cellphone nito na nagse-sex ang dalawa, na humantong sa pagpatay ng dalawa sa politiko. Nakatakas man sa isla ng politiko ang dalawa, nagtapos ang pelikula na nasa madawag na gubat at napipinto na silang masukol ng goons ng politiko.

Hindi naman ito kataka-taka kung isasaalang-alang ang kontekstual na horizon ng produksyon ng pelikula: ang strongman na panunungkulan at administrasyong Rodrigo Duterte. Magiging madugong narkopolitiko ang governance mode nito na papaslang sa mahigit 30,000 inaakalang drug users noong taong 2019 pero pawang galing ang kalakhan sa hanay ng mga mahihirap. Edad din ng fake news na kinetikong nagsisirkulasyon ang mga isinisiwalat na tindig o datos o mismong mga balitang walang katotohanan, kabilang pa ang troll farm na nagpapalaganap nito, pati ang bastos at balbal na pagkuyog sa mga lumalaban kay Duterte at ang kanyang mga polisiya at inaalyado. Ito ang mapagmura at misogynistang pangulo na madidinig at mapapanood sa popular na midya ng radyo at telebisyon ng lahat ng gulang. At ang media ay walang gagawin kundi ipalaganap itong mga pitik ni Duterte sa balita nang walang konteksto para sa layong maging kontrobersyal, at magkaroon ng malawak na interes at social media traffic.

Kumbaga sa afinidad sa panitikan, wala pa ring way out o rekurso sa kasalukuyang predikamento na nakikita at

A still from *Hele sa Hiwagang Hapis* (2016) by Bradley Liew, courtesy of sine olivia pilipinas.

Previous page: Joselito Altarejos' *Walang Kasarian ang Digmang Bayan* (2076Kolektib, 2020). Courtesy of Altarejos.



Antoinette Jadaone's *Never Not Love You* (Viva Films, Project 8 Corner San Joaquin Projects, 2018), Carlos Siguion-Reyna's *Hihintayin Kita sa Langit* (Reyna Films, 1991), and Jeffrey Jeturian's *Ekstra* (Cinemalaya Foundation, Quantum Films, 2013). Courtesy of Philip Cu-Unjieng.

inilalahad ang indie films dahil mismong historikal na realidad ay wala pa ring lumalabas na popular at efektibong mga pagkilos at pagsagka kundi man pagbabalikwas sa kalabisan sa kapangyarihan, korapsyon, at kultura ng impunidad ng administrasyong Duterte. At tila wala pa ring liwanag sa hinaharap.

Ang isa sa units ng indie film cottage industry, ang Sinag Maynila ay diniskwalifika ang *Walang Kasarian ang Digmaang Bayan* (2020) ni Joselito Altarejos dahil sa teknikalidad na mayorya raw na nabago ang skript sa pelikula mula sa napagkasunduang skript pamproduksyon. Pero sa mga balita, ang pelikula ay kritikal sa administrasyong Duterte at ang malawakang paglabag nito sa karapatang pantao. Sa trailer ay binigkas ng nagluluksang karakter, “Kung sana naging mas matapang ako, ako mismo ang papatay kay Duterte.” Ang mga personalidad na nasa likod ng Sinag Maynila ay sina Wilson Chieng at Brillante Mendoza na pawang sumusuporta kay Duterte. Ang kakatwang sitwasyon ay mismong ang pribadong ahensya na ang nagpapatupad ng sensura na nasa sakop dapat ng kapangyarihan ng Movie and Television Review and Classification Board sa pamamagitan ng X-rating nito.

Ang karisma ni Duterte bilang regular na sangganong mapapagkatiwalaan at mabilis na magagawa ang ipinangakong gawin ang naghimok sa maraming personalidad sa pelikula at entertainment, liban pa sa mas masaklaw na mga personalidad at entidad sa iba pang larangan, na suportahan ang pagkandidato nito sa pagkapangulo, at nang manalo, ang pamamahala nito sa bansa. Si Mendoza ang kinuhang direktor ng live telecast ng unang dalawang State of the Nation Address ni Duterte, na gagawing mas popular ng direktor na si Bb. Joyce Bernal sa kasunod na mga taon. Marami ring filmmaker ang umakda ng iba pang kultural na gawain para sa administrasyong Duterte. Si Adolfo Alix Jr. ang nagdirek ng *Bato: The Gen. Ronald Dela Rosa Story* (2019), ang biofilm ng pangunahing arkitekto ng Oplan Tokhang o War on Drugs ni Duterte, at pinagbidahan ni Robin Padilla, isang supporter din ni Duterte. Maging ang mga kultural na ahensya ng pamahalaan ay naging kasabwat na rin sa rebisyonismong historikal ng Marcoses na katuwang sa suporta kay Duterte sa isyung ito. Noong Enero 2020, nagdaos ang CCP ng

hapunan at parangal kay Imelda bilang tagapagtaguyod na tagapangulo nito kahit nananatiling mainit ang pagpupursigi ng mga Marcos na baguhin ang interpretasyon ng kasaysayan, na kalimutan at mag-move on na ang sambayanan sa mga naganap noong ang mag-asawang Marcos ang nanungkulan sa bansa.

Ang aktor na si Mateo Guidicelli na isa ring reservist sa army ay nakipagbatbatan sa social media hinggil sa tamang paraan ng pagiging nasyonalistiko sa pamamagitan ng pagsuporta sa Armed Forces of the Philippines. Nauulat sa balita ang pana-panahong pahapunan at pagtitipon ni Duterte kasama ang mga sumusuportang personalidad sa show business. At ito ang impact ni Duterte sa loob at labas ng pelikula: ang maging mapanghati sa bawat hanay at sektor ng lipunan—kung supporter o hindi, kung kalaban o hindi. Hindi rin maganda ang prospek ng pelikula sa kagyat na nananatiling panahon ng adminstrasyong Duterte dahil walang mayor na inobasyon sa indie cinema ng naratibong anyo.

Sa pelikulang dokumentaryo pa ang ningning ng liwanag sa malagim at madilim na kasalukuyang predikamento ng pelikula at lipunan. Ito ang nagsisiwalat ng realidad sa mga tampok na paksang piniling isapelikula: isyu ng kahirapan dulot ng hindi makataong agresibong urbanisasyon sa mga pelikulang *Tundong Magiliw: Pasaan Isinilang Siyang Mahirap* (2011) at *Sa Palad ng Daantaong Kulang* (2017) ni Jewel Maranan, manggagawang musmos sa *Yield* (2017) nina Toshihiko Uriu at Victor Delotavo Tagaro, epekto ng Oplan Tokhang sa mga pamilyang naiwan sa *Aswang* (2020) ni Alyx Ayn Arumpac ang ilan sa mga halimbawa nito. Kabilang din sa dokumentaryo at newsreel na format ang matagal nang inisyatiba ng network ng alternative media na may malakas na online presence, tulad ng Kodao, Altermidya, Bulatlat, Pinoy Weekly, at iba pa.

Sa pagkabalangkas ng indie cinema na naratibong anyo ang diin, naisantabi ang kaakibat na golden age din ng maiikling pelikula at dokumentaryo. Sa namayagpag na indie cinema, codifiable brand na ang indie film, at patuloy itong nasusustina na lamang sa post-2016 na produksyon ng maliliit na pelikula na ang best effort na pinakaasam-asam ay hindi na o hindi na lamang internasyonal na rekognisyon kundi

makapasok na rin sa plataporma ng Netflix, ang mayor na online streaming site sa buong mundo.

At sa pagkakasulat nitong akda sa 2020, 15 taon matapos ang simula ng ikatlong golden age, wala nang, o wala pang, mayor na inobasyong higit na makakapagtulak sa mas mataas na antas ang indie cinema. Patuloy na lamang ang mekanismo ng produksyon at exhibisyon ng mga pelikula, kasama ang pagpasok ng microcinemas sa Metro Manila. Netflix na ang pinakamalawak na plataporma para sa distribusyon ng indie film. Nadulong bookend na nga ba ng *Ma’ Rosa* o *Ang Babaeng Humayo* ang *Maximo Oliveros* gaya ng pagka-bookend ng dalawang pelikula ni Lino Brocka sa ikalawang golden age—ang *Maynila sa Kuko ng Liwanag* (1975) at *Orapronobis* (1989) kahit pa sa pagpasok ng 1986 ay tumila na ang masining na produksyong pampelikula?

15 taon na ang ikatlong golden age ng pelikulang Filipino, 11 kung nagtapos na noong 2016. Kung ikukumpara, 14 na taon ang edad ng ikalawang golden age, sampu kung *Takaw Tukso* (William Pascual, 1985) ang nagsara nito. Wala ngang Gawad Urian noong 1987 dahil inaakala ng Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino na wala namang karapat-dapat na pelikula na dapat gawaran ng parangal mula sa 1986 na produksyon. Kung *Genghis Khan* (Manuel Conde, 1950) ang nagbukas ng unang golden age, naisara ito ng *Geron Busabos* (Chat Gallardo, 1964), at kung gayon ay 14 na taon ang unang golden age. Samakatwid, sa natural life span ng golden age sa pelikulang Filipino, medyo natapos na dapat o patapos na itong ikatlo at pinakahuli.

