

# A Round Table Discussion on Poetics and Practice of Film Criticism in the Philippines

## Introduction

So much has changed in the landscape of Philippine cinema since the first decade of the twenty-first century. The 2000s saw, at the outset, a significant decline in celluloid film production and then, quite fortuitously, the rise of a predominantly digital cinema. Film festivals as well as film education programs began to multiply in this new landscape where “anyone can be a filmmaker.” Supporters and viewers of Philippine films—primarily cinephiles, students and academics, and the intelligentsia—also became more active as commentators and reviewers, writing in relatively accessible and more interactive new media spaces.

What became clear in the period of transition, especially between 2004 and 2014, is how much our purview of Philippine cinema and the vocabulary we use to talk about it as a distinct field has been influenced by film critics in the last quarter of the twentieth century. For example, online and magazine articles and television features are replete with references to the golden age, alternative and independent films, the notion of the death of the film industry, and the idea that cinema is related to revolutions and to the nation, all of which were ideas put forward prior to the new century. Such epistemic categories employed in a very particular mode of evaluating film are what separates criticism from mere commentary. Indeed, the work of film criticism has been and still is not only a para-site of cinema but a primary site of struggle and contestation for meaning and direction. Some

of the defining critical writings before and during the rise of digital cinema in the Philippines have not only made distinctions among the aesthetic and formal qualities of individual works; they have also made and continue to make ethico-political pronouncements about Philippine history, culture, and society.

In 2014, as the digital era was shaping up more clearly, I thought it was a good time to reflect on the changing landscape of film criticism and to listen to critics, who have been actively writing for decades or who have been members of organized critics groups, on their thoughts on the history and development of film criticism in the Philippines. To this end, I invited a number of film critics to address the following broad questions:

- What has been the history of film criticism like in the Philippines?
- What have been the principles and presuppositions of your own critical practice, through the years?
- In your view as a critic, where is film criticism now or where should it be going?

Seven critics responded affirmatively to the invitation, and so the Office of Research and Publication organized the round table discussion (RTD) held on March 19, 2014 at the Plaridel Hall, University of the Philippines, Diliman. Three of the critics, Bienvenido Lumbera, Nicanor G. Tiongson, and Rolando B. Tolentino, are members of the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino (MPP). The MPP, the first organized film critics group in the Philippines, was established in 1976, with the avowed agenda of “making audiences more critical of the films which, whether they realize it or not, have an impact on their lives” and “giving producers systematic feedback on their products.” They give out the annual Urian Awards, and, apart from their respective books, some of their film writings are collected in the *Urian Anthology* series (1983, 2001, 2010, 2013). Three other critics, Patrick D. Flores, Eulalio R. Guieb III, and Choy S. Pangilinan, are members of the Young Critics Circle (YCC) Film Desk, a group which also holds an annual citation in film achievement. The YCC, founded in 1990, “stakes its claims in advocating a strategic and interventive agenda for a transdisciplinary film criticism that is responsive to the needs of the moment and responsible for its future aspirations.” Some of their film writings are collected in *Sampung Taong Sine: Philippine Cinema 1990-1999* (2002) and *Sining ng Sineng Filipino* (2009). The last participating critic is independent film scholar, Nick Deocampo, who was editor of *Movement* magazine in the 1980s and 1990s and author of three books on film history.

The papers that the critics read in the RTD were subsequently revised and are published here for the first time, according to their original alphabetical

sequence of presentation. The video coverage of the RTD, which includes the open forum with the audience, is available for viewing at <http://www.plarideljournal.org/videos/>.

## **Bien! Oh, Bien! Where is Philippine Film History?**

Nick Deocampo

This round-table discussion has given me the opportunity to reflect on the kind of film criticism I write. Mine is a type of criticism which comes from my historical writing. It critiques the way cinema has been framed by local film historians as something that is already ideologically constructed as “Filipino,” rather than frame it as a material phenomenon wrought with complexities rooted in material reality that complicates its identity. In this presentation, my singular focus on the historiography of Dr. Bienvenido Lumbera, who I will fondly call Bien throughout this essay, will serve as an example of my critical writing. This essay is a short version of a longer one that I am writing on the history of film criticism in the Philippines.

Before I proceed, allow me to state my approach towards film criticism. As mentioned, the criticism I write results from my historiographic work. More significantly, my criticism is informed by a “cultural-materialistic” framework. It is a reaction towards any form of “idealism” that locates culture change in human systems of thought rather than in material conditions. This is a strange observation as some of our historians manifest progressive thought in their criticisms, although I maintain that they remain as idealist critics in their understanding of the country’s cinema history. Their idealism lies in their belief that cinema is already essentially Filipino. Their writings exude with a priori assumptions regarding cinema’s identity while superseding the material evolution forming cinema’s phenomenological growth.

Contrasting myself from their position, I take the view that before we call cinema Filipino, we must first ascertain the material origins of the medium. In short, I take a materialist, rather than an essentialist, position with regards to cinema’s identity. In doing so, we may be surprised to discover how non-native forces and foreign influences helped construct the cinema we have come to cherish as our “native” cinema, our “national” cinema. This kind of criticism can only result from a close study of the medium’s material history. Its process entails a focus on observable, measurable phenomena (the *etic* approach) rather than on an ideational (or *emic*) approach practiced by historians who take a less than holistic approach towards their study of the medium. As a critic who believes on the materiality of cinema, I adhere to the belief that technological and economic aspects of cinema play a primary role in shaping its identity and development, not the other way

around. With cultural materialism, I aim to understand the effects made by technological, economic and demographic factors in molding cinema's structure and superstructure in scientific rather than ideational methods or ideological constructs.

My film criticism therefore is concerned with "historical process." My writings have shown that preceding the formation of film's identity is the material condition shaping its evolution and construction. In the case of cinema, I find any pronouncement of Filipino cinema highly problematic. Although difficult, I prefer to question such ideational claim and re-configure it to be one of inquiry by asking questions like: "What is Filipino in cinema?" "When did cinema become Filipino?" Instead of taking a nativist path that locates cinema in the mindset of critics (the emic approach), I take a stand to inquire about the growth of cinema in the country based on observable and measurable reality as mainly done by historians (the etic approach).

This difference in approach can be seen in the perspectives taken by our two camps. While earlier writings have placed the emphasis on the study of Philippine cinema on national identity—as if cinema was already Filipino even during its initial stages of development—I re-state the issue by proposing that we study first how cinema became Filipino. As a historian (from which my criticism is derived), I am concerned with how cinema came *to be* Filipino, investigating its process of *becoming* in order to deduce its state of *being*. This for me is a better option than to merely accept cinema as already Filipino. It is a belief that fuels my writing of a five-volume history of cinema in the country.

To illustrate the process of historical criticism I practice, allow me to focus on the writings of Dr. Bienvenido Lumbera. The reason I chose Bien's historiographic writings is because he was among the first to present a clear program of inquiry into film historiography among local film scholars. It has to be acknowledged that Bien is among the first who can be called a "film historian." He was the first to embark in writing self-reflexive articles on film history. But having said these, I hope I will be allowed, especially by Bien himself, to constructively critique his historical construction as it is wanting in its investigation and therefore problematic in its framing of cinema's identity.

To start, I would like us to recall Bien's two seminal essays that showed his interest in film historiography. In 1976, Bienvenido Lumbera wrote a seminal article in *Sagisag* entitled, "Kasaysayan at Tunguhin ng Pelikulang Pilipino" ["The History and Prospects of the Filipino Film"].<sup>1</sup> In the article, one can already see his major concerns regarding the medium's history: what forces shaped local films and what were its prospects for development. Serving as a major undercurrent in his article is the theme of "nationalism," one that he would personally espouse in many of his writings in literature

and cinema.<sup>2</sup> Five years later, Bien wrote in *Diliman Review* another article, “Problems in Philippine Film History.” It deals with problems in Filipino film history, continuing his running theme of finding in film a site for native identity.<sup>3</sup>

Although his first article makes mention of history, it is, disappointingly, less about history than criticism. The critic-turned-historian ruminates more about the contextual nature of local cinema’s growth. But while bemoaning the retarding “effects” made by forces like Hollywood on local cinema, he fails to concretely provide us with material evidences to convincingly prove his point. At best, his essay provides an opportunity to construct Philippine cinema as a subject of historical inquiry and this he does in self-assured ways that cannot be mistaken to be other than being “nativist.” He is able to do it by contraposing native cinema against alien forces but which, sadly, fails to unmask their tacit ways of colonial cultural subjugation. His article could have been more liberating if only he had been more of a historian than a critic. Vacillating between his two roles, as critic he gives us a critique of the “effects” cast by foreign influences but as historian, he falls short in providing evidentiary proofs as to why Filipino cinema remains underdeveloped, except for his general statements about imported Hollywood technology and western influences on local culture. One issue we can tease out as well is that of “dependence,” a topic which Bien, as critic, abhors. But how we can get local cinema out of a state of dependency, it would have been helpful if Bien has provided us with answers to questions like: How is native cinema dependent on foreign influences—technologically, aesthetically, financially? What social dynamics allow this dependence to prosper? Answers to these questions can provide us with concrete, material evidences that will make us realize that the much-vaunted identity that is Philippine cinema is a myth.

By not providing material details of our country’s dependence on foreign film technology and capital and their local machinations, we are unable to know under what foreign *and* colonial conditions does our native cinema wage its struggle to become the “national” cinema that we claim it to be. In failing to know this it will be hard for us to understand, and perhaps, to “liberate,” our cinema against the hegemonic control of such an “alien” medium. Our unproblematized popular acceptance of a “national/ist” cinema makes us fail to account for the foreign (or colonial) aspects of a western medium that is continually shaping its local clone. While we note that Bien’s nationalist film history has been at the core of his critical thinking, we also note that this has limited his critical perspective. His notion of a “national” cinema forms only half of the argument for a liberative understanding of cinema. His lack of articulation to account for the other half of this cinema—what may be deemed as its “non-nationalist,” or foreign,

colonial, “non-native,” western, international side—makes it difficult for us to achieve a holistic understanding of the real conditions and material state of this native cinema, as well as the actual oppression and struggle it needs to overcome.

