



CHRONICLE

A JOURNAL OF TECHNOLOGY, DESIGN, AND CULTURE
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About the Cover: Photo of the clapper used in writer/director and NU-APC faculty Jaime Pacena's 2024 Cinemalaya competition entry, *Kono Basho* (This Place). Courtesy of Leobensant Marquez and Project8Projects.

It is with great pleasure that I introduce this new issue of *Chronicle*. This edition focuses on the history and nature of various media forms, both old and new, as well as communication and artistic practices. I have gathered a diverse collection of research articles from media scholars, essays on artistic and communication practices by visual artists and educators, and reviews of selected creative works by respected media critics. Through these contributions, we examine how media, communication, and the arts have influenced—and been influenced by—the Philippines’ unique historical and social contexts. This issue is divided into main articles, creative praxis, and reviews. The main articles consist of longer scholarly essays. Creative praxis includes essays written by artists and practitioners about their artistic processes. Lastly, we feature reviews of two creative works—one film and one solo exhibit.

First on this issue is Joyce L. Arriola’s “The New Humanities as Research Agenda: Exploring Loci for Communication and Allied Fields” in which she presents new directions for arts and humanities research in response to the depersonalizing impact of digital technologies, examining how these insights can be applied to map new prospects for communication and media research in the Philippines. Clodualdo del Mundo, Jr.’s “Mula Pelikula Tungo sa Pagkamulat Tungo sa Pag-aklas” underscores the transformative power of cinema in narrating and inspiring revolutionary movements. He focuses on the Filipinos’ struggle against various colonial and authoritarian regimes, illustrating how film can catalyze awareness and action. Meanwhile, my essay “Feminine Foremothers and the Cinematic Construction of the Dalagang Filipina” seeks to establish a “maternal genealogy” within Philippine cinema by examining how female movie producers influenced the artistic development of Philippine cinema, as demonstrated in the ways by which the image of the “Dalagang Filipina” has been constructed on screen. On the other hand, the often-overlooked field of alternative cinema is what Nick Deocampo explored in his essay “A Network of Multiplicities: Understanding Philippine Alternative Cinema,” where Deocampo asserts that with the rise of social media and other web-based platforms, alternative cinema has branched out into various forms, most especially as TikTok videos. Lastly, China Patricia T. Villanueva’s “Caring in Curating: Curating Art, Spaces, and the Self” shows how the notion of “curation” extends beyond the art world and is applied to various professional spheres like libraries, news production, and especially in social media platforms.

Visual artist Robert Besana uses spirituality as inspiration for his painting, *Aqua lateris Christi, Lava me*, which was included in a group exhibit organized by The Center for Art, New Ventures and Sustainable Development (CANVAS). For his part, mixed media artist Rainer Ma. F. Cruz discusses his unique process in creating the works featured in his one-man exhibit, *Cabinets & Curiosities*, at Vinyl on Vinyl. Finally, a passion for teaching is what Arch. Jose Manuel V. Garcia shares as he recounts his experiences when he volunteered to facilitate several Media-based Cultural Documentation classes for the Philippine Cultural Education Program (PCEP) of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA).

We end this issue of *Chronicle* with Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino member Katrina Ross A. Tan's insightful review of Anna Isabelle Matutina's independent film *12 Weeks* and art critic Sean Carballo's assessment of photographer Wawi Navarroza's solo exhibit, *As Wild As They Come*.

Opening this issue of *Chronicle* to more contributors from different educational institutions reflects NU-Asia Pacific College's commitment to fostering rigorous scholarship and promoting diverse perspectives within the academic community. It is my hope that the articles presented here not only advance knowledge in communication, media, and the arts but also invite readers to engage critically with the topics and issues explored by the authors. On behalf of the *Chronicle* Editorial Board, I extend my sincerest gratitude to the authors, peer reviewers, and publication staff whose dedication and expertise have made this issue possible.