At kung gayon, pamatay na ang indie cinema as we know it. At kahit hindi pa natin alam ang kasunod na yugto

ng pagningning nito, ang katiyakan, tulad ng mga naunang golden age rito ay ang pagkasadlak ng kalidad at kantidad ng pelikulang Filipino. Integral itong tengga o soul-searching o panibagong match ng supply at demand ng pelikula sa pagkahinog ng kondisyon ng posibilidad para sa higit nitong pag-alagwa sa susunod na yugto. Ang unang golden age ay pahiwatig ng pag-mature ng sining ng pelikulang Filipino sa kanyang adaptasyon ng lokal na kondisyon. Ang ikalawa ay new wave mode, gaya ng pandaigdigang pambansang cinema na naganap bago at matapos ng kanyang panahon, o ang inobasyon sa porma at laman para mas maging interrogatibo sa politikal na kapangyarihan at diktadura ng classical Hollywood narrative cinema. At ang ikatlo ay teknolohiya ang may impetus, mas maraming kabataang filmmaker na tinig, mas maraming representasyon sa mga sektoral at rehiyonal na isyu.

Nasa interregnum tayo ng pelikula at lipunang Filipino—hindi pa namamatay ang luma, hindi pa rin isinisilang ang kapalit. Gayunpaman, long live Philippine cinema dahil nakaangkla naman ang pag-unlad nito sa kultural na politika ng pag-asa ng mga filmmaker, manonood, kritiko, mamamayan, at sambayanang nagnanais ng magandang bukas.

Jewel Maranan filming *Tundong Magiliw: Pasaan Isinilang Siyang Mahirap?* (2011). Photo by Carla Baful, courtesy of Maranan.



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The image of Kidlat Tahimik and his works in his home country is much more diversified and multipolar than what an outside observer, one from overseas (specifically the West), can immediately fathom. In an important respect, it is appropriate to name Kidlat's works underground, not so much for their aesthetics but for the persistent inaccessibility and the lack of actual knowledge about his works by what ought to be his primary audience. To many Filipinos, including his peer filmmakers, Kidlat's films are much more hearsay than firsthand spectacle. For the time being, Kidlat's opus remains the phantom of the arthouse cinema.

Thus—from the perspective of a lot of people in his own country—the veneration Kidlat receives from his Western followers seems like a kind of mystery, a misunderstanding, if not a product of naïve romanticism. Or is it simply another case of “a prophet is without honor in his own country”? On the other hand, there is also a broad consensus in the Philippines about the importance of Kidlat Tahimik's body of work. Given the long course and discourse of enshrinement on Kidlat as the founder, patron saint, and savior of the independent and alternative cinema in the Philippines, some questions need to be addressed.

A welcome approach and good guideline to describe and to understand a foreign culture seems to be immersion combined with a survey to let the subjects of the study present their respective personal point of view in the context and against the background of their individual situation. This might be a good guideline for a less neo-orientalistic mode of interpretation for multilayered and multiplexed internal discourses on this specific topic. By doing so, we quite possibly will find ourselves in a better position to describe and to understand discourses, networks, and the inherent mechanics and dynamics of internal cultural exchange. The support of oral history will help to establish a more complex picture of the subject of our interest. Therefore, off to the Philippines to experience how the players involved describe their very own milieus in regard to Kidlat Tahimik.

ATO BAUTISTA

I started studying film in 2000 at Mowelfund Film Institute. One of the films archived there that filmmakers used to watch is Kidlat's *Perfumed Nightmare* (1977), his most popular work. I watched the whole thing and never forgot about it. I was blown away by its ambition and aesthetics. I was amazed at how free and creative it was. Back then, I did not know what it had achieved. I appreciated the film because it was so different. It defied boundaries. And the fact that it was done in the 1970s was amazing. Many experimental filmmakers got ideas from it.

You can say I'm a fan of Kidlat. His film affected me as a viewer. But as a filmmaker, I wasn't exactly influenced by his film. All in all, I'm a film noir guy who does popular cinema. I have my own aesthetics; the style of Kidlat is completely his. Some other filmmakers could probably get a few magic tricks from his works. But I never thought about using his style or techniques or paying homage. It was more a revelation that things can be done that way.

It opened my mind. I appreciate how it was filmed, and the way the story moved from one point to another with surprises. I appreciate the satire of how a brown man brought a jeepney to Paris, how it crossed from realism, fantasy, to absurdity, and to whatever it was. It mixed up so many elements, and so many genres. It blew me away. I got the same feeling when I saw Lav Diaz's *Heremias* (2006). I thought that this guy is a genius because he thought or he perceived that something like that can be done.

I don't think that Kidlat has an influence in the broad sense. As a novice filmmaker, if you study film history, there is an 80 percent chance that you will encounter his name and his works and be exposed to what he did. He's one of the major influencers of experimental cinema in the Philippines, mostly in the '80s and '90s. But, of course, it's not exclusively Kidlat Tahimik. While experimental filmmaking in the Philippines is not very popular, there are many other independent and experimental filmmakers who have pushed the form in the last 30 years. Back then, there was no independent filmmaking; there was just alternative and experimental filmmaking. When I began working as a filmmaker in 2000, the term “independent filmmaking” was not used. It was an obscure profession. We called it guerilla filmmaking.

Kidlat's influence on young filmmakers nowadays is quite limited, I'd say. This influence is limited to the guys in Manila. How could somebody like Kidlat influence filmmaking in the regions? The influence of artists on other people breaks down to the availability and visibility of their works. It's that simple. Outside the National Capital Region, the only influence is mainstream cinema. Because besides special screening opportunities in schools, there are no alternative venues. It's an irony in a way. If independent filmmakers like us want to influence the regions, it should be done intentionally. But I don't think this is one of Kidlat's intentions. He's always in Baguio with his family and his own group. His films are private, and he chooses to stay private.



SIGRID ANDREA BERNARDO

I first saw a Kidlat Tahimik film when I was working for Lav Diaz on *Ebolusyon ng Pamilyang Pilipino* (2004). We were shooting in Baguio. The team hung out in Oh My Gulay, Kidlat's restaurant, and watched one of his films. I remember thinking, “Oh, films are made like this.” It was a big surprise! I was only 19 at that time and didn't know much about filmmaking. I didn't quite understand what Kidlat's film was about. But I like films that focus on the feelings of their audience.

We have what we call semiotics in theater, like symbolism and actions even without stories. I saw that kind of technique in Kidlat's film. The story was not done with the usual beginning, middle, and end. Instead, it was constructed from snippets of everyday lives. Buy you could still somehow grasp a whole story from it. In this regard, when you watch a film by Kidlat, there's no right or wrong answer. It's free for everyone to make something out of it.

Watching Kidlat's *Balikbayan #1* (2015) is like going back to my roots. It reminds me of Lav Diaz's *Ebolusyon*. I like the kind of rawness these films have, as well as themany feelings and ideas in them. But I don't think it's for everyone. It might be hard for some people to digest because it's different from what they are used to in their cinematic diet. But if you have no expectations when you go to the theater, then you might appreciate it. You just have to feel it. It's like going back to your childhood. That's the feel of Kidlat's films.

I do believe that kids should watch more experimental films like Kidlat's. Its abstract form makes you create your own story out of it. You interpret. You play with it. It's not just given away. So many kids have a short attention span. They have no patience. It's better that they watch experimental films as early as possible. It's visually interesting. It makes your imagination work. It teaches children, even toddlers, not



to be lazy and create their own answers. The kid's mind has no rules. It doesn't pay much attention to the plausibility of a story. Give them Kidlat's films!

I don't know what kind of influence Kidlat had when he started filmmaking. First of all, making *Perfumed Nightmare* was expensive. For that reason, not many independent filmmakers in the Philippines back then had been able to follow his example. Then again, his example shows that if you want to be a director, then there's no reason that you can't be a director. You just make use of whatever resources you have. Kidlat wanted to explore and create different styles. He was experimenting on camera. It's like he's painting in abstract form. Even if his films are personal, they are not self-centered. That's what makes his works unique. It's his way of communicating.

The meaning of being a Filipino is you're born here, is raised here, and you grew up in an environment that embraces Filipino culture. I appreciate Kidlat's regionality, even if he's only an adopted Ifugao. He promotes this culture with a lot of effort. I envy him for that. Seeing him wearing the *babag* makes me feel proud of our culture.

DERICK CABRIDO

The first time I saw a film by Kidlat Tahimik was back when I was still in college in 2001 or 2002. = One of my classmates attended Kidlat Tahimik's seminar. I joined one of those classes at the University of the Philippines (UP) in Diliman. I recognized that Kidlat is a very good teacher.

Back then, I wanted to do documentaries very much. Kidlat did a couple of documentaries. However, I found them a bit boring, and I didn't want to follow his kind of filmmaking. I cannot say that I'm influenced by Kidlat. Don't get me wrong, I respect his works. I can see where he's coming from and where he's right now in terms of his aesthetics and point of view. But I can't say that this is going to be something you need or something that counts for Philippine cinema at this point in time. But this is less a problem of Kidlat. The avenue of Philippine cinema is limited.

The basic problem here in the Philippines is access. Up to now, so many seminal works are not that easy to access. We lack the archival infrastructure. At the same time, it's a problem of promotion and marketing. How are you going to market films like his? How are you going to screen outside the festival and university circles for public viewing? Kidlat's films are unique. They have their own voice. We should have different voices. To understand and to recognize this is what Kidlat and his work are all about. The younger generations have an idea of him because he's part of their textbooks and the history of Philippine cinema. But how do you explain that he is the father of the independent cinema in the Philippines when it is hard to find even one of Kidlat's films anywhere in the whole country? Because of this, Kidlat's influence on the Philippine film scene as a whole, even on the contemporary independent scene, is very limited.