It is in his second article, “Problems in Philippine Film History,” where Bien embraces the task which historians do best: engaging in historical periodization. But in doing so, two historical accounts of great importance are ignored as he excises them from historical memory, perhaps by force of his nationalist compulsion? Not surprisingly, these two events cover periods of foreign colonization—a topic that appears strictly out of the ambit of Bien’s nationalist discourse. The first are the initial twenty years of film’s colonial origins and formative beginnings under the Spanish and American colonizers, and the other, the war interregnum under Japanese military rule. Sadly omitted in the first is a whole chapter of early film history that Bien dismisses as a “veritable pre-history.”<sup>4</sup> By ignoring the colonial beginnings of cinema and branding it merely as “pre-history,” the effect that is created to one who reads his essay is that of film being already Filipino from the start.<sup>5</sup> By being selective of which dates to represent film’s originary “events,” to the naming of which “men” to represent landmark breakthroughs in introducing the medium, down to the choice of what “films” to pioneer the beginning of this cinema—all these point to a history that favors film’s *native* “emanation,” while choosing to be silent about the greater *material* forces—mostly foreign—fueling its advance in the country, i.e. the so-called “colonial” and foreign attributes counting among them technology, capital and modes of production.

Like choosing one’s memory of a past, Bien too becomes selective in his process, desiring only to construct a native cinema. He omits the crucial formative years that need rightly to be seen as colonial and internationalist. One must realize that this early film period—no matter how problematic for a historian to articulate, or even how “politically wrong” for a nationalist to adopt as a position—became the bedrock for what, only in time, would become the Filipino cinema we presently know. Bien’s framing becomes tainted with nativism as it constructs a history favoring only a local perspective, at the expense of actual material realities revealing of local cinema’s foreign dependencies. This makes Bien’s historiography inadequate. His nationalist ideological framing of film history, which silences its colonial origins and ties, is only able to tell us half of local cinema’s story, and thus, also half of its history. The other half aches to be told if we were to know all sides of our history.

I can mention two examples that will show the historical omissions Bien made and they can serve to prove my point that in their denial, Bien missed out telling us the other half of our local film history. One is about

the contributions made by American pioneers in industrializing the studio system in the country and the other is the period of World War II. In failing to name Western personalities who caused the industrialization of local filmmaking that served as the groundwork for the emergence of the Tagalog movie industry, Bien's article instead extols a set of native accomplishments, such as the rise of local studios like the pre-war X'Otic, Excelsior, Sampaguita, and LVN. He fails to mention that their growth was merely spurred by the establishment of Philippine Films set up by two Americans George Harris and Eddie Tait in 1933. It also served as a marked beginning of the country's reliance on foreign film importation. It is through the silencing of examples like this that makes it difficult for us to know how our native cinema became highly dependent on colonial ties, enough to question the native-ness of this "national" cinema. In brief, it was foreign capital, technology, and aesthetic influences which dictated the formation of the larger base of this nascent local movie industry's material and cultural infrastructure and growth.

There is another act of omission, again, made in a pattern involving the lack of articulation of colonial relations. While attributing to World War II the destruction of the local movie industry, the history of cinema during this brief period of Japanese military occupation remains un-articulated. During this short span of time, the native cinema, hardly out from the shadow of Hollywood, was cut off from its offshore source. The local film industry was at a virtual standstill. Yet, no matter how traumatic this period had been, I find it necessary to mention what happened to the nascent film industry in the hands of the occupying Japanese forces. In doing so, one will find out the reasons why within the decade after the devastating war the local movie industry almost "miraculously" recuperated from hopeless destruction and even reached its so-called "golden age" starting in the mid-Fifties. This phenomenal story is almost hard to believe. Why? Because by merely selecting major post-war cinematic achievements as Bien does, one still cannot see how local cinema reached its much-celebrated apotheosis. Nagging questions will hound anyone who will ask for reasons that can explain the immediate recovery of the native movie industry when the country, impoverished as it was after the war, razed to the ground by American bombs and torched by retreating Japanese soldiers, had no, repeat *no*, local manufacturing base for both the technology and the raw film that it needed to produce movies.

While those instances I mentioned are significant issues that need to be answered, I do not wish to create here an impression of favoring foreign film forces over the emerging national. Far from it. What is being vigorously proposed here is an effort to know materially what contending forces surrounded the growth of "native" cinema and not to ideationally and

ideologically isolate its growth from the western dependencies and foreign influences swaddling its development. This is a simple case of facing and presenting reality, and historians—as well as critics—have the supreme duty to do, as best they can, to present the varied sides of reality for a more truthful narration of “Philippine” film history. Otherwise, getting only one side of a story will result to a view that will be solipsistic, and in the end, impoverished of a truth that will be necessary to see the object of its study (i.e. native cinema) in its interdependent relations with a wider, global market.

Missing out on several salient historical points, Bien has positioned our understanding of an otherwise very international, very cosmopolitan, medium to that of the native. For this we are grateful to him for giving cinema a “native” face and we appreciate him for his efforts. He too has been amply rewarded and recognized with all the awards and recognitions that have been bestowed upon him. For it was indeed daring and “revolutionary” for him to insist during his time an agenda of “nationalism” while the world around him was consumed by western forces that shaped local economic, political, social, and cultural life. But there is another side to Bien Lumbera’s historicizing of cinema which this essay wants to bring out. It’s what he left out of his historical writings, and which we need to take cognizance of if we were to truly know our film history. This essay asks for a history that will be more true to what actually happened, without losing sight of the perspectives of the “local,” the “native,” and the “national.” This essay has been written for the sake of having a history that will make us attain a deeper historical understanding of the filmic phenomena that do not isolate Philippine cinema from the context of film’s international origins and continuing foreign domination from which this cinema continues to struggle and co-exist. We must address and redress issues beyond the borders of a nationalist understanding of film’s history that only limits our understanding of the medium as merely a strictly “local” affair.

In closing, I cast no doubt that Bien has gifted us with a film history which, despite its imperfections, has allowed us to build cinema’s past. By omitting some parts of that past, he actually asks us to participate in filling it up, in helping him with its construction, and in making this cinema whole. I am grateful that Bien did not write a perfect film history, for in that imperfection, all of us have a chance to contribute to its writing, have our own say in its intellectual re-building. It is how we add to Bien Lumbera’s project of constructing film’s history that we are able to affirm the importance of what he did, not only for the history of cinema but, more significantly, for our history as a people. In doing our share in this historical re-construction, we will see for ourselves the challenges, perhaps also the folly, in trying to attain *our* own cinema, and of writing about *our* own history: What it means

and how we can be responsible with having a cinema, and a history, that we can call *our* own. And this is by no means an easy task, knowing that we are all standing on the shoulders of a giant.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Bienvenido Lumbera, "Kasaysayan at Tunguhin ng Pelikulang Pilipino" (The History and Prospects of the Filipino Film), Sagisag, October 1976; reprinted in *The Urian Anthology: 1970-1979*, edited by Nicanor G. Tiongson, Manila: Manuel L. Morato, 1983.

<sup>2</sup>Many of Lumbera's literary output and film criticisms have espoused a strong nationalist bent, making him one of the country's foremost nationalist scholars and critics and which earned for him the title of National Artist for Literature in 2006. For his strong contributions to the growth of native writing and for "asserting the central place of the vernacular tradition in framing a national identity for modern Filipinos," he was also awarded the 1993 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Journalism, Literature, and Creative Communication Arts.

<sup>3</sup>Bienvenido Lumbera, "Problems in Philippine Film History," *The Diliman Review*, July-August, 1981; reprinted in *Readings in Philippine Cinema*, edited by Rafael Ma. Guerrero, Manila: Experimental Cinema of the Philippines, 1983.

<sup>4</sup>Lumbera, "Problems in Philippine Film History," 67.

<sup>5</sup>Other essays or books that tended to essentialize cinema as being "native" or "national" from its very beginning were those written by the likes of Salumbides.

## The Elusive Film Criticism

Patrick D. Flores

At the outset, I have four points on film criticism for this discussion.

I start with the very fundamental question: What is film criticism? From this question, let me sketch out four aspects.

First, film criticism is a mode of inquiry, which means it lays bare questions and problems.

Second, film criticism is a procedure of explanation; it is a technique of analysis.

Third, film criticism is a proposition of judgment; it is an act of discrimination, with the critic expected to be discriminating. This habit of being discriminating inevitably leads to decisions mediated by discrimination; we have to live with this uneasy (but also at times thrilling) feeling of power and the moral obligation, or ethical exigency, that should shape it.

Fourth, film criticism is a gesture of writing; film criticism is written, and so we need to know how it is written; or if the critic knows how to write, a kind of writing commensurate with the artistic temper, or at least aspiring to its always potential incipience.

In light of these aspects, I ask the question: How is film criticism different

from the other ways of generating knowledge about film in the form of, let us say, film theory or film history? Or more broadly, in the context of art history or art theory? I ask because I come from the field of art history and art theory of which film is a specific articulation. Moreover, how is film criticism to be distinguished from common opinion or commentary? I argue that film criticism assumes a level of specialization. I am committed to this requirement, to this moment of a specific intelligence. There should be a method and style of argumentation that underlies it and alongside it, a *disciplinal* accountability, a latitude for speculative thinking, and an academic desire. As we revisit the question of film criticism, so do we need to revisit our conceptualization of critique. What to our reckoning is critique? And for sure, we need to reevaluate our conceptualization of film that is intertwined with our conceptualization of critique. What is film? This is a fundamental point. Then, there is the material condition, its social thickness in which this particular film criticism plays out. There is thus this anxiety of context to bedevil and ground us, as well as an obligation to this inveterate context, and a commitment to this contingent context. Here, we discern a shift: from film criticism to critical practice in film. Instead of asking what film criticism is, we can ask instead: What does it mean to do film criticism? What does it entail? What is at stake?

To flesh out this context in the Philippines, we might want to ask these questions: Who writes film criticism? How is it written? For whom is it written and who reads it? Why is it written? And finally where is it written?

As a way to respond to the need to discuss the context of film criticism in the Philippines, we can provisionally trace certain strains in the history of the practice.

The first strain of film criticism in the Philippines is journalism. The second is award-giving, initially organized by writers and journalists. And then the third is the organization of critics, largely from the academe who consciously presented themselves to the public as critics. In this regard, we can sense a movement from the FAMAS to the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino. Within the latter and across the years of its existence since 1976, several approaches to film criticism have been spun, animated by wider inclinations in scholarship about Philippine social life, broadly conceived. For instance, we can point to the tendency to situate the Philippine film in the ambit of the history of culture and related art forms like literature and theater. And here arises the always vexing question of identity. So what is identity? Is it native? Can it be global or planetary? Is it local? How does it become national and should it always be nationalist? Cannot it be intercultural instead? When is it post-colonial?

The second strain is materialist critique and semiotics. Also, there has been an attempt to reconsider the way the Philippine film is situated within the matrix of colonial theater and therefore within a more extensive colonial project. In other words, there is a reassessment of the methodology of film criticism and the historiography that frames it.

The third strain is the analysis of the logic practice of film in relation to industrial dynamics and a possible aesthetic program based on bodies of work, formulae, stylistic sources, so-called enduring traits, and dispositions, and so on.