Elvin Amerigo Valerio, PhD

Editor-In-Chief

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The New Humanities as Research Agenda: Exploring Loci for Communication and Allied Fields

Joyce L. Arriola

Abstract

This paper tackles the role and contribution of the agenda for new humanities research in light of current initiatives to redefine the research agenda in Philippine universities. Specifically, it answers the following questions: What constitutes the new humanities? What is their rationale as domains of knowledge and as modes of inquiry? How do the new humanities contribute to redefining the university research agenda in the Philippine context? Lastly, how can communication studies and related fields insert themselves in the supposed updated typologies and definitions? Therefore, this paper explores the possibilities for the new humanities to balance the depersonalizing influence of the new technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and how these may be relevant to mapping new prospects for communication and media research.

Keywords: new humanities, research agenda, communication studies, domains of knowledge, modes of inquiry

NOTE: An earlier draft of this paper was presented at the 2019 Asian Media Information Centre (AMIC) Conference held from June 17 to 19, 2019, at the University of Chulalongkorn in Bangkok, Thailand.

Introduction

In June 2019, the Asian Media Information Centre (AMIC) convened a conference entitled “Communication, Technology and New Humanism.” Held a few months before the COVID-19 pandemic started, the prevailing concern of researchers and practitioners of communication and media at that time was the widespread impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution – particularly, the technologies of communication and information that it spawned - upon human society. There had been since a proposal to promote discussions on the New Humanism that could assist scholars in navigating the contours of research in the discipline. Additionally, the conference brought to light the pressing need for a new world communication order that will revitalize traditional or classical humanism if a new one is not yet at hand.

Before and after the pandemic, it was established that the massive shifts in human consciousness today have been due to the major, if not the sole, contribution of technology and communication in our lives. What we once considered mere tools or media of communication became the driving force of contemporary life. They have become the major instruments of social interaction. And as they have re-ordered our way of apprehending (or even operating within this world), they have created a new episteme, a new way of knowing the world. We are at this juncture of history partly because communication and media have become so greatly revolutionized by technological advances that possess the capacity to create a new communication culture.

Perhaps the oldest program of learning that came down to us from the early days of Western civilization is what is now collectively called the Humanities. We traditionally associate it with the old program of studies offered when the first universities were established in Medieval Europe. Universities such as the University of Bologna, University of Paris, University of Oxford, and University of Salamanca were the first to offer what was called the Classical A.B. or Bachelor of Arts, which was designed to educate those who would like to pursue higher studies of theology and the wealthy class who would like to attain higher learning during the Middle Ages. The medieval university curriculum consisted initially of the curriculum called the *trivium*, which consisted of grammar, rhetoric, and logic. If we examine *trivium* closely, we can say that the subjects are ordered for teaching competence in communication. This curriculum constituted the core components of what we refer to today as the communication discipline. Eventually, the *trivium* expanded to become *quadrivium* or the subjects pertaining to music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy, which, like the *trivium*, are actually “languages” that were utilized in the Middle Ages to acquire higher forms of knowledge. The core of Medieval university education was learning the “languages” needed for

higher learning. This early emphasis on languages will be foundational to the communication discipline.

The traditional or classical humanities are, true to their name, consisting of foundational knowledge that allows the learner to understand the complexities of personal life and social and political institutions around him/her. Ellie Chambers (2001) further describes traditional/classical humanism as follows:

Traditionally, the avowed aim of humanities study has been to prepare people to participate in social and political life as knowledgeable, impartial, and tolerant individuals ...They encouraged all forms of expression, especially the arts, and also the development of what were regarded as the quintessentially human attributes of reason, imagination, and aesthetic sensibility – by their very nature, ‘goods’ for society no less than for (elite) individuals. Such ideas still inform traditional quality-of-life justifications for the study of a broad arts/humanities curriculum, embracing art, classical studies, culture (including forms of social and political life), drama, history, languages, law, literature, music, philosophy, and religion. (p. 3)

Traditional or classical humanism, as intuited in the Chambers passage, is centered on reason, imagination, and aesthetics and is deeply interiorized in approach. The individual is invited to come to a self-understanding to navigate the expectations of the social world. However, it cannot be denied that classical humanism has been an individual means to social ends; it aims to examine society and its values through the lens of individual worldviews.

Communication and Humanities

In so far as classical humanism is about language and expression, the earliest conception of communication as a field of study had been humanistic in emphasis. The oldest communication theory, Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, concerned how an individual could produce excellent public speeches in ancient Greece. The rhetorical methods of logos (logical design), pathos (audience impact), and ethos (source credibility) are as relevant today as they were during the classical antiquity of the Greek civilization. These confer on the speaker and listener the ethical responsibility of sifting through public speeches and how they deploy argumentation and reasoning.