When one says that, "Kidlat Tahimik is the father of the Philippine independent cinema," there's also the question as to who has the authority to put this label on him. Mostly foreigners use this label. But here in Kidlat's native land, you will rarely hear this. So when we follow this designation—what are the actual criteria? There are filmmakers who get their ideas and concepts from Kidlat or follow the paths of his films. But a lot of filmmakers or the broader audience don't have an idea as to who he is. And I'm talking about the better informed people in Manila. Now, ask someone from the provinces about Kidlat. All the more you won't find anybody familiar with him.

Most of Kidlat's films are not quite narrative driven. They are more of an experimental type. Everything is just abstract. That's why most people find it boring. The majority of the audience is not used to appreciating cinema as another form of art.

KIRI DALENA

Since my sisters Sari and Aba, and I grew up in the same circles of artists, I got to know Kidlat early on. I remember having seen Kidlat's works as a child. But my recollection of them is mostly in fragments. Only as an adult did I seriously watch his films again. The most vivid one I remember is *Turumba* (1981) because it was shot in Laguna where Kidlat's father is from. It is also where my father Danny's (Dalena) ancestral house is also there.

What inspired me about Kidlat was the story of how he got into film. He was an established economist in Europe, a student leader, the chairperson of the university student council. He forwent these career paths, left his comfort zone and decided to become an artist. This is already revolutionary. Later on,

what inspired me, or where I see parallels in our practices, is the kind of independence our films have, like they have a life of their own. Even before Lav Diaz, Kidlat came up with the idea that a film doesn't need to subscribe to a conventional time frame. Not just in terms of literal length but also the length of time you work on it. It was then that I thought, *Hey, this is something that I also want for my works*. I wanted this idea of films that have lives of their own, where the end is so uncertain and movable.

In 2005, Nick Deocampo organized a film festival in Mactan, and we, delegates from all over the Philippines, came up with the Mactan Manifesto where regional filmmakers like Kidlat, Peque Gallaga, Teng Mangansakan, and many others declared the need for and the support of the cultural richness of the Philippines, and the decentralization of filmmaking by cultivating centers of regional filmmaking outside Manila. With that alone, you can see that Kidlat puts effort in supporting regional cinema. Kidlat travels around, attending festivals, and screening his films. In the North, in Baguio and other places in the Cordilleras, he definitely has created a kind of filmmaking scene. He definitely influences young filmmakers.

Honestly, I'm surprised whenever I meet someone who hasn't heard of Kidlat or hasn't seen his films. I feel that it is something so organic that if you're a filmmaker, you should know your predecessors in the history of film. But then, there's my realization that it's not like that. Our appreciation of Philippine film will only be enriched or deepened if we have knowledge of what came before us. To have this continuous circulation of independent and experimental work is what we need.

Unfortunately, until now, the knowledge of this part of our culture is still exclusive and the audience is still limited. Kidlat already belongs to this roster of filmmakers who should be part of the teaching of the history of Philippine cinema. He belongs with filmmakers who have earned their right to be enshrined, like Lino Brocka, Ishmael Bernal. We need to have the same for those who are struggling in experimental and independent cinema spaces. And there I see Kidlat.

SHERON DAYOC

The first film by Kidlat that I saw was *Bakit Dilaw ang Gitna ng Babag-hari?* (1994). It was around 2008 or 2009 at UP Diliman when I was making my first short films. It was sort of a journey for me because I was still a new filmmaker; I was still searching for my own voice. Since I'm also from the Zamboanga, watching *Babag-hari* taught me that going back to my roots and being honest with what I'm telling, and sharing my personal stories and my experiences can have a lot of impact on the audience. This became my foundation for the kind of stories I tell.

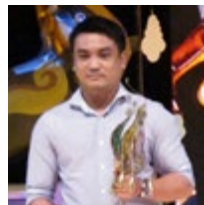
Back in the province, I had no idea what independent filmmaking was about. I only heard about Kidlat when I got to Manila and started my film studies. He was one of the first few filmmakers that popped out and that had a huge impact among young filmmakers like me. After watching his first film, *Perfumed Nightmare*, I got a different idea on how to tell sincere human stories, whether you're doing an arthouse, a documentary, or something else. At the end of the day, what becomes universal is if you're being honest about the stories you tell. And by being honest, you can also explore different forms of storytelling. Kidlat Tahimik developed his very own form of storytelling. You can see how sincere he is as a person and as a filmmaker. That part of his filmmaking influenced me very much with my own filmmaking.

Kidlat is an icon of independent filmmaking. After getting to know some of his works, I understood that one shouldn't be afraid of being authentic, and of having one's own voice. I realized that growing up in the province can be an advantage because you tend to have a more unique voice. Each culture and each region have their own environment and cultural backgrounds and, thus, developed their own unique voices. This can be a significant ingredient in the stories we tell. With this, we can contribute to the diversity of the Filipino experience.

MES DE GUZMAN

When I was in high school in Nueva Vizcaya, I encountered Kidlat Tahimik's works in a book and in some clippings from a national newspaper in our library. I saw his film *Perfumed Nightmare* when I was in UP Diliman while I was taking a creative writing course at that time.

Maybe Kidlat's films had an influence on me in the aspect of being a regional filmmaker, or a filmmaker who represents the customs, traditions, and culture of our own province or milieu. We both hail from the Mountain Province. I can easily connect with his films, for the reason that Kidlat's films effectively capture the themes and the environment of a rural or semi-urban setting that are organic and dynamic to my own experiences as a local filmmaker.



Kidlat is one of the pioneers of the experimental and the independent film movement in the Philippines. He has the artistic and the undaunted connection to our native roots. His works are the voice of the marginalized and have the integrity and the uniqueness of a cinematic vision.

The importance and the inspiration of Kidlat Tahimik as a filmmaker lies in his being one of the models of pure independent and alternative filmmaking. His films are characterized by originality and artistry that express a filmmaker's personal insight on the human condition. Kidlat's works are known for being a philosophical critique of our neocolonial history. They articulate a critical point of view and a personal interpretation of Philippine society. His *sariling duende* is an unending search for a personal vision that resonates within the search of a nation's own cultural identity.



EMMAN DELA CRUZ

The first time I probably saw a Kidlat Tahimik film was in the film program of UP's College of Mass Communication. I also saw most his films in a retrospective in Cine Adarna at UP. One of the most memorable is *Perfumed Nightmare*. It opened my mind to what cinema should be open to. Obviously, you see the progression of Kidlat as a filmmaker and how he, who is self-taught, created his own language. He took the responsibility that came with breaking out of the norm. I felt a kinship with him. He's very paternal to a lot of filmmakers. I myself had so many chances to visit him at his house in Baguio, and we had good interactions.

I call my three favorite Filipino films the "holy trinity" of cinema because, among the three of them, you can write the rest of Philippine cinema—that's my theory. The first is *Biyaya ng Lupa* (1959), the second is *Broken Marriage* (1983), and the third is *Perfumed Nightmare*. Kidlat's film is the closest to what you have to independence at that time and until today. It's a seminal work. When I first saw *Todo Todo Teros* (2006) by John Torres, I thought, "This is the direct descendant of Kidlat and his political works!"

Kidlat's biggest influence is showing you the meaning of being fully independent; putting forward the idea that you're not constricted by time, and not constricted by an output-driven mechanism. Instead, you can live within and without your work. Your work becomes an expression of your life as an artist, as a filmmaker, and as a mentor. That's the magic of his works. They become like a process of seeing how he grapples with all these issues and questions. This freedom to explore is also very Lav Diaz-like. I would say Kidlat's no-holds-barred style defined the next generation of independent filmmakers in the Philippines. More by accident—I don't think that he consciously did that—he opened up this way.

Watching Kidlat's films is like questioning yourself. He's like a Martian making a Filipino film. It's revolutionary in that way. Kidlat started the question of identity and form, and the acceptance of the paradoxes that the Filipino goes through. How do we make films? Why do we make films? Kidlat showed us a way to go through these issues of making a film in the Philippines. Of course, people would say, "Hey, he's rich. He has the resources." But it didn't stop him from making films that weren't safe. You just have to sit with him to see that he's still always in the middle of his work. He's always new. That's what I love about him.

Kidlat is like Santa Claus to a lot of the young filmmakers. They probably haven't seen neither him nor any of his works. They might have heard about his works but they see him more like a mascot. Kidlat has been very active in championing the works of young people. He goes to festivals and gives his Bamboo Camera Award, and his Sariling Duende Award. He wants the discourse to keep going. The younger filmmakers might not know it but, through their mentors, people who got influenced by Kidlat and the generation after him, like Raymond Red, Lav Diaz, and so on, there's a long thread of discourse and heritage. This long line of influence and exchange makes up the history of Philippine cinema. It's sad when the young filmmakers think they wouldn't be part of this tradition and discourse. Kidlat's influence is definitely there. It's when they are breaking the norm, when they suddenly find themselves in a no-man's land, that's when they meet Kidlat.