The fourth strain is the intervention of independent cinema that has introduced to the field a new way of sensing and describing film. It is likewise this independent cinema that could offer a link between film and contemporary art.

The final strain is an interdisciplinary and hopefully a transdisciplinary framework in which the critic converses with (and transforms) a range of disciplines, trajectories, and archives of reading to access or intuit the robust ecology of film. The Film Desk of the Young Critics Circle exemplifies this tendency.

In closing, I would like to talk about reviewing as a symptom of film criticism. It is the film reviewer that is accessible, and not the film critic who writes in journals and academic publications. This being said, the film critic can also be a reviewer but not without impediment, considering how popular formats discourage and even disparage complexity. The task for the reviewer who has sympathies with ideas and their history is to inscribe theory in the grammar of the review. Again, this is tough because I observe that in these parts, theory poses a threat to the cherished comforts among some readers and practitioners, and curiously among peers, too. The issue might be language that is regarded as readily apparent, consumable, easily recognizable and therefore reducible to preconception, to some self-fulfilling prophesy of a certain intolerance. If the critic's language is difficult, aesthetic, dense, elusive, ludic, it is dismissed as pedantic, obscure, academic, muddled. So the typical review becomes some kind of self-referential punditry and not critique. Actually, punditry is a more charitable term; platitude or a rant might be more precise. Critique or criticism is always difficult because the art to which it responds is highly mediated and resists being trapped in the clarities of common sense, instruments of preconceived notion that is more often than not actually prejudice.

Prevailing I think in the current atmosphere is a cult of the amateur, and that is not a totally negative phrase. The cult of the amateur, the autodidact, the putatively witty, entrepreneurial self-taught, self-promoting reviewer, or, let us concede for a moment, the informed commentator of film because of

prolonged exposure to the material—this is now the norm. The situation of this type of reviewer turns for the worse when the self-styled commentator becomes a groupie, a glib byte maker, a hype *meister*, a trigger-happy blogger, sometimes even a film producer or a bit player under the ambience of a wider creative industry of design, music, festivals, writing workshops, and other minor spectacles.

I end with a timely and urgent plea for committed and talented and attentive critics that a fellow had sounded so many years ago. There is significant investment in the production of art, but no substantial effort to sustain critical practice and the necessary interlocution to the exceptional aspirations of both artists and audiences as well as to their many productive imperfections.

## **Two papers for the Round Table Discussion on the Poetics and Practice of Film Criticism in the Philippines**

Eulalio R. Guieb III

### **On Criticism**

(First published online on February 01, 2012 in <http://yccfilmdesk.wordpress.com/2012/02/01/on-criticism/> and reposted in 2012 in <http://yccfilmdesk.tumblr.com/>. First version of this essay was published in the program brochure of “Kritika: A festival of criticisms,” U.P. Department of Broadcast Communication, 15-16 March 2011.)

Criticism interrogates. It interrogates our individual and collective experiences with meanings. There are meanings that detain us in the prisons of our oppressors, and there are meanings that tell us which truths are more preferred under the contingencies of our present struggles. The challenge of criticism is to know the co-variances, similarities and differences between and among meanings, to know how to untangle the hidden power of meanings, to know how power is ensconced in those meanings, to know how that power can be unleashed to bring our social lives closer to the world we are redreaming, and to use that power to birth the possibilities of a just future into the present.

Criticism allows us to create new metaphors that speak of the turmoil of the present. It is always provocative, for to be complacent about the colonization of our empirical and imagined realities by unjust discourses and social practices is to invite tyranny and oppression.

Criticism shatters. It shatters the shibboleths of our silenced lives, the deep silences about the wrongs of society. To challenge those silences has often come to mean courting tragedy. Criticism challenges those silences. It breaks silence free from its silence. It proffers breakthroughs that break

down debilitating silences, and, in the process, rejoices in the breakdown of unwanted silence.

Criticism is not about answers. It is about questions. The aim of criticism is to offer sheaf after sheaf of provocative questions that negotiate the terrains of the wrongs and the wronged, and the wrongdoers. Why is there too deep a silence about the wrongs of society? Perhaps, because we have been comfortable with the answers—and have been too negligent to ask. To be comfortable with answers is again an invitation to the discomforts of a morbidly terrible silence.

Criticism is about asking. It is not enough to have answers, no matter how approximately true the preferred truths to those answers come out to be. Answers should continually take the form of questions. Criticism asks questions that attempt to bring life back to life. That is why criticism is a celebration. We feast on questions that can tear to shreds the chilling comforts of silence and the discomfoting decadence of our silenced lives.

Criticism is a festival. It celebrates provocations, welcomes incitement, agitates the world. It is a festival that celebrates war against those who lacerate the soul of the unjustly wounded.

Criticism fortifies the collective heroism of our anonymous revolutions.

### **From Indio to Indie: A Redreamt *Indie*hood and *Indie*genity**

(First published 04 December 2011 in <http://yccfilmdesk.blogspot.com/2011/12/critic-of-month-eulalio-r-guieb-iii-on.html>. An earlier version of this essay was read during the awarding ceremonies of *Cine Indie for MDG (Millennium Development Goals)*, organized by the Forum for Family Planning and Development, Tanghalang Manuel Conde, Cultural Center of the Philippines, Manila, 16 October 2009.)

Many are of the opinion that independent cinema will save the current state of the Filipino film industry. However, I often lose hope as an academe-based critic in the promise offered by films that we label *indie* or underground or alternative cinema, or whatever category that fits into our notion of this type of films.

Independent films have undoubtedly contributed in transforming film production in the country, but this practice is only one aspect of filmmaking. I do not discount the substantial contributions of new festivals that focus on independent films, the generous financial support by various groups for films that they want us to believe are indie films, the current rate of film output coming from individuals and groups that call themselves indies, and the recognition that indie films get from various international festivals. Indeed, this phenomenon has paved the way for the production of

new cinematic forms and aesthetics. In my view, however, many so-called alternative filmmakers have yet to produce social discourses that confront the discourses of the unjust holders of our society's economic and political power.

I contend that there is no significant difference in terms of offering a plurality of visions and options for just and humane social relations from the current output of either alternative or commercial cinema. Except perhaps for the counter-discourses of the films of Kidlat Tahimik, Nick Deocampo, Roxlee and committed filmmakers, particularly those who fought against the dictator—like Joey Clemente and Lito Tiongson—and the promise coming from a few filmmakers of the current generation, specifically Pepe Diokno, seldom do I see in the films of the present breed of independent filmmakers a clearly articulated and politically grounded social consciousness. In other words, there is no alternative social discourse coming from so-called alternative filmmakers. I argue that the struggle within the commercial film industry by Ishmael Bernal, Lino Brocka, Mike de Leon and Mario O'Hara made more sense—politically—to construct a “just alternative” vision of social relations in Philippine society.

In recasting the experiences of the Filipino people in indie films, we—filmmakers and audiences alike—need to interrogate our place in the country's current political and cultural struggle—and for whom, and why, we need to articulate and pursue this position. If these films—and the framework that guides our reading of these films—if all these do not fit into the alliance of communities of knowledge and interests based on social justice, our *indiehood*, our *indiegenity* is a misnomer. In my view, we do not deserve our *indiehood* or our *indiegenity* as filmmakers or film critics if our positions are no different from the discourse of the current holders of political power whose development agenda disregard social justice for the marginalized. In this sense, our *indiehood*, our *indiegenity* is a negation of the nationhood of the powerless.

The power to create a just and humane world lies at the center of humanity itself—a collective of human beings that knows how to nourish life back to life. How to get there depends on how we ground ourselves in our contemporary social life. The possibilities of the future lie in neither a fossilized past nor in an aestheticized utopia. *The possibilities of the future are always present in the present.* How to translate this vision into economic, political and cultural terms is another struggle altogether. Part of that struggle is to rewrite and refilm the world, to reworld the world; not to redeem the world, but perhaps—to use the phrase by Ben Okri in his novel *The Famished Road*—to redream the world. In my view, that is what life and committed independent filmmaking, in general terms, are all about.

## Kung Paano Ako Nakapasok sa Film Criticism

Bienvenido Lumbera

Napasok ako sa film criticism dahil sa aking naging karanasan bilang promdi na nakarating sa Maynila upang mag-aral sa UST. Inakala ko noon na ang mga kabataang kapanahon ko ay may hilig na tulad ko sa panonood ng sineng Tagalog. Dekada 1950 noon. Galing ako sa Lipa City at doon ay may tatlong sinehan na tuwing weekend ay nagpapalabas ng double-program na Tagalog movies.

Sa UST, natuklasan ko na ang marami kong kaklase sa Faculty of Philosophy and Letters ay walang alam tungkol sa mga pelikulang local. Tila para sa kanila, ang isang estudyanteng nasa isang highbrow na kolehiyo ay kahiya-hiyang magkahilig sa itinuturing nilang lowbrow na hilig sa panooring hindi maipapantay sa mga sineng Ingles na siyang eksklusibong laman ng mga first-class na sinehan ng siyudad ng Maynila.

Ganyan ang dinatnan kong sitwasyong pangkultura sa unibersidad. At bilang bahagi ng highbrow na kolehiyo, nanahimik na lamang ako sa aking kahiya-hiyang hilig. Pero sa tuwing weekend na umuuwi ako sa Lipa, bigay-hilig ako sa panonood ng double-program na sineng Tagalog.

Nang magsimula akong magsulat tungkol sa sineng Tagalog, pangunahing layunin ko na ang mga kabataang inilayo ng kanilang edukasyong kolonyal sa mga lokal na sine ay akitin silang manood ng sineng Tagalog. Layunin ko ring maipamalay sa mga gumagawa ng pelikulang lokal na kailangan nilang dulutan ang manonood ng mga sineng makabuluhan. Mayroon nang mga pelikulang tulad ng *Tayug*, *Tandang Sora*, *Isumpa Mo*, *Giliw*, *Sawa sa Lumang Simboryo*, at *Anak Dalita*, pero ang mga ito ay hindi nabibigyan ng publisidad na tatawag ng pansin ng mga “edukado.”

Ang edukado sa panahong iyon ay mga Pilipinong nakapagtapos ng apat na taong pag-aaral sa kolehiyo, kompleto ang pagkatuto, gamit ang Ingles, kaya ang panlasa sa kultura ay Amerikanisado. Napunta ako sa pagsusulat ng film criticism upang maabot ang mga kababata kong nag-aambisyong maging “edukado” kung ano ang dapat nilang maunawaan tungkol sa sineng Tagalog, lalong-lalo na ang kasaysayan ng paggawa ng pelikula sa Filipinas na isang Third-World country na nanghihiram lamang ng teknolohiya sa mayamang bansang tulad ng Amerika.