Through the centuries, rhetoric never really went out of fashion. In fact, recently, it has been extended into a new approach to understanding persuasive communication. Rhetoric was adopted as a core subject in the early mass communication programs and became part of the early curricula of journalism and broadcasting. Rhetoric is usually “theorized,” according to Robert Craig (1999), as a “practical art of discourse” (p. 135). He adds that Rhetoric “is useful for explaining why our participation in discourse, especially public discourse, is important and

how it occurs and holds forth the possibility that the practice of communication can be cultivated and improved through critical study and education” (p. 135).

Therefore, the roots of the communication discipline lie in the humanities, as exemplified by the towering contribution of rhetoric, the oldest communication theory. In recent times, it has been revived in Neo-Aristotelianism, with the concept of the “practical art of discourse” (Craig, 1999, p. 135) still an important component of public communication. Rhetoric also promotes traditional humanism’s attitude of “disinterested curiosity and inquiry” (Chambers, 2001, p. 3).

The earliest teachers of communication in the United States began as members of the Speech and Drama departments. This is the reason why rhetoric has become a major component of early communication curricula. Early speech teachers, according to Em Griffin (2012), in his book *A First Look at Communication Theory*, a widely acknowledged textbook for undergraduate communication students, developed courses around “public address, oral interpretation of literature, radio announcing, drama, debate, and roundtable discussion”, and they drew heavily from the theories of “Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian” (p. 21).

As the decades wore on, the communication field began relying on other persuasions and modes of inquiry along the positivist tradition. Griffin (2012) claims that the split tradition of communication theorizing and inquiry created a fissure existing within the communication discipline from the 1910s up until more recent times. The said fissure is particularly apparent in the division existing between those who hold a humanistic view of communication and those who hold a scientific view of communication (Griffin, 2012, p. 29). While it is said that communication research in the United States has remained positivist to this day, as Griffin has noted, the European tradition of communication and media studies is connected deeply with humanism. In previous decades, C.P. Snow has referred to this division between the humanities and the sciences as “two cultures” (in Cornelius and St. Vincent, Eds., 1964, p. 2); alluding to the great divide between scientists and humanists that created far-reaching implications in the way disciplines are administered in the universities of the twentieth century.

Meanwhile, Craig (1999) demonstrates the dual impulses that animate the communication field by listing down seven traditions of communication theory. Many of these traditions are humanistic, and some are scientific in the way they pursue the subject of their inquiry, the pedagogical principles that affect them, and their modes of inquiry. These are The Rhetorical Tradition, The Semiotic Tradition, The Phenomenological Tradition, The Cybernetic Tradition, The Socio-Psychological Tradition, The Sociocultural Tradition, and The Critical Tradition.

In 1983, the *Journal of Communication* published a special issue addressing the “Ferment in the Field”, which touches on the rise of critical theory and research.

The critical view of communication study somehow recuperates the humanist emphasis on capacitating the individual with critical thinking skills that will hopefully assist them in carrying on their function in society and making it more livable and just for humans.

Despite this perceived division between the two tendencies of communication scholars, the humanistic bent has persisted and continued to animate the study of communication through the different eras of communication study, offering a counterpoint to the scientific and objectivist stances of positivist social science.

Today, there are new contexts for humanism's return. The fourth industrial revolution has been attended – so to speak – by the exponential rate of advances in digital technology that created possibilities unheard of before and merely imagined in previous periods. This is characterized, in the words of Klaus Schwab (2016) of the World Economic Forum, by a “fusion of technologies that is blurring the lines between the physical, digital, and biological spheres” (Schwab, 2016, para 2). The output of this revolution consists of “emerging technology breakthroughs in fields such as artificial intelligence, robotics, the Internet of Things, autonomous vehicles, 3-D printing, nanotechnology, biotechnology, materials science, energy storage, and quantum computing” (Schwab, 2016, para 4).