Alas, for the mass audience, Kidlat has no relevance. The Philippine mainstream is like Hollywoodism at its worst. It is filmmaking while in zombie mode in a film factory. That's what Kidlat has been resisting with his work, and that's what he has been saying from day one: question the maker! You're consuming something which does not nourish you. Even with the recent independent scene, it's so sad. You ask yourself: "What are those works?!" They are like replicas of something else. It's like mainstream in a weird way. Then again, here are great examples: Khavn de la Cruz, Raya Martin, and Jet Leyco. That's why I'm not losing hope for Philippine cinema. That's the inspiration we can get from Kidlat's work. I hope we don't stop looking at his work. That's what we need here. Period.



KEITH DELIGERO

The only film by Kidlat Tahimik that I have seen is *Perfumed Nightmare* some time between 2005 and 2009. I love it. It's the kind of film I would like to make. When I discovered *Perfumed Nightmare*, I wanted to watch more of Kidlat's films. But it was impossible to find any of them.

I have not met anyone who have any idea about Kidlat or his works. That's why I keep recommending *Perfumed Nightmare*. I feel that they should watch it. It will change the way they think about cinema, the way they see themselves and the world.

I don't think that Kidlat and his filmmaking had an influence on me. I saw *Perfumed Nightmare* when I was already making films. I had already found my own way, my process, my method, and my film language. Instead, I found many similarities to the way I operate. It's more of an inspiration than an influence. I see similarities to my aesthetics in Kidlat's filmmaking. He favors this perspective in life on this very small scale, on ordinary things in small provincial towns. There are these youthfulness and childishness, which are also very obvious in my films. I also found a lot of small town pop culture references in his film. I like that.

I have a feeling that what happened to me in regard of Kidlat's work is similar to what happened to other filmmakers. They're not influenced directly. But they could have been inspired in terms how he worked. Kidlat makes films in his own way without giving in to any commercial aspirations or exterior influences. A lot of established independent filmmakers and even starting filmmakers are trying to do it that way. Even if they had not known Kidlat, and only discover him later on, they will be more inspired to go on doing films in their personal ways.

It's so important that every one of us making films outside of Manila be aware of our regions' specific sensibilities. You're telling stories about your own place, and how life is lived there. If young filmmakers would just see the possibilities of making small, personal films about what you see and what you experience in your own small place—that would be a great gain for Philippine cinema. It should be local. That's the way films should be made. That makes more sense than making all those films which are accessible through the mainstream. That's my advocacy. In that way, Kidlat Tahimik is very inspirational. I always go for local flavors. And that's Kidlat Tahimik: very local.



NICK DEOCAMPO

I was a student in UP when I first heard of Kidlat; we're talking around 1979/1980. I saw *Perfumed Nightmare* and thought, "What is this?" I recognized that it was a totally different film—the film language and vocabulary. You must remember, in the '80s, we were going into the end of martial law. Everything was in the form of alternative: alternative media, alternative economy, and alternative lifestyle. And why not alternative cinema? Kidlat Tahimik provided us with this narrative type of filmmaking. But we owe to Kidlat the thought that the filmmaker can be self-reflexive. Because he filmed himself. He just burst the whole notion of what is filmic reality against reality-reality. With this, he destroyed several conventions. And I liked that. At a certain point, he was pioneering something.

Kidlat was always legendary. But he was absent. All the time, until now. Back from abroad—that's the first thing you hear about Kidlat. He succeeded abroad. And he appeals to the colonial mentality of those who are left behind here and who aspire to be recognized. Therefore, it plays to the whole colonial narrative that has been going on for a century in this country: make it abroad, come home, and then you are a hero. We play this until now. It has been feeding into our fantasies as independent filmmakers.

The phenomenal thing about Kidlat is that he fitted so well in a paradigmatic discourse of that era when Third World was the favorite word in the world. Kidlat Tahimik was extolled as one of the poster boys of the Third World aesthetics and politics. That's why he appealed so well with the academic community—until now! He's the darling of the academic community who is critical and resistant of the economic system that has ruled the world. But putting him in the independent movement during that time, I do not see his direct lineage.

Kidlat Tahimik is a pristine talent, with almost no beginnings in this country. It was almost like he came out of a bamboo that just opened up, and he was already self-contained as an independent individual filmmaker. Where did he come from? What is the context of his emergence, whoever he is? It's still a big phenomenological puzzle for us here in this country. Who in the lineage of the movie industry did he follow? None! This is Kidlat Tahimik! He was born inspired. Because of that, he had his internal personal transformation. It was a personal struggle. And he was able to break through. So, what is it that

we need to follow? It is his fierce independence that makes him a maverick spirit. In no uncertain terms, he was truly a maverick.

Historically, we need to put Kidlat Tahimik in his rightful place. I am all for Kidlat to be a National Artist—but for the right reason. If the reason is to call him the father of Philippine independent cinema, then I'm sorry, but somebody has to burst this balloon. It's not right. In the first place: what do we mean by “the father”? What did Kidlat father? And if he's the father of independent cinema, why can't he correct and put in order the chaos going on in independent cinema? Independent cinema has been so abused!

I am trying to make Kidlat accountable. He, who's been considered as a father, should step in and say exactly: “Children, this is how you should define it.” Like any good father, he should do that. If you are a paternalistic figure, please do something! There is no mediation from Kidlat, no statement at all, at this very crucial time when independent cinema is looking for a direction. When will the young digital filmmakers realize that they got the short end of their adulation? When do they see that there is no clear path to where this independent cinema is going? These people now believe that, “Oh, we are independent!” when actually they're going into the trap of commercial filmmaking. Is that inspired by Kidlat Tahimik? This is highly problematic.

Are we clear with independent cinema? Can we make him accountable now that he's dubbed the father of independent cinema? He's been put into a position wherein something has been made out of him and it appears as if he's been complicit in it—complicit in the sense that he's not correcting what blatantly appears to be wrong. Historically, when you talk about a father, and if I were his child, I'd be a rebellious child of his. Because I would like to think, “You orphaned me. Where were you at the time I needed you during the time of the Marcos regime? Why did you leave me here in this city, in these very difficult times of military oppression, while you were up there blessed in the heavens of the Cordilleras? Why were you not here in our messed-up life, when we were defining, and creating that space for independent cinema?” Did we have safety nets making our films? Did Kidlat Tahimik exactly tell us, “Oh, be careful with what's ahead.” Kidlat, the father? It's a myth. But should we blame the artist? Is it the responsibility of the artist to get himself known?



LAV DIAZ

I don't remember the year anymore when this story happened. My youngest child was studying in Baguio, staying with my relatives there. Every weekend, I went up to Baguio, and every time, I texted or called Kidlat. He always took care of me. “Come to my place,” he'd say. “Come to my restaurant, let's eat,” or “Let's go somewhere, have coffee.” It became a ritual every weekend. One weekend, while we were hanging out, I recorded him doing some screenings, cursing and swearing. He was giving the dirty finger to a big construction that was about to become the SM Baguio. We were standing on top of his building. And Kidlat was shouting: “Look at that structure! It's poison to Baguio!” Kidlat was going on and on, complaining and complaining. Poetic justice?

Brillante Mendoza initiated this omnibus project with the three of us. He came up with the idea. The title is *Lakbayan* (2018). Some years ago, he asked me to join Sinag Maynila Film Festival as part of the jury. He said, “Lav, apart from this jury I'm asking you to be part of, I'm thinking of this project. What do you think of doing an omnibus with Kidlat?” I told him, “That's a good idea. Ask Kidlat.” I didn't bother to ask him why he chose the us. Why Kidlat, since, yeah, he's a bit off Dante's [Brillante] cinematic sensibilities, and at the same with me. Our respective cinematic styles differ a lot. But between Brillante and me, we both look up to Kidlat as our elder, as somebody who's like a father to us. Kidlat is part of that generation which started experimental cinema in the Philippines. He's part of our inspiration. It's a form of homage to Kidlat, and at the same time, a collaboration. It's some kind of a jam between the generations. I told Brillante, “It's okay, I'm in.” A few days later, Brillante texted me that Kidlat would be joining us.

You know, I can work fast and Dante can work fast. But we both know that with Kidlat, you might have to wait 'till forever—if you may. Kidlat might do it today or tomorrow. But if he asks, “Can you just wait for me?” You just wait for him until he says, “I'm ready this year.” Brillante wanted to submit the project to Berlinale 2018. Well, unfortunately, it was too late for Berlinale because of Kidlat. His part was two hours long, and he needed to shorten it a lot. But I'm very happy with it.



LAWRENCE FAJARDO

I have seen only one film by Kidlat. It was around ten years ago when I was editing a video for an NCCA [National Commission for Culture and the Arts] event. Truthfully, I didn't watch the whole film. It was only a portion of *Perfumed Nightmare*. The concept of a guy from the province going to Paris was interesting. Also, the scene of the ritual of *tuli*. It looked like the work of a filmmaker-slash-ethnographer. It's good that there's a filmmaker recording the cultural practices and the customs of the people of the Cordillera or wherever that was. An important requirement for being a good filmmaker is the ability to adapt. You should adjust, observe the culture, the people, their events, and you film it. What I've seen and what I like with Kidlat's movies is his cultural versatility and his ability to immerse into different kinds of environment. So, that's Kidlat for me. But beside that clip of *Perfumed Nightmare*, I haven't seen any other film by him. Maybe because it's not my thing, what he's saying. I'm not that interested in what he wants to tell.