Higit sa lahat, kaiba sa mga sineng Ingles, ang sineng Tagalog ay nakabase sa buhay ng mga mamamayan sa Filipinas at ang lengguwahe nito ay wika ng mga karaniwang tao sa bayang ito. Pamilyar ang mga manonood sa mga sitwasyong inilalarawan at ang kulturang nasa likod ng naratibong isinasalaysay ng pelikula. Sa kaso ng mga pelikulang galing sa Amerika, bukod sa problema ng dayuhang kultura, ang dialogo ay hindi laging buong-buong nasasakyan ng Filipinong manonood, kaya ang kabuuan ng

karanasang laman ng pelikulang Ingles ay hindi nasasapol ng karaniwang Filipino.

Nang magsimula akong magsulat ng film criticism, Ingles ang wikang ginamit ko dahil nga ang layunin ko ay maabot ang mga intelektuwal na Ingles ang wikang natutuhan sa kolehiyo. Sa kalaunan, gumamit ako ng Tagalog upang ang gumagawa ng pelikulang lokal ay maabot ko rin. Gayundin, ninais kong umangat ang level ng pagsusulat tungkol sa sineng Tagalog mula sa mga papuri sa mga artista at tsismis tungkol sa nagaganap sa industriya.

Sa kasalukuyan, ikinagagalak kong pansinin na marami nang nag-aaral sa kolehiyo ang bahagi na ng madlang manonood ng sineng Tagalog. Mayroon na ring pagbabago sa larangan ng paggawa ng pelikulang local gaya nang ating masasaksihan sa mga festival na ngayo’y karaniwan na ng event sa Kamaynilaan at sa mga rehiyon.

## **Krisis at Kritisismo: Ang Pangangailangan ng Radikal at Politikal na Kritika sa Hugpungan ng Sine, Kultura at Lipunan**

Choy Pangilinan

What matters, therefore, is not trying to establish once and for all which theory is right and which is a load of shit, but only whether or not to continue on the swings and roundabouts of thinking.

-John Mullarkey (2009)

Upang magsilbing giya ng diskusyon, nais kong simulan ang maikling panayam na ito sa pagbabalik tanaw sa isang sipi na hango sa sanaysay na “Ang Kritika sa Panahon ng Krisis” ng batikang kritiko na si Epifanio San Juan Jr. (2006). Aniya ukol sa ugnayan ng krisis at kritisismo:

Sa gitna ng permanenteng krisis ng sambayanan, ng laganap na karukhaan at paghihikahos ng nakararami; sa harap ng matinding kahirapan ng mga manggagawa’t pesante, ng mga biktima ng militarismo at low intensity warfare ng mga maykapangyarihan; at sa patuloy na pagsasamantala’t panunupil ng mga dayuhan, maitatanong natin: hindi ba isang kalabisang luho ang papuri nating ginagawa para sa ilang libro? Ano ang silbi ng sining sa harap ng nakaririmarim na kalagayan ng madlang hindi siguro makakabasa ng kahit isang librong maitatanghal dito? Ano ang katuturan

ng proseso ng pagkilatis, panunuri, at pagpapahalagang nakapaloob sa pagkakataong ito? (p. 32)

Bagamat ang inisyal na tutok ng sanaysay ay ang sining ng panitikan at panunuri dito, maaaring gamiting lundayan ang mga punto ng sipi upang magbalik suri sa naging pag-unlad o ang kawalang kaunlaran ng antas ng kritisismo, o sa kasamaang palad ay ang pagdausdos at pagkabaog ng dapat sana'y papel panlipunan ng kritika upang baguhin ang landas ng mga likhang sining at kultura sa partikular, at upang bakahin ang mga puwersang ideolohikal na gumugupo sa sambayanang patuloy na namumuhay sa ligalig sa pangkalahatan.

Dalawampu't anim na taon na ang nakalipas mula ng basahin ng naturang kritiko ang kanyang sanaysay sa harap ng mga manunulat, kapwa kritiko at mga manlilikha ng sining sa Sentrong Pangkultura ng Pilipinas subalit tila patuloy na lumalala ang mga krisis panlipunan gaya ng patuloy na pagtaas ng bahagdan ng mahihirap dahil na din sa mga huwad na polisiya ng kaunlaran, kawalang akses ng nakararami sa mga batayang serbisyong panlipunan, nariyan din ang pribatisasyon at komersyalisasyon ng sistema ng edukasyon, pagtaas ng kaso ng paglabag sa karapatang pantao sa siyudad at kanayunan, paglako ng lakas paggawa sa pandaigdigang marketo, patuloy na pambubusabos sa kababaihan at sa mga pangkulturang komunidad, muling banta ng pagkakaroon ng base militar ng Estados Unidos sa Pilipinas upang patuloy na muhanan ang mga neo kolonya nito, at ang pagkakaroon ng mediang popular na walang alinlangang dumadambana at sumasamba sa lohika ng kapital halimbawa.

Kung gayon, sa gitna ng ganitong kalagayang panlipunan, sa paanong paraan dapat basahin ang kritiko at ang kanyang mga kritika bilang textong panlipunan? Sa paanong paraan at posisyon dapat manindigan ang isang kritiko sa kanyang pagkilates sa mga anyong pansining at mga textong kultural? Ano ang "istratehikong posisyon" na dapat ay taglay ng kanyang kritika sa nag-uumpugang daigdig ng akademya, sining at lipunan? Ano ang dapat na maging papel ng kritiko sa pagsiyasat sa isang pangmadlang anyo ng sining gaya ng sine halimbawa? Anong sine ang kinakailangan ng hanay ng masa na patuloy na pinagkakaitan ng hustisya, kapantayan, at makamamamayang mga polisiya? Sa mundo ng kritikal na praktika, para kanino ang mga kritika?

At sa lahat ng ito, ang tanong na nag-uusig ay kanino dapat pumapanig ang kritiko at kanyang kritika?

Matindi ang responsibilidad na nakaatang at kailangang pangkuin ng isang kritiko lalu na't masidhi ang pangangailangan upang magkaroon ng interbensyon, interogasyon at pagposisyon upang mabuyangyang ang mga tensyon, kontradiksyon, puwang at katahimikan, at mga nakakubling

ideolohikal na puwersa na masasalat sa textong kanyang nilalapatan ng pagpuna maging ito ay pantikan, sining biswal, larang ng sine, media at iba pang textong kultural. Ngunit sa kasalukuyang panahon ng panunuot ng neo-liberal na mga pangangatwiran at kaisipan sa mismong moog ng akademya—tila mismong ang kritiko, na imbis na siyang sumasawata sa krisis, ang nasa kalagayan at bingit ng krisis. Kung kaya't heto muna ang ating pag-usapan.

Sa paglipana ng mga teoretikal na posisyon na iniluwal ng neo-liberal na katangian ng edukasyon gaya ng pabulusok na pagbabalik ng “positibismo” at “cognitivism” sa pag-aaral ng media, o ang pagyabong ng “pluralismo,” “end of ideology,” “post history,” “post-theory” at kung ano-ano pang mga bagong kaisapang uso ngunit tahasang mapanganib ay hindi maitatatwang nasa bakuran na natin ang mga kaisipang ngumangatngat at bumabansot sa pag-iral ng ating mapanuring kamalayan. Sa unang malas ay kay gandang mga pakinggan at tila may bahid ng kontradiskursibong posisyon ngunit sa ikalawang tingin ay tunay na mga ampaw at mga kanluraning salamangka lamang ito para higit na mailayo ang kritiko at akademiko ng Ikatlong Daigdig sa pakikipagbuno at pakikipagtalaban upang maunawaan ang danas ng kanyang bayan at makabigay preskripsyon ukol sa kung ano ang makabuluhang sining.

Hindi maikakailang may ilang mga kritiko sa kasalukuyan ang nagmumuwalan sa mga kaisapang makabago, mga teoryang nakakabasag tainga, at mga kaisipang hugot at hindi lapat sa lupa kung kaya't kung pakasuriin ang kanilang mga akda'y tila mga hungkag lamang na haka. Lahat ay nakalutang lamang sa dambana ng mataas na teorya ngunit sa katotohana'y mga mapurol na teoretisasyon at ilusoryong posisyon na said sa sustansya.

Hindi rin natin dapat talikuran ang katotohanang may ilang mga kritiko sa espera ng akademya na matagal ng isinangla, iprinenda at ibinenta ang kanilang panulat, kasama ang kanilang paninindigan, para sa interes ng nangyayaring kaayusan—partikular sa interes ng estado, mga institusyon, at negosyo. Sila yaong mga mahilig magsulat ng mga “praise review,” ang mga “penforhire,”—silangmgawalanggulugodatmgakawalngmaykapangyarihan at mapang-api. Sa kabilang banda rin naman, ginagamit ng ilang kritiko ang mga sulong na kaisipan at kritikal na mga pormulasyon hindi para gawing puwersa para himukin ang nagbabantang lakas ng naisantabi ngunit upang gawing sangkalan ang danas ng nakararami sa kanilang mga pretensyosong uri ng iskolarsyip at upang magsilbi lamang na tungtungang bato sa patuloy na pagtaas ng kanikanilang simbolikong kapital sa hirarkiya ng akademya nang sa gayo'y marating ang tuktok ng toreng garing kasama ng ilan pang

lulong sa droga ng kapangyarihan. Mula sa tuktok, tinatanaw na lamang nila sa ibaba ang naghihikahos na sambayanan.