Such a revolution has resulted in a shift in media technologies, epistemic shifts, and, perhaps, the re-mapping of human skills. Media technologies shifted as the technoscape transitioned from analog to digital. This is accompanied by a shift in episteme: from the linear mode of print and the immersive mode of electronic media to the interactive and fragmented mode of digital media. Meanwhile, the alleged re-mapping of skills has occurred as technologies seem to have claimed the function formerly held by humans. Increased automation, robotics, and artificial intelligence created an occasion for revitalizing human skills and for abandoning the routinary in favor of more creative ones.

The UNESCO-published book titled *Media Literacy and New Humanism* (2010), authored by Jose Manuel Perez Tornero and Tapio Varis, has noted that the recent digital revolution has caused a host of challenges to the core ideas of humanity, which consist of autonomy, freedom, and creativity. The prevailing notion – ever since the Fourth Industrial Revolution caused massive shifts in labor cultures, educational systems, governance, and social communications - is that a technology-dependent world will gradually erode those esteemed ideas. UNESCO literature of late addresses this so-called “depersonalizing effects of mass technology” (Perez Tornero & Varis, 2020, p. 5) or what the poet and critic Thomas Sterns Eliot has referred to as the “dissociation of sensibility” of modern men and women.

Such growing concerns over the negative impact of digital technology have necessitated a renewal of the humanist spirit that has animated academic life and research in previous ages. In his Foreword to the *Media Literacy and Humanism*

(2010) manual cited above, UNESCO IITE Director Dendev Badarch said:

The idea of 'new humanism' has become a new credo for UNESCO. Being applied to education, it suggests the creation of a more inclusive society in which all humans have a chance to access knowledge and quality education and every voice is heard in the universal dialogue. The new humanism in global society must prioritize a new sense of respect for multiplicity and cultural diversity and must support media development with the goal of consolidating the new culture of peace. (p.4)

As the world moves toward a future of unparalleled technological advancements, scholars and thinkers have grown concerned about a scenario dominated by post-humanist issues and realities, a future where humanity is forced to forge its existence in relation to advanced technologies that have been crafted to take over several human functions and skills. In response to this growing concern, efforts such as the above have been conceived and spearheaded by UNESCO as stop-gap measures to arrest this long-term threat to humanity. For this reason, the Asian Media Information Centre convened a conference in 2019 aimed at re-formulating humanism in the face of a technology-saturated future. The following discussion will tackle the historical and conceptual roots of humanism.

Retracing Humanism's Roots

The idea of humanism is old. It is traceable to the Renaissance as an outlook on life, as a school of thought, or as a body of discourse. In the sixteenth century, Renaissance Europe took a renewed interest in the Greek and Roman classics and re-examined man's place in the world.

Several pivotal events influenced Renaissance thought. These events include the following:

1. The expansion of the European empires through the discovery of other continents and lands.
2. The Protestant Reformation
3. The rise of science
4. The invention of printing
5. The rise of the vernaculars
6. The secularization of knowledge, among others

The expansion of European empires and the discovery of other continents became an opening for new inventions and ideas. These flowed from the imperial

centers to the newfound lands. In return, colonial administrations discovered new peoples, specific cultures, and fresh sources for more economic exchange. Despite the subjugation suffered by colonized people, these imperial projects allowed the rest of the world to become aware of other races and the right of people to assert their respective cultural identities. Nationalist movements have been founded on the idea of human value and freedom, and their seminal notions of sovereignty have become the historical and ideological bases for new humanism's respect for cultural diversity and cultural difference.

The Protestant Reformation, coming on the heels of the rise of mass printing and mass literacy, encouraged the private interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. This led to disunity in the Christian Church and contributed to the modern-day idea of denominationalism, which has been an offshoot of fragmentation and diversity of interpretations of the Word of God as expressed in the Bible. This event has become responsible for feeding off a negative consequence of humanism: discarding fifteen hundred years of dependence on Sacred Tradition and the magisterial teaching of the church in favor of independent thinking and private judgment over questions of morality, Christian ethics, and the rule of faith.

The rise of science and scientific thinking allowed key technological inventions to extend human activities and the mobility of communities. Scientific thought emphasized the value of rational thinking and promoted empiricism and positivism. It encouraged the belief in man's rational capabilities and in making practical judgments by inferring from evidence and objective data. The rise of scientific thought contributed to the diminution of the human sciences, with universities in the nineteenth century emphasizing disciplinary protocols, departmentalization, and the development of processes and modes of inquiry unique to disciplinary temperaments.