The major problem in the Philippines is access to the films that all these important filmmakers have done. Maybe Kidlat is better known abroad because, in foreign countries, there's a bigger interest in art films. Art is always the least priority of the people in the Philippines. But Kidlat knows how to push for his films to be screened in foreign countries. People here meet you with a kind of respect when your films have been shown abroad. Not because of your work and your art in themselves, but because of the recognition you get in foreign countries. You become a kind of celebrity. But as an artist, you're still immaterial. Your art doesn't matter. It's the problem of the audience, or even more of the government. But the arts don't matter to the government.

I don't think that Kidlat influenced me as a filmmaker. Growing up in Bacolod, my influence came from other sources. We watched the films of Peque Gallaga. That's the opposite side of the process of filmmaking represented by Kidlat. Kidlat might have directly influenced Auraeus Solito [a.k.a. Kanakan Balintagos]. There's also this strong ethnic dimension in his works. He's from Palawan and also digs deep into his assumed indigenous and tribal roots. Then there are Khavn de la Cruz and John Torres. I suppose they follow Kidlat's experimental way of filmmaking. It seems there are a lot of filmmakers who idolize Kidlat.

I cannot tell if Kidlat has any practical influence on younger filmmakers. When I teach at the Bacollywood Workshop in Negros, Kidlat and his works are not a big part of the curriculum. The history of filmmaking here in the country is very scattered, and that's the problem. We lack the historical background of our own national film culture. People might know Lino Brocka, Ishmael Bernal—but then what? Why? Because this kind of knowledge is not officially supported. It's not in the art curriculum. We don't have film libraries, and we don't have the books. Where are the books on our cinematic masters—on Celso Ad. Castillo, on Peque Gallaga? We need information. We don't know enough about our own culture. We live in a culture of ignorance, disrespect, and negligence.



QUARK HENARES

I remember, we had an exercise in fourth year high school. We were supposed to make a short film. There was a book about Filipino short films and it mentioned filmmakers like Mike de Leon, and Raymond Red. But there was one strange name: Kidlat Tahimik. I wondered, “Whoa! Who's that person? I need to find this guy's movies!” I finally found one of his films at a Filipino film festival in SM Megamall. It was *Perfumed Nightmare*. I was totally stunned. It didn't follow the typical structure of mainstream cinema, or the three act structure of Regal, Viva, and Star Cinema movies. It's not like Mike de Leon or Brillante Mendoza where there is a story to follow, or even Lav Diaz for that matter. A lot of it was like random images put together. I thought the film was good. At that time, I had been growing as a film appreciator.

Rather than by Kidlat's aesthetics or anything else in the case of material filmmaking, I was influenced by his philosophy on life, how he sees the world, how he unleashed his inner *duende*, and how he found his own voice without adhering to colonialist preconceptions and mental structures. I admire how he was and still is able to do his own thing. The concept of digging for your own *duende* and always asking the people to do that is at the heart of who Kidlat is.

Kidlat is unique. He most likely is unknown to the vast majority of the Filipino movie audience. I do think, though, that filmmakers at least recognize him as the godfather of independent cinema in the Philippines. It's funny, the Philippine indie scene looks at him as both the godfather and as a kind of mascot because he's always wearing a *bahag*. He's always doing his rituals, dancing with his gong and

he brings his bamboo camera everywhere. People regard him in a different way than they would regard Brocka, Bernal, and de Leon. Kidlat was so influential in many ways for filmmakers like Khavn de la Cruz, Lav Diaz, and especially for experimental filmmakers like Roxlee or Raymond Red. They all look up to Kidlat. He's awesome, he's amazing. Really inspiring. What a guy!

In a weird way, the influence Kidlat has on so many filmmakers and the great reputation he has in the independent circle but at the same time the constant inaccessibility of his films make him a great candidate for the National Artist Award. Even to this day, Kidlat remains as elusive as he has always been. I suppose only a handful of people have seen his last film, *Balikbayan #1* in the Philippines. If independent films are inaccessible for most of the people in Manila, how much more difficult is it to get hold of niche experimental films like Kidlat's?

Without a doubt, Kidlat is influential. And he continues to create, which you can't say about a lot of the other authors of that time. It is also very important to note that Kidlat makes sure that he's part of the community and that he builds a community. There is a very social aspect to his filmmaking. He teaches the indigenous people to create their own cinema, and to preserve and promote their own culture. That should be rewarded as well, right?

JEFFREY JETURIAN

I first heard of Kidlat Tahimik in 1977 when *Perfumed Nightmare* was screened at the Berlin International Film Festival. Back then, it was rare for a Filipino film to be invited to the big three international film festivals. So, Kidlat's film's inclusion in Berlin was a big deal, particularly among film buffs. Fortunately, the film had a special screening at the UP Film Center, where I was a freshman then—so that was my first exposure to a Kidlat Tahimik film.

Kidlat and I never got introduced to each other, and neither did we have any form of interaction whatsoever. His work influenced me only to the extent that it exposed me to a different kind of storytelling. One that is poles apart from the Hollywood formula films that we've grown up with and gotten accustomed to. Kidlat's *Perfumed Nightmare* was among my first exposure to avant-garde cinema.

Kidlat can be regarded as the founder and father of indie and alternative cinema in the Philippines. He pioneered and espoused independent filmmaking at a time when our cinema culture was steeped in Hollywood and mainstream sensibilities, and he stuck to it throughout his entire career. That's true artistic integrity and commitment.

For the longest time, since the start of his film career, Kidlat Tahimik stood as the single icon and lone voice of regional independent filmmaking. But, sadly, he had been largely ignored by the Manila-centric industry. It was only in recent times, with the creation of numerous local film festivals and outreach programs such as Cinema Rehiyon by the NCCA that filmmakers from the Visayas, Mindanao, and provinces in Luzon, that regional filmmakers were given a platform to narrate their indigenous stories on film. Kidlat Tahimik himself was belatedly acknowledged and honored for his contribution to indie filmmaking. It was only recently that he was bestowed with a lifetime achievement award by Cinemalaya in 2013. However, the new generation of filmmakers probably is not aware who Kidlat Tahimik is.

Kidlat walks the talk when it comes to promoting his indigenous roots. Nothing can illustrate this more and with so much impact than when he attends congressional hearings or awards nights wearing only a loin cloth worn by the indigenous natives of the region he came from.

JUN LANA

The first film by Kidlat Tahimik I saw was *Perfumed Nightmare*. I was in college then. Shortly after, around 1994/1995, I met him in Baguio. It was during the University of the Philippines' National Writing Workshop. A couple of writers, including me, went to his house and had dinner with him. And so, to have that meeting with Kidlat Tahimik, just his presence gave me so much inspiration. That was an unforgettable experience for me. He's an institution. All filmmakers look up to him, especially those who are interested in a different kind of storytelling.

Even when I was still a student, when I was avidly looking around for films beyond the mainstream, it was difficult to see a film by Kidlat. You needed to go to special screenings to watch his films. The situation didn't improve. We have so many local film festivals for independent films, we have retrospectives, and ABS-CBN has done restorations of films. But you wonder, where's Kidlat in all of that? He's so important! Then again, I don't think he's the type of filmmaker who's concerned about

being relevant and praised. He just makes his films. But the FDCP [Film Development Council of the Philippines] and the NCCA should make a conscious effort to make sure that the young filmmakers are exposed to the films of the likes of Kidlat Tahimik.

I grew up watching a lot of films from Viva Pictures. It wasn't until I was in college that I started going to the UP Film Center to watch short films by alternative filmmakers by going to CCP [Cultural Center of the Philippines] for special screenings. It was like hearing rumors that there's going to be this or that screening—no internet back then! To watch his films was a real adventure. To be honest, I didn't understand his kind of filmmaking at first. When ten people watch a film by Kidlat Tahimik, you get ten different versions of what the film is about. His kind of storytelling is, let's say, atmospheric, totally different from the kind of films I was used to. It took me awhile to appreciate because I was so exposed to the traditional and conventional kind of storytelling, and plot-oriented films. It was a violent shift. Kidlat and his films opened my mind to other perspectives of storytelling.

Therefore, Kidlat Tahimik and his films are still so very important to the film scene. He inspired many young filmmakers to take a different route, to experiment, and to use the tools of storytelling in a different way. He absolutely still has an influence on young film directors entering the scene in this decade. He's a master filmmaker. When you watch his films, you see that they are timeless. Any young filmmaker who's exposed to the filmmaking of Kidlat will definitely be inspired. I wish I could be like him.

When he makes his films, he makes them on his own terms. He's just the purest version of a filmmaker. He doesn't compromise. That's why I would definitely subscribe to the idea that Kidlat is the godfather of independent and alternative filmmaking in the Philippines. His works opened a gateway to alternative cinema, to independent filmmaking. That was what Kidlat Tahimik did for Philippine cinema. Filmmakers should be continuously exposed to the works of Kidlat Tahimik.

ED LEJANO

I was in senior high school when I saw a film by Kidlat Tahimik for the first time. Kidlat had just won an award for *Perfumed Nightmare* at Berlinale. When I first saw *Perfumed Nightmare*, it opened a portal in me because I realized there's another form of making movies. I thought, "Okay, he's an artist. He has a different way of making movies outside of the studio system." At that time, we didn't talk about independent films yet, because the concept of indie was not yet clear. It was a new way of making movies, which at that point, I've only seen in short films. It was like a mosaic, what Kidlat used as a style. I thought, "Oh, this is what Third World cinema is!" He positioned himself as a postcolonial, Third World filmmaker with a distinct authorial voice.