Sa kaso naman ng mga kritikong piniling pag-aralan ang kulturang popular kung saan nakasukob ang larang ng media gaya ng radio, telebisyon, bagong media at sine halimbawa, mahalagang irehistro na may ambag ang mga pagniniyasat na ito upang mabalasa ang mga nag-uumpugang puwersa ng kapangyarihan sa mga lunang ito na dati rati'y hindi itinuturing na lehitimong sangay ng makabuluhang iskolarsyip. Ngunit may bitag din rito. Kadalasan, ang mga pag-aaral bagamat may kaakibat na potensyal ay nalilihis na lamang sa mga maninipis na panunuring wumawaglit sa mga batayang isyu na kinakaharap ng lipunang Filipino. Imbis na maging salalayang prinsipyo halimbawa ang talaban ng mga uri at dayalektikal na kaugnayan nito sa kasarian at sexualidad sa pag-aaral halimbawa ng mga gay films na iniluwal ng indie sine, nalilimita na lamang sa usapin ng empowerment, camp, postmodernong identidad, queerness at homosociality ang atake. Walang masama doon, ngunit may kakulangan, may kakulangan ng pagposisyon ang pagsusuri para higit na maiangkop sa hugpungan ng uri, na siyang salalayang problema ng lipunan, ang larang ng pagsiyasat sa kasarian at gender performativity. Maganda ang pananaw rito ng Ingles na Marxistang si Terry Eagleton. Ani Eagleton (2003):

Among students of culture, the body is an immensely fashionable topic, but it is usually the erotic body, not the famished. There is a keen interest in coupling bodies, but not in laboring ones. Quietly-spoken middle-class students huddle diligently in libraries, at work on sensationalist subjects like vampirism and eye-gouging, cyborgs and porno movies . . . . [I]ntellectual matters are no longer an ivory-tower affair, but belong to the world of media and shopping malls, bedrooms and brothels. As such, they re-join everyday life—but only at the risk of losing their ability to subject it to critique. (p. 3)

Ang nais lang naman igiit ni Eagleton sa kanyang puna sa ilang kritiko ng kultura at kulturang popular ay ang pangangailangang iangkop ang anomang pag-aaral upang higit na masiyasat ng masiste ang mga batayang problemang kumukukob sa isang lipunan at sanhi ng material na danas ng nakararami. Sa kaso natin, sa isang lipunang patuloy pa ding binabalabalan ng tunggalian ng mga uri, pyudal na kalakaran pang lupa, diskriminansyong pangkasarian at pang etinidad, at ang patuloy na pagbibigay suhay at maniobra ng global na mopolyo ng kapital sa tunguhin ng mamamayan at

bayan. Ika nga ni San Juan (2006), “[h]indi tulad sa Kanluran, ang sining at kritika sa mga bansang dumaranas ng mga rebolusyonaryong pagbabago ay hindi maibubukod sa krisis ng pulitika at ekonomiya—magkatalik ang krisis at kritika sa bawat pangyayaring nagaganap sa lipunang ito.” (p. 32)

Sa larang naman ng kritika ng sine, may ilan pa ding hindi makaalagwa sa pag-aaral rito bilang isang anyo lamang ng audio biswal na sining. Nais kong igiit na hindi masamang maging maalam sa formal na katangian ng sine bilang larangan ng sining at media na may tiyak na wika rin ng pananagisag gaya ng naratibo, tunggalian, tunog, karakterisasyon, *mise-en-scène*, pag-iilaw, teknik sa sinematograpiya at editing halimbawa. Mahalagang pag-aralan ang mga ito ngunit kung ang pagdawdaw ng kritika ay nakasagka lamang sa limitadong lente ng formalismo, tiyak na hindi mahihigit ang bisa at hiwaga ng sine bilang isa sa pinaka popular na larangan ng kulturang popular at bilang isa sa pinakamakapangyarihang medium na may kakanyahang hubugin ang pananaw pang mundo ng indibidwal na manonood at ang kolektibong hanay ng mga tumatangkilik rito sa pribado man o publikong espero. Ang karamihan din naman ng sumusuong sa kritika ng sine ay humaling pa din sa interpretatibong birtud ng semiotika ngunit paratihang nakakaligtaang higitin ang potensyal ng teoryang winawasiwas. Salat sa paghistorisa, salat sa kontekstualisasyon, salat sa diwang mapalalim pa ang pag-aaral labas sa konstelasyon ng mga senyas. Halimbawa lamang ito ng mga kritikang nagpapalabnaw sa dapat sana’y nakapanlalaslas na uri ng mga kritisismo.

Ang larang ng kritika at mga kritiko sa kasalukuyan ay nasa krisis gaya din ng sambayanang kinapapalooban nating lahat. Nasa krisis sapagkat hindi na nagkakabisa ang kritika kung ano ang sana’y lugar nito sa lipunan. Nasa krisis sapagkat lulong ang karamihan sa mga kritiko sa mga kaisipang patuloy na nagdedepolitisa at nagdidisarma sa kanilang panulat. Nasa krisis sapagkat ang ilan sa mga nagdadambana sa kanilang mga sarili bilang kritiko ay nakatira sa bahay na salamin kung saan narsisismo ang himno. Nasa krisis sapagkat winawaglit na ng kritiko na ang kritika ay kailangang ihagkis dahil may gustong baguhin sa sining at lipunan. Nasa krisis sapagkat karamihan sa mga kritiko ngayon ay hinehele na lamang ng postmodernong iskeptisismo kung kaya’t pagbuwag lamang ang intensyon ng panunuri at hindi pagbubuo. Nasa krisis sapagkat nahumaling na lamang sa pag-aaral kay Lady Gaga, sa Bro mance, sa ilusoryong kapangyarihan ng social network halimbawa imbis na siyasatin ang kompleksidad ng mga tunggalian bumabatbat sa lipunang Filipino. Nasa krisis sapagkat malayo na sa pangangailangan ng sambayanan ang mga inihahagkis na kritika. Nasa krisis sapagkat winawaglit o para nga sa ilan ay inabandona na ang maka-uring pagsusuri. Nasa krisis sapagkat naalibadbaran na sa Marxismo.

Ang kritikang inihahagkis ng isang kritiko ay textong magbubukas sa

atin para matantya ang kalidad ng kanyang diskurso, integridad ng pananaw panlipunan, panlasa sa sining, at lokasyon sa gitgitan ng mga diskurso at sa mga pakatotohanang walang humpay na nagbabangaan sa isang lipunang ginigi-yagis ng tunggalian. Ika nga ni Edel Garcellano (2001):

[t]he critic in a sense is also a text that must be read. And his/her reading that locates the text reflexively locates/situates him/her in the network of power positions. Which is again actually saying: What is he/she saying? Why/how is he/she saying it? From where does he/she say it? In a time of war, criticism partakes the urgency of partisan deployment. (p. 249)

Ang usapin ng kritisismo at sining ng kritika ay walang pagdududa na pagpili ng panig. Ito ay isang politikal na gawain. Ito ay paglahok sa rehimen ng mga pakatotohanan at pakikibakang ideolohikal. Hindi simpleng gawain ang kritika na may layon lamang magbasbas kung “maganda” o “walang kuwenta” ang textong sinusuri. Kinakailangang ilapat ang pagbasa sa mas malaking pangangailangan ng kultura at sambayanan. Pagtatasa ito kung sa paanong paraan halimbawa tumataliwas at nakakapagpamulat ang sine/texto para buhayin ang diwang mapanghimagsik ng mamamayan o kung paano nagsisilbing bikig ang sine/texto para lubos pang busalan ang nagbabadyang lakas ng masang api sa mapanganib at hegemonikong yugtong ito ng neoliberal na globalismo. Kung gayon, kung saan pumanig ang kritiko at ang kanyang kritika ay doon natin lantarang matuturo kung saan ang lokasyon niya sa pagitan ng digmaan ng iilan at nakararami.

Alam nating may kakanyahan ang kritika na umugit ng mga kontra-alaala, kontradiskurso, kontralunan, at kontrapuntal na posisyon para higit na masiyasat ang mga batayang problemang kinakaharap ng larangan ng sine sa partikular at lipunang Filipino sa kabuuan. Pagisyasat ito mula sa batayang isyu ng talaban ng mga uri at iba pang mga kultural na katagorya gaya ng kasarian, etnisidad, sexualidad at lahi hanggang sa pagsalat sa usapin ng pambansang identidad, diskurso ng kasaysayan, at globalismo halimbawa. Kung gayon, ang kritika ay sabayang sandata at kalasag. Kalasag para masalag ang mga ideolohiyang mapaniil na maaaring taglayin ng mga texto na hinulma ng mga aparatong nagsususog dito. Sandata para makaatake at maisulong ang mas makabuluhang tunguhin sa parang ng kultural na pakikipagdigma. Muli, ika nga ni San Juan (2006), “[a]ng kritikal o mapanuring diwa ay maaaring gumanap ng papel ng pagpukaw at pagmobilisa ng samabayanan upang magkaisang balikatin ang isang programa ng pagsulong” (p. 34).

Sa ganang akin kinakailangang ihagkis muli ang maka-uring pagsusuri sa kritika ng mga textong kultural gaya ng larangan sineng Filipino upang mailantad ang bangga ng mga interes at gitgitan ng mga puwersa sa kultural na lunang ito. Ika nga ng film scholar na si Mike Wayne (2005), “[m]arxism and film share atleast one thing in common: they are both interested in the masses”(p. 1). Sa kontexto ng ating bayan bilang Ikatlong Daigdig na nakasukob sa puwersa ng nangyayaring kapangyarihan ng iilan, mahalagang masalat kung sa paanong paraan nanunuot sa mundo ng sine, mapa Hollywood man, maging sa pagsulat ng kasaysayan nito, komersyal na sine o ang dinadambang indie, ang mga ideolohikal na puwersang patuloy na bumabansot sa pag-iral, pag-igpaw at pag-alagwa ng hanay ng marhinilizado. Ang larang ng sine ay hawak at gumagana batay sa makina ng kapital, kungdi man ng estado, at kung minsan ng tambalan ng estado at mga korporasyon kung kaya’t bilang mga aparatong ideolohikal mahalagang sipatin at sistematikong pag-aralan kung sa paanong paraan hinuhubog ng mga pelikula ang diskurso ng uri, tunggaliang panlipunan, ang reproduksyon ng panlipunang kaayusan, at emansipasyon halimbawa. Mahalagang suriin kung sa paanong paraan nagiging tulay ang sine para bihagin ang manonood nito o para pukawin ang hanay ng nakakarami tungo sa tunay na panlipunang pagbabago.

Kinakailangang muling ilangkap at ibaling muli ang tuon sa diskurso ng uri at ideological critique para higit pang maunwaan ang kompleksidad ng mga usapin gaya ng identidad, diaspora, urbanisasyon, body politics, hugpungan ng oras at lunan sa makabagong panahon, agency, kasaysayan, diskurso ng kahirapan, kasarian, politikal na ekonomiya, cultural politics, at globalisasyon halimbawa. Ito ang pangangailangan ng sambayanang patuloy na ninananakawan ng kinabukasan ng iilan. Ang pagbalik at muling paglangkap ng maka-uring panunuri sa sineng Filipino at mga textong pangkultural sa pangkalahatan ay higit na makapagbibigay tinig sa mga winaglitang nito at patuloy na winawaglitang. Sa aking palagay, mahalagang salalayang paninindigang teoretikal at imperatibo ng kritika, paglikha ng sining, at pagkilos ang lagusang hinawan ng Marxismo partikular ang diin sa uri, dayalektika, imperyalismo at ideolohiya. Nais kong sipiin sa kabuuan ang kritikong si Mike Wayne (2005) ukol sa ugnayan ng Marxismo, kritika, pag-aaral ng sine at pag-unawa sa lipunan. Aniya:

What is it that Marxism offers film studies? It offers I think a remarkably rich tradition of analysis and debates central to understanding an industrial cultural form such as film. Marxism raises questions at every level of the social order; without necessarily collapsing into reductionism...Marxism

demands that we historicise everything rather than taking it to be a natural immutable fact. It provides the tools with which scholars can self-reflexively critique their own position within the class structure and wonder how that position inevitably leads us to unthinking internalization of dominant practices. Marxism's historicisation refers not only to the past and present, but to the future as well. Marxism allows us to think beyond the now. Its sensitivity to utopian currents within cultural practices (and technologies) as well as resistance and contradiction helps us glimpse the prefiguring of alternative ways of living and loving which are today so urgently needs. (p. 32)

Mahalagang ihagkis muli ang maka-uring panunuri para maipamalas na hindi kalian man maiwawalay sa usapin ng ekonomiya at politika ang espera ng kultura. Moog ng aking kritisismo ang saligang teoretisasyon ng Marxismo sapagkat naniniwala akong sa bisa ng teoryang ito hindi lamang mailalapit ang kritika sa bayan kungdi mas nailalapit din nito ang kritiko sa hanay at digmaan ng mga nilapastangan. Sa salita nga ng Italyanong Marxistang si Antonio Gramsci, “ang pakikibaka para sa moral at intelektwal na pamumuno sa espera ng kultura ay pakikibaka para makamit ang gahum.”