Meanwhile, the invention of printing democratized access to knowledge and created a condition in which much of Europe's increasing literacy became an avenue for self-determination and rationalism. Mass production of books and the rise of literacy contributed to the humanistic promotion of intellectual enlightenment, the encouragement of free marketplaces of ideas, the personal quest for happiness, and the idea of a moral and ethical system that would support the creation of a just and humane society.

Moreover, the rise of the vernaculars in the sixteenth century contributed greatly to humanism's emphasis on the independence of the people's inquisitive spirit. The rise of the vernaculars – such as the Tuscan language in which Dante Alighieri wrote his opus titled *Divina Commedia* – became a necessary ally to humanism's aspiration to elevate literacy even among non-Latin speaking people and to make knowledge written in the classical languages accessible to as many people as possible via translation.

The secularization of knowledge or the expansion of interest in learning beyond the confines of theology and religious knowledge assisted in developing a curiosity over non-religious and scientific thought. This movement fed off humanism's aspiration for intellectual ascent for all human beings; knowledge being the basis for self-understanding and for discerning the contribution of individual vocations in the shaping of communal spirit.

Of the said historic events, technology seemed to be a major catalyst of change. The technology of shipbuilding, for instance, aided sea voyages and in carrying out the work entailed in expanding imperial projects in the colonies. In addition, the printing technology led to mass literacy and the printing of thousands of copies of the Bible. Also, print technology opened the door for the translation of classical literary works and other forms of secular knowledge into the vernacular languages and resulted in the intellectualization of said vernacular languages.

In other words, during the Renaissance and at the present, the rise of technology (printing, for instance, in the sixteenth century and new media in the twenty-first) led to new modes of thinking. Technology was the catalyst for sixteenth-century proto-modern thought. Similarly, technology has remained to be the driving force for change and innovation in the twenty-first century, thereby creating massive shifts in governance, economy, education, culture, and communications.

Humanism could not have affected human thought other than during the Renaissance. This historical epoch was ripe for embracing change and facilitating transitions. The reinterpretation of the value of humanity was directly and indirectly caused by the new technologies. Most significant to communication and media cultures were the printing technology and the mass dissemination of books. Mass literacy democratized access to education. As an innovation of Renaissance Europe, the book was later joined by other print media forms and genres: newspapers, magazines, penny press, and mass advertising.

The new Humanism is never entirely new. It has always been there – at least as a body of discourse since the 1930s. Modern conceptions of humanism may be ascribed to “a philosophy of life that affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity.” (“Cork Humanists,” n.d.)

What has happened between the sixteenth and twenty-first centuries that we need to recover humanism or define a new one? Each time a new technology is born, humans must adjust their activities. Such alignment of human function has several implications for our ethical lives. Some five hundred years of exponential growth of communication technology have affected humanity in various domains such as lifestyles, workplaces, governance, economy, mobility, and well-being.

The New Humanities or New Humanism can be traced to the literary criticism of a group of scholars in the 19th century who reworked the ethical and moral

philosophies handed down from the period of antiquity. By the 1930s, the Neo-Humanists were chiefly known for their concern “with the ends of literature as affecting man, with literature as it takes its place in the human forum of ideas and attitudes” (Scott, 1962, p. 23). Therefore, what is significant to New Humanism is the centrality of man as they move around the context of the times, which could be the Industrial Revolution, the rise of electronic media, the World Wars, the full impact of modern life, and the postcolonial experiences of nation-states that grew out of the imperial project of the European West since the 16th century. In other words, what we deem as New Humanism today is the continuation of a longer project aimed at recuperating what has been perceived to be a rapture in the history of humanism during the four industrial revolutions.

The religious systems and cultural beliefs of Asia have always been considered a major source of humanist philosophical thought. The ancient civilizations of India and China have grounded their moral philosophy in the teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism.