He used unique Pinoy humor and a unique perspective on history and colonialism. It gave me a little pride. Because at that time, we were a poor country under a dictatorship. I thought, "So, there's validity in our existence, we have a voice that we can share. Perhaps other countries can relate to us."

Perfumed Nightmare opened this new view on our own culture, that maybe this will go somewhere using our Third World voice, and somehow, we can be recognized. I was trying to figure out why we were always depicted in exotic ways. Internationally, Philippine cinema was identified as neorealist—that we're making a virtue out of our poverty. Then came Kidlat with his different approach. He would use our colonial experiences as a platform for his amusements about our history, and the Filipino identity.

Most definitely, Kidlat had. During the late '70s, he set himself apart from other award-winning Filipino directors. They were working with and within the industry. But Kidlat was his own producer; he was his own cinema. And he deliberately stayed that way, was conscious about him being an outsider, and an unconventional experimental filmmaker. He was conscious that he was not for movie theaters but more for galleries or auditoriums, and other noncommercial environments.

Early on, he was already associated with big names like Herzog and Coppola. And so Kidlat did not go into the direction of Brocka or the other big Filipino directors at that time. Therefore, when the digital age came to be in the late '90s and early 2000s, it was easy for filmmakers using the digital technology to look up to Kidlat. I see a strong connection when digital Filipino features first came to be disseminated in film festivals. I see some influence on technical aspects, like other than the normal ways of funding. That's why I regard him as one of the key influences of the film scene.

Maybe Kidlat had an influence on film and art students, and visual and performance artists. They are quite familiar with his works. Maybe people in literature are familiar with his



work as well. Kidlat has a name for what his work represents, for the buzz words like subaltern, transnational, postcolonial, imagined community. But does he have an influence as far as popular movies and entertainment? I doubt that. Kidlat's influence is on those familiar with the art circles or the film circles.

Maybe nowadays, Kidlat's name has spread a bit among the common audience, and they maybe have some knowledge about him as a person. But they are most likely not familiar with his works, which are only for the high-brow film buffs. He's not a household name.

Kidlat definitely is regional. Because he uses that as part of his persona and filmic vocabulary. Whether he is a true spokesperson of regional cinema from the Cordilleras or not, I'm not so sure. What I see more in him is the Western-educated member of the Baguio arts community. He uses that Western education to put more layers to his persona as a filmmaker. With this, he becomes more than just regional, even more than a Filipino filmmaker. But that's the Philippines. Our identity is pierced with Spanish, American, Japanese, and god knows what influences. In a way, Kidlat is a representative of that element of the Philippines which has been open to artistic influences from outside.



ERIK MATTI

I first saw a film by Kidlat Tahimik when I was 18 years old, around 1989/1990, in my second year of college in Bacolod as a Mass Communication student. There was a group of guys from Mowelfund who was doing provincial immersions, talking about filmmaking and showing their short films. Part of the screenings was *Perfumed Nightmare*. The whole experience of watching films by Joey Agbayani, Raymond and Jon Red, animation from Roxlee was a weird moment. Of course, our only link to filmmaking was to narrative stuff. If you're from the countryside, the things that you get to see are quite limited.

I remember asking the Manila guys, "So what's the foundation of all these works?" The movie was a disjointed, experimental stuff, and just a series of images. I tried making sense of *Perfumed Nightmare*. It's an exploration of stuff, just going here and there with the camera. If you're from Manila, you're familiar with experimental stuff, you know the differences between the cinematic categories, right? But the Manila guys weren't helpful at all. They said, "Well, whatever you get from it, that's good. Whatever you think of it is valid." But I got nothing from it. What I was expecting was an explanation of where this or that was coming from.

What I took from this experience is the feeling that goes with it. Like, when a particular shot is framed in a particular way. Kidlat had all this very raw, strange angles. It just opens your mind to new things: what the camera can do, what lighting conditions can do, that you don't necessarily need to go for the Hollywood type of angles, and that there are other ways to see things. The wide angles, the fisheye lenses. You only see them with this kind of experimental work because they're too extreme. You ask yourself, "Wow, what does that lens do?" You start thinking about being a bit irreverent in the filmmaking approach. That's what it mainly told me.

Kidlat, nowadays, doesn't have much of an influence anymore. The major influence of Kidlat was in the generation of Raymond Red, Mac Alejandre, and Yam Laranas in the 1980s 'till the 1990s. Those were the guys who were immersed in Kidlat's works. They showed them what an underground filmmaker could possibly achieve, even without any money in the pocket. You just grab a camera and a few feet of negatives, and then you go out and shoot. But today, Kidlat's influence is no longer there.

Even more so with the ordinary audience. I doubt that Kidlat's films had or have any measurable impact on them. Knowledge about Kidlat's films doesn't go around. Not when I was in college and most particularly not now. It was only when I moved to Manila in 1991/'92 that I got to go and watch independent and experimental films at CCP and Mowelfund. But prior to that, none of us had any idea what directors like Kidlat were doing. Coming from the province, when you see a provincial setting, you're not that interested in the first place. When you see all this daily life stuff and it's something that you always see around you in the countryside day in and day out, then I think, "Do I have the patience for this?" As a normal audience, you never care about those films. With something as guerilla as Kidlat's films, where it just depicts reality in its barest sense, what the camera can capture at the very moment, and even if it's quirky and has a bit of humor, a bit tongue-in-cheek, you just don't have the patience for it.



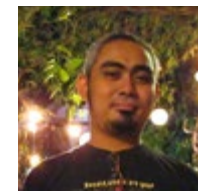
JET LEYCO

In college, I discovered alternative cinema when I was an intern for Khavn de la Cruz and Lav Diaz. I was studying Communication Arts. Once, Roxlee and Kidlat Tahimik showed up. There was also a talk at Ateneo de Manila University where Kidlat showed up, and he talked about his filmmaking. At that time, he was filming *Balikbayan #1*. I also saw parts of his documentary *Bakit Dilaw ang Gitna ng Babag-bari?* It's hard to access Kidlat's films unless you go to Baguio and personally borrow his films.

I'm impressed by Kidlat's energy, and the specific way he creates films. It's overwhelming. He can do any film he wants, even without financial assistance. He can do a period film like *Balikbayan* about the explorations of Magellan. I always hear other directors say they would need a lot of time and resources to do this or that film. But Kidlat just does it. He does his films because of his energy. And his efforts pay off. This kind of cinema reflects alternative filmmaking: you do what you got to do, even when there's no budget; you only have the camera and your ideas. And that's it! This work attitude influenced me a lot.

Sometimes, a filmmaker thinks he needs to have a grant. But if you have ideas of how to get around your budget constraints or think ahead and cope with your problems in creative ways, you can do it. Khavn can do it. I can do it. That's how Kidlat does it, too. And that's why it's justified to call Kidlat the father of Pinoy independent cinema. For example, you can see it with the works of Khavn, and the earlier works of Raya Martin. They are students of Kidlat. You can see it in the first two films of John Torres as well. It's about the process of making a film without a lot of external forces like a studio or people interested only in money-making. Nowadays, people rely too much on technology. They think that if they cannot work with proper high-tech equipment, they will be compromising their work. Instead, one should maximize all the possible processes of filmmaking. You as a filmmaker, a director, a writer, and a cinematographer need to maximize all elements to achieve whatever your vision is.

I wish a lot more independent filmmakers could see Kidlat's films, or, at least, read or talk about him. When I ask my students about him, they tell me they haven't heard of Kidlat, nor have they seen his films. The impact of Kidlat on the contemporary generation is like zero. That's why I also don't think that Kidlat has an influence on young filmmakers from the regions. They don't have access to academic facilities and they cannot access Kidlat's films. There's no knowledge about him in the provinces. Maybe when those guys come to the big cities like Cebu or Davao they will have an idea. Hopefully, they learn the process of this kind of filmmaking, wherein one gets results even without the academic background and all the modern technology. I wish that a lot more people get to know Kidlat's works and the experimental scene.



GUTIERREZ "TENG" MANGANSAKAN II

I first encountered a film by Kidlat Tahimik in 1995 during the celebration of the centennial of cinema. I was a student at that time. I went to Manila from Davao to study. That was the start of my love affair with Kidlat's films. I tried to invite him to Davao that year to screen his films. But because of some circumstances, we were not able to push through with this. In the following year, when I was studying film at the Mowelfund, I saw more of his films, and I was able to meet him personally. From then on, we established a personal relationship.

I love the rawness and playfulness of Kidlat's films. The one thing that got me interested was his questioning of his identity and the process of looking for the Philippine identity. During that time, the question of identity was also very important for me. I became politicized then. So, I was not only starting to find my Philippine identity but also struggling for my Moro identity. *Perfumed Nightmare* gave me the idea that sometimes you don't have to search far for things as profound as identity. Maybe you just have to look within yourself, within your family and your neighborhood, and you will find a lot of things there. As a filmmaker and as a writer, that was very important. It helped me to look for things in my films, things that are close to my heart, things that are bothering me and inspiring me at the same time. Among all other Filipino filmmakers, it was Kidlat Tahimik who influenced me to go into that direction.

Kidlat came at a very important moment for Philippine cinema in the 1970s when he did *Perfumed Nightmare* and it was recognized in Berlin. It was a time of great reckoning of the sociopolitical value of cinema and cinema as part of a bigger sociopolitical and economic structure. Kidlat was there to show us that we can make films the way he did. After him came Nick Deocampo. The way he made films also showed me that I could explore the other faces of my identity. I credit Kidlat as the ideological godfather of the Philippine independent cinema. Until now, his films are very relevant, especially his questioning of colonialism and the very notion of identity. He stayed relevant over the years and up to this very moment, especially against the backdrop of the superficial notion of Filipino identity. Kidlat wants us

to go deeper into our psyche, even into our painful past, and into things that are not so kind and good. In order to know ourselves, we need to have the courage to go into that direction.