Kung kaya't kinakailangang higitin ang radikal na potensyal ng pag-aaral sa sine, kultura at lipunan para matiyak na makakamit ang pambansang pagbabago sa parang ng kultura at sa 'di nalalayong parang kung saan mas makatao at makatarungan ang buhay ng mamamayan. Kung saan ang sining at lipunan ay tunay na para sa masa. Sapagkat bilang mga kritiko kailangan muli nating umibig lampas sa sarili.

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# Critiquing the Filipino Film Today: Notes for the Round-Table Discussion on Film Criticism

Nicanor G. Tiongson

For purposes of this discussion, this writer has three simple goals: a) to describe one productive way of critiquing the Filipino film in our day; b) to highlight the elements of this type of film criticism; and c) to reaffirm what I believe are the tasks and challenges facing film critics today.

To this writer, film criticism is the analysis and evaluation of a given film, which seeks to provide audiences with a deeper understanding of said film.

## Analysis of the Film

Analysis seeks to explain the content and form of a film on its own terms, clarifying whether it succeeds or fails in what it wants to do. Analysis would try to answer questions like:

- 1) What are the major themes of the film?
- 2) How does the filmmaker structure reality so that these themes may be developed through the film narrative?
- 3) What point of view is employed throughout the film, and why?
- 4) How are the plastics of the image (actors, sets and location, costumes, props and lighting) and the sounds (including dialogue and other diegetic sounds) orchestrated to create the mise-en-scene of specific sequences?
- 5) How are the scenes shot by the camera and how are these shots edited, scored, and titled?

To illustrate, analysis of the film *Serbis* by Brillante Mendoza (2008) should show how the film is able to harness the elements of cinema in order to express and elaborate on its major theme: The deterioration of the Pineda family members and the relations between them. In the space of one day, each of the protagonists suffers a setback or undergoes an incident that causes further erosion of their characters. Nanay Flor loses the bigamy case that she filed against her husband. In court, her own children testify that their father does not have a second family, so that the second family will not be eligible to claim any part of the father's inheritance. Nayda imperils her marriage by openly showing her attraction to her n'er-do-well cousin who works as the theatre projectionist. Nayda's husband realizes for the first time that his marriage is a trap. Alan, Nayda's cousin, decides to run away from his responsibility to Merly, whom he has impregnated. The screening of bomba films and the sexual transactions between gays continue inside the

movie house, even as the procession of Good Friday wends its way around the theatre building.

Opting for the style of neo-realism, the film sets its story in the actual Family Theater, from where the film stories have been derived. Here family members live in separate rooms, whose distances from each other symbolize the alienation between the family members themselves. Acting strikes us as undramatic, natural, matter of fact even, but it is truly expressive and consistent with character. There are no costumes, only everyday clothes that characters of this class would wear. Much of the film is shot with a meandering camera that represents the point of view of characters as they go up and down the theatre's maze of stairs, even as it captures the flux of life in real time. The live sound reproduces the external noises, including the beep of jeeps and *vrooming* of tricycles, which sometimes almost drown out the dialogue. The sound pollution from the outside is meant to parallel the pollution inside the theatre, both the physical stench of the toilets and the "moral" filth inside the screening room. Editing is mainly invisible and generally minimal, in order to preserve the rhythm of real time.

Aside from illustrating the internal coherence, or lack thereof, of a cinematic work, analysis may also try to explain how the film got to be what it is. In this regard, questions regarding the economic, political, social conditions under which the film was made, as well as the artistic circumstances, influences and styles which shaped the film become relevant. These questions would include the following, for a film like *Serbis* :

- 1) What is the mode of production of an indie film like *Serbis* as opposed to that of a mainstream film?
- 2) How does the production cost impact on the filmmaker's freedom to choose his subject matter and the way he wants to shoot his film?
- 3) How was it possible to create a bold and cutting edge film like *Serbis* in 2008?
- 4) What is the filmmaking style proposed by Bing Lao's Found Story, and how did it shape *Serbis*?

The cost of an indie film is a mere fraction (one fifth or one sixth) of the budget for a mainstream commercial film, mainly because DV filmmaking is so inexpensive that filmmakers themselves can afford to produce their own films. Because of the elimination of the big time producer who was eager to ensure a return on investment and a hefty profit if possible, filmmakers were now free to pursue their artistic vision and make the films they wanted to make without any artistic compromises. Although *Serbis* was shot in celluloid (thanks to a French investor), the director was left to make his own artistic choices without interference or dictation from its

executive producer, who funded the film precisely because of the artistry of the Mendoza films he had seen in Europe. Moreover, the film was shot in the same indie way that Mendoza's previous indies were made.

But *Serbis* is special in the sense that it is the film that best exemplifies the filmmaking style of Bing Lao's Found Story. Searching for a style of filmmaking that was more appropriate to Filipino characters and narratives, Bing Lao developed the concept of the Found Story, which "is a story drawn from real life whose objects are represented in the story as referents", namely, any phenomena, physical or cultural, that are found in the real world. The Found Story may be approached through three different narrative perspectives" the dramatic time mode, the real time mode, and the poetic time mode. The real time mode "foregrounds the power of the place and how it influences the found characters in a certain way." Stories in this mode happen in a particular place with a specific locale. And that locale has a great influence on the people within that place." In *Serbis*, that locale is the Family Theatre, a real functioning theatre in Pampanga. Mendoza explains, "We found this cinema in Angeles City and this family, who ran the place, lived right inside the cinema. That was the starting point of the whole film." Lao further explains "Again, it is a found story, a found place, and the noise is found too.... That is what these films are all about. They are about the physicality of these locations, and that informs both the subject matter and the aesthetics."

## Evaluation of a Film

Evaluation highlights the significance of the content and form of a given film. Content would include the ideas and values imbedded or animating the narrative and its characters. Form would include the genre (action, drama, comedy, horror and fantasy, *bomba* [adult film]) or the indie style (neo-realism, social epic, personal meditation, among others) used in the film.

## Content

The significance of certain films is rooted in the fact that they pioneered in the presentation of certain ideas or values at specific periods in our history. The evaluation of such films therefore can focus on and develop the film's achievement in this regard but it must also examine the weaknesses or limitations of the ideas presented. Allow me to cite some examples of films which have become significant in our history for the ideas they propounded.

- 1) *Bayaning Third World* (De Leon, 1999) is the first film to question the heroism of Jose Rizal, at the time of the centennial celebrations

when movies like *Jose Rizal* (Diaz-Abaya, 1998) continued to venerate the hero as the unquestioned center and source of Philippine nationalism. However, even as the film deconstructs the heroism of the national hero by showing his rejection of the revolution and his possible retraction, the film nonetheless ends by saying that if we have doubts about his heroism, those doubts will be dispelled when we read Rizal's works, which ironically are the works that embody his lack of confidence in a revolution from below.

- 2) *Sister Stella L.* (De Leon, 1984) is the first film to expose the economic exploitation of workers and the salvaging of labor leaders as well as the politicization of the religious and the censorship of the press during the period of Martial Law. After being gagged for more than a decade of restrictive censorship and terrorized by the ubiquitous military, filmmakers began to organize and protest against arbitrary and unreasonable censorship in the early 1980s, becoming even more militant and aggressive under the banner of the Concerned Artists of the Philippines (CAP) after the Aquino assassination in 1983, even as the anti-Marcos movement spread rapidly to all classes. Both Jose Lacaba and his co-writers and the director Mike De Leon were members of the CAP, and the film was made with the help and support of the burgis elements who had turned against the dictatorship. *Sister Stella L.* was later followed by *Bayan Ko* (Brocka, 1984), which was also significant for daring to depict the Lakbayan march and the singing of the anthem of protest, *Bayan Ko*, which the BRMPT tried to censor. Brocka brought the case to the Supreme Court, which ruled that the BRMPT could only classify not censor films. This decision in turn forced Marcos to replace the BRMPT with a more "liberal" MTRCB in 1985.
- 3) The film *Bata, Bata, Paano Ka Ginawa?* (Roño, 1988) is significant for being the first film that directly tackled women's issues, like wife battery, abandonment by husbands, prejudices against separated women or single mothers or working mothers, and the first film to have as heroine a woman who struggles, not always successfully, to perform her work as employee in a Women's Crisis Center and her job as mother of two and live-in partner of a macho mama's boy. Unlike many women's films that end up by endorsing the traditional roles of women as obedient wife and dutiful mother, the film holds up the far from ideal but loving and rights advocate Lea as a heroine for our times. One should point out, however, that for reasons known only to the writer and director, one whole side of Lea, that of political activist who would join demonstrations against the Marcos

dictatorship, was edited out in the movie, removing thereby an important arena in the women's movement.

- 4) *Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros* (Solito, 2005) is a very significant film because it is the first gay feature film that shows the gay not as an object of derision or as a victim of macho chauvinism, but as a boy accepted by his family and friends, and one who in the end shows willingness to transcend the dehumanizing effects of poverty by educating himself. Departing from Dolphy movies where gayness is considered as a sickness (not a sexuality) that should be cured and can be cured by finding the right woman for the gay man, *Maximo* presents gayness as a fact of life, a kind of sexual persuasion that need not be changed nor repressed. Here the gay boy chooses his love over his family because his family has committed a wrong, but when his beloved policeman becomes accessory to the murder of Maximo's father, Maximo in turn rejects him and comes out a better and more confident person after all the tragedies that beset him.
- 5) *Anacbanua* (Gozun, 2009) is the first Pangasinan film, in the sense that it is made by a native of Pangasinan and it uses the Pangasinan language in its main narrative. The persona of the film, a *balikbayan* [returning Filipino] who rediscovers his Pangasinan roots, visits the different places of his childhood, and the different landmarks of Pangasinan, and the places that are famous for the manufacture of famous Pangasinan products, like the native *bagoong* [fish sauce], *bolo* [machete] and knives, and pottery. Outstanding is the cinematography of the film which heightens the poetry of the subject matter and narration. It should be pointed out however, that even as the film highlights the achievements of one region and encourages the younger generations not to forget their language and culture, it also discourages the youth from learning or speaking the national language because it is not their native language. The film thus falls into the trap of nativism (wanting to go back to an idyllic rural period) as well as regionalism (the refusal to be integrated to a larger nation through the Filipino language.)

## Form

The significance of other films may be attributed to their innovative use of cinematic forms or styles which open up new possibilities for the communication of new ideas. Allow me to give some examples of films that are significant for their novel and imaginative use of form in the service of their chosen content.

- 1) *Tuhog* by Jeffrey Jeturian (2001) exemplifies how an exploitative genre like bomba can be used to subvert itself and expose its predatory nature and ways. The film is about a mother and daughter who are sexually molested by the same man, the mother's father and the daughter's grandfather. A film producer and writer offer them money to use their story for a film they say will give them the justice they deserve. But the finished film disgusts both mother and daughter because they are depicted as sex-obsessed females who welcome the sexual advances of the old man. But even as the film uses the genre and conventions of the bomba, it is careful not to dwell on nude bodies to avoid titillating of the audience. The camera shots and direction effectively distance the audience from the scenes, encouraging them to reflect on the contradictions that are playing out on screen.
- 2) *Aguila* by Eddie Romero (1980) is an important film because it rides on the popularity of Fernando Poe Jr and the action film in order to dramatize its historical epic showing the transformation of Philippine society from the period of the 1896 revolution to the period of activism in the 1970s. A cinema of ideas, *Aguila* traces the changes in four generations of the Aguila family and their involvement in the issues of their times—betrayal of the revolution by the *ilustrados*, connivance between the politicians and the local leaders in the despoliation of lands in Mindanao, the suppression of the Sakdal uprisings of the American period, the ideological conflict between Huks and Americans after the Liberation, the tragic involvement of one son in the Korean War, the corrupt elections of the 1950s, the imposition of Martial Law and the rise of activism in the 1970s. Although FPJ refused to give up his low waist pants and his long sideburns, the film succeeded nonetheless in transforming the action film into a film of social ideas.
- 3) Another successful transformation of genre is typified by *Bata, Bata, Paano Ka Ginawa?* (Roño, 1988). Billing itself as a melodrama about family relationships, the film was able to attract the traditional audiences of melodrama, the women, who are the primary targets of the messages of this film. But even as audiences identified with the usual dramatic confrontations and tear-jerking situations of the melodrama, they were also introduced to characters who were no longer black and white but individual and real like themselves, living in or reacting to situations that were familiar and credible.
- 4) A film that is significant for creating a form that cannot be aligned with any of the genres and can only be considered on its own terms

is *Bayaning Third World* (De Leon, 1999). With no real “story” to speak of, the film’s narrative follows the ups and downs of a director and writer who are researching in order to make a film about Rizal. Interestingly, the research process or the collection of data is dramatized, with the researchers in contemporary clothes, entering the houses of the past where their research interviewees live. At one point towards the end, the film space of the past connects to the film space of the present. The film is shot in black and white, so that the viewer will find it easier to maintain a distance from the film, a distance that will encourage him to think about the issues being raised by the film.

- 5) An achievement that could have only been done because of the new DV cameras is *Ang Damgo ni Eleuteria* (Zuasola, 2010). This is the first Filipino film shot in one continuous long take, that chronicles the last hours of Eleuteria in Cebu before she embarks on her trip to Germany as a mail order bride. From behind, in front or from the side, the camera documents how her parents fetch her from the river, force her to dress up, how she listens to her cousin who is married to a German, how she meets up with the village idiot who is trying to plant a banana tree in the water, and then later her boyfriend who tries unsuccessfully to spirit her away, how she arrives at the port and says a bitter goodbye. The new technology has allowed the filmmaker to document life as it is lived and as it flows in real time, with all its vagaries, intrusions and unpredictabilities.

In evaluating the content and form of a film, I use very specific standards. In general, I would endorse films that critically portray important realities in our society (in whatever style) but at the same time have messages which are liberative and transformative, and conducive to the protection of the rights of all Filipinos and the creation of an egalitarian nation. I also would endorse films that highlight innovation, experimentation and transformation of cinematic forms so that they become worthy vehicles of new and progressive ideas. On the other hand, I do not endorse films that in any way discriminate or exploit anyone, or propagate ideas that are elitist, colonial or patriarchal.

### **Tasks and Challenges for the Critic of our Time.**

In ending allow me to identify what I believe are the qualifications that are necessary to be able to analyze and evaluate films well :

- 1) An appreciation of the language of film;
- 2) A knowledge of the history of the Filipino film as well as familiarity

- with Philippine history;
- 3) An appreciation of film as cultural artefact and as social catalyst;
  - 4) A familiarity with the theories that analyze the social and political significance of film;
  - 5) A critical language that is sincerely interested in communicating with the audience, that is free of theoretical jargon and pedantic language;
  - 6) A healthy respect for other critics in order to encourage dialogue; and
  - 7) Above all, an attitude of balance and fairness, which is free of all personal agenda and self-promotion.

## **Hinahanap, Kaya Nawawala**

Rolando B. Tolentino

Sapantaha ko, ang simulain ng kritisismong pelikula ay sa mga popular na akdang isinulat ng mga akademikong malikhaing manunulat at iskolar, tulad nina Bienvenido Lumbera, Nicanor Tiongson, Petronilo Bn. Daroy, Isagani Cruz, at Virgilio S. Almario, kasama ang mga peryodistang sina T.D. Agcaoili, Nick Joaquin, at Pete Lacaba. Ito ang dekada 1970, na ang bulwak ng nasyonalismo at Filipinisasyon sa pambansang kalakaran ay naghudyat ng paghahagilap ng pagka-Filipino ng dayuhang angkat na midya ng pelikula, at ng pag-unawa at pag-aaral nito. Sinasagot ng mga sanaysay ang konteksto ng popularidad at kasiningan ng pelikula, artista, direktor, at kalakarang pamproduksiyon na nagpapahiwatig at nagpapaigting ng isang pambansang identidad at kultura.

Ang susunod na sandali na mahalaga sa kasaysayan ng kritisismong pelikula ay ang pagkatatag ng kauna-unahan—at sa matagal na panahon hanggang 2010 ay nag-iisa—na undergraduate program sa pelikula, ang A.B. Film and Audiovisual Communication sa U.P. College of Mass Communication noong akademikong taong 1984-1985. Mahalagang sandali ang pagkakatatag ng undergraduate program bilang simula ng disiplina at disiplinasyon ng pelikula, ibig sabihin, may pinaghahalawan na itong teorya't teoretikong balangkas, naisakonteksto na ito sa kasaysayan at lipunang Filipino, at may pagtahak na ang kritisismo sa labas ng rebyu at mahabang sanaysay sa popular na publikasyon. At tulad ng mga disiplina, nanghihimok na ang daluhasa na lamang ng disiplina ang may natatanging papel, katungkulan, at kaalaman para sa pagpapaunlad ng disiplinang araling pelikula.

Pero hindi nangyari ito, o hindi pa nangyayari ito. Sumpa ng midya ng pelikula na ang lahat ng nakapanood ay may awtoridad na makapagbigay ng

kaniyang kuro-kuro sa pinanood na palabas, na ang publiko ay awtoridad—bilang konsumeristang nagbabayad—sa kaniyang karanasan bilang manonood. At walang ipinagkaiba ito sa teritoryalisasyon ng mga kritiko sa iba't ibang disiplina sa humanidades at agham panlipunan na tumahak din ng landas tungo sa pagpapalawig ng pelikula hindi sa isang disiplinaryang pampelikula na panuntunan kundi sa kanilang disiplina't espesyalisasyon.

Sa isa kong kritika sa *Bayan Ko Kapit sa Patalim* na binasa sa isang Philippine Studies conference sa Hawai'i noong 1990s, iritadong binanggit ng nakinig na historyador na kolumnista sa diyaryo na bakit kailangan pa ng mataas at “jargon-ic” na pagsusuri sa popular na midya ng pelikula, bakit hindi na lang daw tayo maligayahan sa panonood ng pelikula? Noong 1990s pa lang, hindi nakikitang lehitimong disiplina ang araling pelikula. Kaya rin naman, ang undergraduate program sa U.P.—noon at ngayon—ay mas kilala sa pagprodyus ng mga filmmaker kaysa mga film scholar.

Sa katunayan, sa halos 30 taon ng programa, may 30 lokal na libro pa lamang sa pelikula ang nalalathala, karamihan pa ay tulad ng 1970s ang peg na tungkol sa mga profile ng direktor at artista, mga koleksiyon ng rebyung naging libro, at antolohiya ng mga sanaysay hinggil sa mga partikular na panahon at dekada. Wala pang naabot na kritikal na antas ang kritisismong pelikula. Wala pa rin itong naabot na antas na critical mass na may kapasidad na pumihit sa mga isyu ng pelikula at lipunan. Tila isinasaad, dahil popular ang midya ng pelikula, kailangan ay popular din ang paraan ng paglalahad ng teksto at konteksto nito: diyaryo, magazin, libro, at ang kasalukuyang pamamayagpag ng diskurso ng pelikula sa internet.

Ang isang sumunod na sumpa sa kritisismong pelikula ay ang Internet, at ang pagsulpot ng pigura ng film blogger. Kung ika nga ng isang indie filmmaker na “the indie director is the new rock star,” ang retrospektibong posisyon ng film critic ay nagkaroon ng retroaktibong pag-angat na kultural at sosyal na kapital sa Internet. Mas mabilis silang magsulat, at may kalakaran sila ng pagsulat na may apela sa mga 35 porsiyento ng mamamayang may akses sa internet—kalakhan, kabataan, at gitnang uri. At kung nagsusulat sila sa Ingles, nababasa sila ng mundo ng mga art film festival, at naiimbitahan sa press junket at film junket, kundi man, maging jury pa sa mga ito.