Kidlat once said one very good thing to me, “It’s not enough that you listen to your *duende*, you must trust that *duende* to lead you to the right direction.” This has been my guiding light. That’s how I try to make films and to write. I listen to myself and listen to my inner voice, and let that voice dictate my cinema and my writings. Maybe by trusting and listening, it’s going to bring me to the right direction. If I can do that, I would be able to answer my question of who I am as a person, as a Filipino, and as a Moro. Because being Moro and Filipino is you trusting your inner self, and this will make good things for you.

ARNEL MARDOQUIO

Honestly, I have not seen any of Kidlat Tahimik’s films. That I have not watched any of his films is very unfortunate on my part. In my opinion, Kidlat as a filmmaker has no impact in the regions, especially not in Mindanao. Teng Mangansakan is the first in our generation of filmmakers in Mindanao to have been influenced by him. On the other hand, it is interesting to know how Kidlat’s regional sensibility connects to the national geography of ideas and the contemporary struggles independent filmmakers in the Philippines are facing until now. We not only create films, we also help create the alternative industry.

Kidlat Tahimik might be a product of a blown-up media hype as he was framed by European media as a Filipino icon. Based on the reviews of his films, I would surmise that he made art films that are accentuated by European aesthetics to deconstruct Filipino sensibilities in a way that pleases European audiences. That Kidlat’s name gained enough popularity to last until now can be interpreted as his films are superior in some sense.

I’ve met Kidlat many times in social gatherings, and my impression is that he has a warm personality. He always talks in English; it’s his mother tongue. Maybe he speaks globally and he thinks locally. His *maliit na duende*, therefore, is kind of a good philosophy to listen to and to promote—especially to the young generations—for it encourages regional voices to find their own niche.

However, the non-availability of his films in our country is a constant problem in making up one’s mind about Kidlat as an artist. His films remain obscured; as a filmmaker, he did not make any effort to make his films available even in selected circuits. Now that he is managing a cinematheque in Baguio, there should be no more excuse for not programming his films in all the other regional cinematheques managed by the FDCP, so that many more people could get introduced to his films. The government should support indie filmmakers like Kidlat Tahimik.

BRILLANTE MENDOZA

My first personal encounter with Kidlat Tahimik was when he watched one of my films. I cannot tell anymore which precisely that was. Maybe it was *Manoro* (2006) because I remember that Kidlat liked that film so much. My first encounter with one of his films was only recently. I was not exposed to Kidlat’s cinema and it had no influence on my own development as a filmmaker. There was no influence at all on my aesthetics or my cinematic sensibilities. Of course, I heard of him before, when I went to Mowelfund. That must have been around 1999.

Kidlat definitely has had an influence as a filmmaker and was an inspiration to a lot of experimental and independent filmmakers after him. I agree that he should be recognized as the father of independent cinema in the Philippines. He was the first to work this way. I watched *Perfumed Nightmare* recently. Having made that kind of film during that time is amazing. It’s a classic. For this alone, Kidlat has earned appreciation.

Unfortunately, the younger generation and the young filmmakers now don’t look up to Kidlat that much. Because the young filmmakers are into form and technology. They’re not into content and storytelling. They do films to be recognized and known. That’s their route. Most of the young filmmakers now have the wrong attitude toward their craft. Everything comes so easy for them, because of the technology. That’s why their recognition for the people who are supposed to give them inspiration, for instance Kidlat, is just not there. Kidlat doesn’t get the attention he deserves. Ask any young filmmaker if they have seen any of Kidlat’s films. They haven’t.



PAM MIRAS

I first saw a film by Kidlat back at college in UP. It was *Perfumed Nightmare*. I liked the visuals and the storytelling and how it was experimental. But it didn’t speak to me in an emotional way, like the films of narrative directors like Mike de Leon or Ishmael Bernal. But it’s the canon when you talk about Philippine experimental films that Kidlat Tahimik is there.

I can’t say so much about Kidlat’s direct influence on the works of other filmmakers. The closest to him I can see in the scene now is Khavn de la Cruz. Though even other experimental filmmakers like Gym Lumbera or John Torres are not so much on Kidlat’s colorful, mystical, visceral, historical level. But Kidlat is very supportive of filmmakers in general. I remember there was a time when I was in Baguio with a friend. We were talking about our films. I was doing a short film, which I couldn’t finish, because I didn’t like how it was going, and there wasn’t enough money to finish it. Kidlat’s advice: “That’s all right. Take a break. And then come back to it.” I know a lot of filmmakers, whenever they’re in Baguio, they drop by his house, and he’s willing to listen to whomever and offer support for their filmmaking.

Kidlat is not as active as Teng Mangansakan’s group in Mindanao or the Visayan group in bringing together films and filmmakers from Baguio, from Ifugao and the Mountain Province. In that sense, he’s not active in supporting a specific regional scene or regional filmmaking as a whole. He just makes his films. But he supports filmmakers, visual artists, all sorts of artists in different ways. It’s not about bringing them around. He’s creating awareness about ways of doing things. His whole body of work reflects that. When I was growing up I was fascinated, because he was the first filmmaker in the scene of this kind of experimental filmmaking who had a name. He’s some kind of rock star. Even if he doesn’t have this machinery—just living the way he does is already a big influence by itself. Look at him and how he lives, and you automatically get the regional awareness of what’s going on in the North. However, that’s not something that he plans.

But speaking in general, Kidlat’s influence and knowledge about his works are very limited. Maybe the young crowd which usually attends Cinemalaya, they’re aware of Kidlat, but most possibly have never have seen one of his films. They have no idea of how experimental he is. They see some weird editing—and that’s experimental for them. Kidlat is more extreme.

RAYMOND RED

I remember hearing the name Kidlat Tahimik as early as my high school years. I was in the Philippine High School for the Arts, where I was studying visual arts. I heard about Kidlat’s name in connection with experimental cinema and independent filmmaking. But I wasn’t into filmmaking then. I never imagined being a filmmaker. Only some years later, around 1982, when I was at the University of the Philippines’ Film Center, where I joined the Cinema as Art workshop headed and run by Nick Deocampo, did I want to become a filmmaker. It was there, in the experimental film workshop, where we had the opportunity to watch *Perfumed Nightmare*. They also let us watch *Sinong Lumikha ng Yoyo? Sinong Lumikha ng Moon Buggy?* (1982).

I still very vividly remember seeing those films. The experience struck me because I never imagined making films in that approach. I’ve never seen any film like that before. And so, that was an eye-opener. We learned about what Kidlat had already achieved in the late ’70s: having *Perfumed Nightmare* screened in international festivals, and getting it picked up by Coppola’s Zoetrope Studio. It was



something we all aspired as young filmmakers. Recognizing somebody like Kidlat Tahimik was amazing. He was like an enigmatic figure. He was like a phantom, also because of his very mysterious name.

Eventually, I did get to meet him. It was very exciting to meet this great source of my early inspiration. I belonged to that Super-8 generation of the early '80s, which kind of jumpstarted a movement. That's how we described ourselves. We called it a movement because it was a conscious, concerted effort. We all believed in trying to create a new cinema outside the mainstream. It was pure intention that drove us. At the same time, we had our inspirations. We were studying the powerful film directors of that time, like Mike de Leon, Lino Brocka, and Ishmael Bernal. But Kidlat stood out; he was like the epitome, or the perfect embodiment, of what an independent filmmaker is.

When I got to know him and we became friends, he invited us to his house in Baguio. There was a time when a lot of the young Mowelfund filmmakers were invited to Baguio to do screenings, and Kidlat would open his doors to us. We would hang out in his house and stay overnight there. We all developed a good relationship with him. About then was when I realized he was totally independent. He had all this equipment at home: he had his sound recording equipment, and a flatbed Steenbeck for editing 16mm film. He was self-sufficient, all the way to sound, except for the film lab. He would go down to Manila to process his films. It was so inspiring for us to know that there was a filmmaker like him. But at the same time, he's not selfish. He was holding workshops; he organized this group called the Sunflower Film Cooperative in Baguio. They started their own movement over there.

Imagine, an 18-year-old kid starting out in filmmaking, and here I met one of my inspirations, a legend—Kidlat was already a legend, as early as then. You befriended him, and he invited you to his house—that was quite amazing.

I do know Kidlat is a purist. He has created his cinema. And if he finds his audience, then he's fulfilled with that. But if he only finds a niche audience he's also happy with it. He remains one of the true independent and alternative filmmakers. And yet he's been named a National Artist. That's an amazing achievement. Being considered is already a big honor and boost for independent cinema! Cooler than any of the filmmakers of this generation. In the past two decades, there has been no one like him. He's a living example of his own art. He's definitely the first of his kind, but he's probably also the last of his kind. Kidlat deserves a retrospective, and a reintroduction to a kind of festival crowd: cinephiles. People need to know about him and his work.



SHERAD ANTHONY SANCHEZ

I haven't seen any of Kidlat's films when I decided to become a filmmaker. When I started, Kidlat was not in my consciousness. When I decided to make films, I immersed myself in European cinema classics and world cinema, but what informed me was Hollywood. I don't think I have made a film that reflects a palpable influence of Kidlat.