Ang kalakaran ng pagsulat ay may gaan at maraming patutsada na wala naman sa mismong pelikula pero nasa konteksto ng gitnang uri't virtual public na intelektuwal na nagsusulat, at ng karanasan nito ng panonood at pagsusulat, kundi man ng kaniyang gitnang uring buhay. Halimbawa nito ang introduksiyon sa rebyu ng *Ang Nawawala* (Jamora, 2012):

When I wrote about Marie Jamora's film *Ang Nawawala* in my low-key hokey column in this week's paper, I thought

it was to help them add press clutter right before its run in Cinemalaya started. Now, after having seen the film tonight, I find that it was an act of conceit more than anything else: I thought I knew exactly what this film was going to be about. It was going to be twee, two feet on cutesy, another Cera-bration, an attempt to return the favor to coming of age films that have wrinkled out our angst—the mastering of this genre, was in a way, to say that growing up had finally been overcome. I pigeonholed it as one of those ‘show and tell’ films that have a filmmaker’s chains all around it like a charm bracelet to be worn by a naive, unaware protagonist as his own—Tintin shirts and songs that, according to a magic slate, “you should know.” But, I was dead wrong. (“Mama says mercy,” 2012)

Ang epekto ay panghihimok nang higit na gitnang uring mambabasa at komentaryo kaysa masusing pagsusuri. Topikal pero wala namang layon ang blogger na magpalalim sa labas ng sarili nitong comfort zone at sa artikulasyon nito ng like o unlike sa mga pelikulang sinusuri.

Ang bulo ng pagsusuri sa mga blog at maging sa mga kritikong hindi galing sa disiplina ng pelikula ay naratibo. Ito ang sityo ng kontestasyon, ang sentro ng diskurso ng kanilang kritisismong pelikula, at pahapyaw, tulad sa *Ang Nawawala*, sa musika bilang interes din ng maraming blogger nito, kabilang ang hipster crowd na sentro ng grabedad ng mga tauhan sa pelikula. At ito namang peg ng mga film blogger (aka critics) ang siya ring pumapaimbalot sa isa pang quasi-, kundi man, pseudo-intelektuwal na publikasyon sa internet, *The Manila Review*, na ang apuhap din—batay sa “wafazan” ng mga interesadong indibidwal sa Facebook—ay tungo sa kontrobersiya’t espektakulo ng mga “intelektuwal” na lumelevel sa putikan at burak kapag umeestima ng puna at kritisismo.

Magandang balikan ang sentrong metodo ni Walter Benjamin, ang repleksiyon, na siyang nasa titulo ng dalawang koleksiyon ng mga sanaysay nito. Kinetikong naglalakad at nagmumuni-muni ang intelektuwal, pinagninilayan ang natatanaw (ang teksto) sa konteksto ng hindi natatanaw (ang nawawala at winawala), at pagbibigay-ugnay sa maliit sa mas malaking diskursong kinapapalooban nito. Sa paglalakad sa siyudad, ang mga katawan ay bahagi ng citification sa global na kapitalismo, at kung paano rin ito umaakibat sa pantasya ng mas moderno at posmodernong pagdanas.

May isinasaad ang metodong repleksiyong ito. Kung idudugtong natin ang isinaad ng mystery writer, si Agatha Christie, “One of the saddest things in life, is the things one remembers” ang paggunita ay isang malungkot at

may pighating pagdanas. Kung idurugtong naman ang isinaad ng isa pang tagumpay na babaeng manunulat, J.K. Rowling, “There was a brief silence in which the distant echo of Hagrid smashing down a wooden front door seemed to reverberate through the intervening years.” May distansiya at panahon ang dagundong ng alaala at pagninilay. Samakatwid, walang nagninilay nang hindi rumaragasa ang lungkot at pighati, maging ang dagundong na nagmumula sa distansiyang akala ay kaylayo at kaytagal na.

Ang naging epekto ng pamamayagpag ng film blogging bilang pribilehiyadong anyo ng diskursong pelikula sa kontemporaneong panahon ay ang pamamayagpag ng (gitnang uring) popular bilang eksklusibong pagdanas: sourcing ng mga indie film, art film, modalidad ng palitan, mga network, reperensiyalidad ng panonood, at iba pa. Ang proyektong nasyonal ay naipagpapatuloy na lamang sa akademikong tunguhin ng diskurso at kritisismong pelikula: Mahalagang salik ang pelikula, representasyon, at mga isinisiwalat na identidad sa pagbuo ng isang pambansang cinema o pagtukoy sa pelikula bilang midya ng pormasyon ng mga kolektibong subhetibidad.

At iilan lang ang may akses dito na siya ring sumpa dahil walang ganap na bisa at epekto ang akademikong tunguhin sa pangkalahatang pagkatahak ng kritisismong pelikula. Ang tunay na namamayagpag sa intended na awdyens ng pelikula ay ang mga film blogger. At ang pangkalahatang direksiyong tinatahak ng kanilang mga blog at mga internet *writing* ay tungo sa isang pos-politika (*post-politics*) na diskurso.

Sa reaksiyon sa aking rebyu sa *Ang Nawawala*, nag-post si Vincenzo Tagle sa kaniyang blog:

Why is he reducing the audience’s response to this movie as simply a conditioned product of capitalist culture? His continuous claim that the movie is simply reproducing the value system that underlies capitalism ignores the humanity of the movie’s story that transcends class boundaries. Universal themes such as the process of grievance, recovering from loss and dealing with a broken family, were subtly developed, albeit in a setting unfamiliar to him and to Philippine cinema in general. One simply had to remove one’s blinders and preconceived expectations on what makes a “Cinemalaya film” in order to see the substance and emotional depth of this movie, that unlike Tolentino opined, were clearly present. (Tagle, 2012)

Tinatanggal ang kapasidad ng pelikula bilang awratikong sining, na ayon

kay Walter Benjamin ay lumilikha ng simulasyon ng orihinal na kasiningang pagdanas sa edad ng mekanikal na reproduksiyon. Ibinabalik ang sining sa ahistoriko, trans-unibersal na humanidad na hindi naman lingat si Tagle, ay nakaangkla sa gitnang uring panuntunan sa kasalukuyang global na kapitalismong inaakala niyang ipinagngunguran ko sa rebyu (binubuo ng ilang daang salita lamang) na siyang dumale sa dapat ay nakikita ko: Ang emotional depth ng maykayang uri na representasyon sa pelikula, at ng gitnang uring akses, panonood at pagsusulat nito.

Sa madaling salita, dapat ay hindi intelektuwal ang pagdulog o approach sa pelikula, dapat ay sa antas lang ng pathos. At kung ito ay sa antas ng emosyon, ito ay sa salik lang ng pelikula bilang libangan (entertainment) na bumubura sa lohika ng politika sa pagtunghay at pagbibigay ng aliw ng pelikula. Ganito rin ang kongklusyon ni Alice Sarmiento sa pagbatikos sa rebyu ko at ni Mara Coson:

In the case of *Ang Nawawala*, because of the dearth of local precedents in the personal history department, what we're being served is not quite as clear. At least not yet. What is clear though is a shortage of stories that delve inward, rather than externalize conflicts, and this is where it could get cultural; because I also can't think of a single Filipino who hasn't been called some variation of asshole for choosing to tell his or her own story. When it comes to personal narratives, it's easier to find space in this country's archives for hagiography rather than for autobiography, making it safe to risk an idea—so long as it's done in someone else's words. (Sarmiento, 2014)

Ang pluralidad ng pananaw ay itinutumbas sa karapatan ng lahat na makapagsalita, lalo na ang gitna at maykayang uri. Ito rin ang tinutuligsa ni Sarmiento na market segmentation sa pelikula na siyang hadlang sa pagkaunawa sa direktor, Marie Jamora, na siya na namang pagbibigay-diin sa ahistorisidad at trans-unibersalidad ng panonood ng at pagsusulat sa pelikula:

By setting *Ang Nawawala* in the middle of Metro Manila's independent music scene (with a little cameo from the art world), Jamora manages to erase the specifics of time and space, manipulating a universal medium to speak to a broad audience about a very particular subject. This is where she is most successful: by taking the bricolage of her own life—

formed by literary nerdiness, bands with small audiences, and pockets of the city that were never very popular to begin with—she manages to weave a web of references that can safely cradle anyone’s experience, whether actual or aspirational. (Sarmiento, 2014)

Kabig sa biyographiko si Sarmiento, at sinipat pa sa paggamit sa lente ng pagsasalita sa ngalan ng inaakalang publiko ang siyang sabit sa mga rebyu ng pelikula. At heto ang hugas-kamay ng pagsusuri nina Tagle, Coson, at Sarmiento: ang pagduduro ng kamay na ikinakahon ang pagsusuri sa pelikula para sa mga walang akses sa panonood nito sa isang banda, at sa kabilang banda, ang pagbura na ang binibigyan nila ng pribilehiyong mismong gitnang uri na itinampok sa pelikula ay isa lamang ding uri sa lipunang Filipino, at kung gayon, may karapatan ding mapanood ang buhay ng mga ito.

Sinipi ni Sarmiento si Benjamin para patuloy na manuligsa, “each sphere of life has, as it were, produced its own tribe of storytellers.” Dagdag pa ni Sarmiento, “therefore, what lacks representation may be the luxury of individual choice that acknowledged the futility of searching for accuracy and authenticity in the multiple facets of individual subjectivity that comes with privilege.” Aminado naman ang manunulat na pribilehiyo ang pagiging gitnang uri, pero hindi niya matanggap na may accountability ang pribilehiyadong uri, pati ang kaniyang pribilehiyadong pagbasa sa uring ito sa representasyonal na pang-araw-araw. Hindi ba’t ito rin ang nais ipabatid na kalakaran sa hegemoniya, na dumudulog na “can’t we all get along?” kung hindi man, tanggapin na lang ang kaniya-kaniyang puwesto at designasyon sa historikal na lipunan?

Ang misreading ni Sarmiento kay Benjamin ay ang pagtukoy na ng kritiko na “[e]xperience has fallen in value. And it looks as if it is going to fall into bottomlessness. Every glance at the newspaper demonstrates that it has reached a new low . . . . Wala nang mahihita sa aktuwal na mundo, kaya ang birtuwal at representasyonal na lang—ang humanidad, ang sangkatauhan—ang mahalaga at pribilehiyado. Ito ang nagiging substansiya ng kritisismong pelikula sa kasalukuyan, ito ang inaakdang post-politika ng kritisismong pelikula.

At ito ang nananatiling sumpa at hamon ng kritisismong pampelikula, o sa kasalukuyan nitong antas, ng pagiging kritisismong pampelikula: Hinahanap dahil nawawala, dahil hindi pa (muling) nakikita. Hinahanap dahil patuloy na nawawala, patuloy na hindi pa nakikita. Hinahanap kahit hindi naman nakita na at makikita pa. O hinahanap dahil may halaga, at ang pagpapahalaga ng politika sa kritisismong pampelikula ang siyang

magtatagpo sa hinahanap at naghahanap, at sa bagay na patuloy na nawawala.

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