It's not that I don't like Kidlat's films. Not because the films are bad, but because I see them as coming from a macho logic. They follow what I call a *kanto* boy logic, and *kanto* boy aesthetics, like when you have these *titos* drinking outside their houses, hanging out, and late at night you hear them philosophize. How they talk, how they formulate their logic, I see that very much in Kidlat's works.

His films remind me very much of my *tito* talking to me about politics, film, and globalization. Even the order of logic and the humor—because most of the time they're drinking—they come off to me as macho. That doesn't sit well with me. It's not that Kidlat's films didn't make an impact on me or didn't affect me. Of course I had fun.. I was conscious enough to realize, "No, I'm not a filmmaker like that." I appreciate that this culture of *kanto titos* drinking and philosophizing has made its way into cinema. It certainly has that Filipino warmth. But then again, that's the kind of culture I'm keeping myself away from.

I can't say if there's a direct influence of Kidlat on the film scene or on particular directors. But in terms of semblance of aesthetics? Yes, I see that with John Torres, Khavn, and also parts of the Mowelfund group like the old Mowelfund short films from the '80s by Raymond Red, Roxlee, Cesar Hernandez. I mean, Raymond's *Ang Magpakailanman* (1982) is more Dziga Vertov than Kidlat Tahimik. But there's a familiar vernacular experimentation expressed in those works. Nowadays? Younger experimental directors like Gym Lumera, Malay Javier, and Timmy Harn—did they get something from Kidlat? Is it the mode of production? I consider Kidlat like a film essayist. But we don't have a tradition following him, there's no line of successors.

I don't think that Kidlat has any influence on the broader audience. I've been teaching students in various places, and Kidlat is rarely mentioned. But Kidlat surely is part of the text. When you talk about

Philippine cinema, specifically independent cinema, Kidlat is always the topic. The problem is that thinking is exclusive to Manila. Because the understanding of independent filmmaking in various regions is different, it's quite basic. They have a hard time understanding current independent cinema; they will have a harder time trying to track its history.

I don't know if Kidlat plays a specific role in the context of regional cinema. I can't say much about the contemporary scene in Mindanao. I'm not familiar with this generation of filmmakers. But in my generation, there was definitely no influence. For example, in Cebu, I don't think they got it from Kidlat because when they started making their short films, most of them were naïve filmmakers.

There's this kind of naivety where they introduce a kind of vernacular, local culture, and humor. Keith Deligero would probably best represent this kind of Cebuano filmmaking. He believes in the same kind of principles you find with Kidlat: this certain kind of humor, of politicization. His films also work more like essays than narrative films. Keith is another representation of this *tito kanto* culture that is present everywhere in the Philippines. That's the only line with which I can connect Keith with Kidlat. But that's also how our government is run: by *titos* who, after a drinking session, decide that they have a say in politics.



RICHARD SOMES

I became a filmmaker over 12 years ago. But it was only seven or eight years ago that I saw a film by Kidlat Tahimik. It was a tribute to him, in connection with a filmmaking class. I was invited, and they showed *Perfumed Nightmare*. It's a great film because I was able to see how and from where Kidlat started. It is not so much his techniques in filmmaking which influenced me, but his ingenuity and originality. The insight on how Kidlat Tahimik's mind works left a great impression on me. He found his own voice. I envy him for that.

Kidlat's influence is mostly in his attitude to filmmaking, how he's being true to his culture and his storytelling. Other filmmakers are mostly influenced by Kidlat's passion and free spirit. They want to do their films in the same way. They want to go on their journey as an artist with a free spirit and want to produce a body of work with a free spirit. That's the essence of his craft and artistry. Kidlat threw away all those things which deeply influenced us: Hollywood, the commerce behind it, and the expectations of an audience whose overwhelming majority is only fed and conditioned by the formulas of the industry. All this doesn't mean anything to Kidlat. He just follows his heart, and what he thinks is pure art.

This kind of cultural sensibility has had a lot of positive effects for aspiring filmmakers, then and now. Listening to this voice of Kidlat reminds us to be purer, to be honest, to stick with this idea that there are a million different stories to be told and that there are a million different ways those stories can be told. Beside genre filmmaking in the mainstream, there is a genuine, personal, and cultural way of filmmaking. Kidlat set the example for this.

His example for regional filmmaking is to go back and look at your own culture, to feel, to sense your environment, to hold it, and to immerse in it. You realize that there's a lot of original ideas which you might find only in your very own culture and nowhere else, based on the influence of your regional environment. And you realize, our cultures have the same Filipino voice. They just have different perspectives and faces and practices. There's the magic, and the mysticism. Kidlat paved the way for the recognition of the diversity of our local cultures. He is one of those filmmakers who pushed that and showed us the way.

Kidlat truly raised the bar for what we call alternative or indie filmmaking. At the same time, he challenged it. And he pushed you as a filmmaker. You cannot stay content. You have to keep your own work authentic. You have to go back to the specifics. You need to go back to what is the most common to you and the most familiar to the people of your region and to us as Filipinos. We tend to forget that because we are more influenced by Western sensibilities. That's what Kidlat Tahimik tells us. You cannot deny that Kidlat paved the way. He pushed the boundaries.



JOHN TORRES

Perfumed Nightmare, the first film by Kidlat Tahimik that I saw, remains memorable for me. I was in school in Ateneo. Kidlat had a screening and a lecture there. I had a sense that the filmmaker was someone I very much could enjoy communicating with. I was so happy. I felt a strong affinity toward *Perfumed Nightmare*. It freed my mind. It seemed like the film had so much freedom. It had an element of play that liberated me and the process of my own filmmaking. I thought you always needed to make a film in a traditional sense, from a script, with a plan. Watching *Perfumed Nightmare* just reminded me that you can

indeed be unsure about all those things, you can just go there and film, and make a raw but very heart-filled film.

Kidlat had very much an influence on me as a person and as an artist. His use of sound and dialogue, and the way he stages his scenes struck me, like filming is not such a precious thing to do in the way that you need to have a big crew. You didn't need to make the act of filming an event that caused you a lot of worries. It made me love and explore the process of filmmaking.

With even just contemporary filmmakers like Raya Martin or Khavn de la Cruz, who have admitted to having Kidlat as an influence on their works, with even just this influence on two important filmmakers from this generation, who are working in the alternative, experimental filmmaking scene, it already shows that Kidlat has had a significant impact, that his contribution to filmmaking in the Philippines is strong and still vivid. We can chase so many traces of influence back to Kidlat. He opened the road for us, made it possible for us to make films in our own ways and to not be ashamed of our own points of view.

His concept of the *sariling duende* is very important. It influenced us a lot in a way that we would never resort to making films the way others do—for better or for worse. Even though it isn't guaranteed that we will make good films, at least the exploration of the process, the freedom, and the playfulness that Kidlat has always reminded us to pursue every time we do the act of filmmaking, are enough encouragement for us. This encouragement is a huge contribution to the Philippine film scene as a whole.



PAOLO VILLALUNA

The first time I saw a film by Kidlat Tahimik was in 2000. It was a celebration of world cinema on national TV on channel 2. They programmed independent films and showed Kidlat's *Perfumed Nightmare* and *Bakit Dilaw ang Gitna ng Bahag-hari?* They looked like documentaries but still felt like kind of a narrative. They were shown with Nick Deocampo's *Oliver* (1983). Can you imagine the impression those works made on a young man like me? That was when I decided to become a filmmaker. My next move was to become a member of batch 2000 at Mowelfund and to immerse myself in the workshop on filmmaking.

A few years later, I had the opportunity to work with Kidlat. The Japanese filmmaker Kiji Imaizumi was shooting [*Abong: Small Home* (2003)] in Manila and mostly in Baguio. Kidlat was one of his producers. I had to replace the production manager so I was able to work with Kidlat in Baguio. Before I met him, I thought he would be a strange guy. But to my surprise, I found him to be very easy to work with, and a nice guy. Although, I was also surprised to learn that he was pretty rich. Based on Kidlat's cinema, I thought he would be a guy who's poor and wanted to express himself and just used what small resources he had. Obviously, it was a philosophical and conscious decision to work the way he did. Given the money he must have had, he could have made the usual narrative films. But he had other things in mind and chose differently. That's when I discovered that you can have your own unique voice in cinema. And Kidlat had a very particular one.

Because Kidlat is so influential in filmmaking, people had to put a title on him. Thus, naming him the godfather of independent cinema. I would rather call him the grandfather of independent filmmaking in the Philippines, since I see Nick Deocampo as the father. Kidlat was influential to young filmmakers of my generation, 2000 onwards. But I don't see that influence with the millennials. His influence is based on handed-down reputation because the millennials haven't seen his films. It's nearly impossible to see them. Plus, the recent film community is so scattered. I don't see a common ground, a kind of movement, like what we of the year 2000 generation has. Is Kidlat ripe for a rediscovery? Most definitely! I hope it's just a matter of time 'till Kidlat's films will be seen again.

I wouldn't go as far to say that the Filipino independent scene can't be what it is without Kidlat. However, I would strongly stress that regional cinema would not exist in the way it now does without Kidlat. Prior to him, regional cinema had been mainstream, following the mainstream narrative agenda. But then, because Kidlat talked about his region, particularly Ifugao, and adopted the image of the young brown Filipino, people became aware of the value of their very own regional culture.

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