Hinduism upholds that humans possess godly qualities. For Hinduism, humans are deeply connected to the quest for inner happiness. Das Basu (1990) claims that “Hinduism believes that God speaks through supermen and also that such saviors are incarnations of God Himself, descending to humanity as occasion arises during days of the darkest gloom” (p. 1). Buddhism, on the other hand, complements Hinduism in a sense through its emphasis on causality, hierarchical relationships, and the rules of propriety (Tanlayco, Lecture, April 21, 2001). Other ethical systems from Asia, like Taoism, Confucianism, and Daoism, privilege humanity’s conscious walk toward perfection and happiness. Some core teachings of said Asian philosophies tend to cohere with some components of the Renaissance or Western humanism and the New Humanist movement from North America in the 1930s. They meet and converge in areas such as personal and social ethics, the quest for human happiness and good, and the natural belief of humans in a transcendent power or entity or their affinity to metaphysical things.

The religious, ethical, and philosophical systems in Asia and those drawn from Western humanism contributed greatly to recent calls for the re-examination of the impact of the technologies brought forth by the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Inevitably, these must also inform the crafting of new directions for the study of communication and media.

Contexts for New Humanism in Communication and Media Studies

We are at this juncture in world history where renewing our faith in humanity has become imperative on account of the many changes wrought by the fourth industrial revolution. However, it pays to re-understand what past industrial eras

have contributed to our current understanding of the discipline of communication and media studies and the ecology that animate the practice of the communication profession.

The first industrial revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe and North America was greatly assisted by the discovery of the use of water and steam power, which led to the mechanization of industries. The second industrial revolution, which took place between 1870 and 1914, featured steel, oil, electricity, and combustion engines. It led to the mass production of goods.

Meanwhile, the third industrial revolution from the 1980s was the Digital Revolution, and its main technologies were personal computers and the Internet. It is meant to hasten automation. Lastly, the fourth industrial revolution in the twenty-first century saw the advance of Augmented Reality, big data, robotics, the Internet of Things, blockchain, and crypto. Klaus Schwab, Founder and Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum, said that the fourth industrial revolution “is characterized by a fusion of technologies that is blurring the lines between the physical, digital, and biological spheres” (2016, para 2).

The renewed call for humanism has been augured by the shifts in consciousness brought about by the fourth industrial revolution. The first led to the mass printing of books, newspapers, and periodicals that gave birth to mass advertising and the breaking down of boundaries between high culture and popular culture. Mechanization is at the heart of mass printing, which, in Walter Benjamin’s opinion, has changed the perception of the masses toward art. The second led to the rise of broadcast media and created what Marshall McLuhan refers to as a “global village.” It massified media consumption and increased the need for assembly line concepts and genre recycling.

Meanwhile, the third industrial revolution was digital and led to nonlinear production and consumption of content, opening a highway where anyone could partake. It led to automatization of communication, encouraging interactivity and ease of access. Subsequently, the fourth industrial age conceived of technologies not as mere extensions of humans but sometimes as replacements for humans. People are sometimes depersonalized and forced to adjust their skills to new technologies, creating new kinds of knowledge, literacies, jobs, and professions. In this context, humans could sometimes be held hostage by technology into a mode of work that is mechanized, emotionless, and corporatized.

New Humanism may address the implications of the fourth industrial revolution (such as depersonalization) that are also confounded by the impact and residue of the other three industrial revolutions (mechanization, massification, automatization). This may be done by understanding the histories and cultural outcomes of the three previous industrial revolutions. Understanding how we

come to this point is important in addressing the fate of humanity in the foreseeable future. As Schwab opines: “There has never been a time of greater promise, or one of greater potential peril” (2016, para 30).

In a UNESCO document titled *A New Humanism for the 21st Century*, UNESCO Director-General Irene Bokova (2010) has outlined the following concrete actions designed to promote the new humanism amid the fourth industrial revolution:

1. Self-fashioning
2. As a collective requirement
3. Building a global community
4. Implementing tangible projects as key to mutual understanding, stability, and development.

For Bokova, the new humanism begins with an individual response to modern life and its attendant problems. Fashioning a sense of self amidst the increasingly dehumanizing factors in modern life would mean understanding and believing in the capacity of the individual to make sense of social change and one’s imaginative response towards it. An example was Leonardo da Vinci’s reading of his times during the Renaissance and what he felt to be his multiple roles in it. In da Vinci’s estimation, humanity is never about limits but rather a limitless potential. Such affirmative action and an almost Utopian impulse to insist on humanity’s place in an increasingly mechanized and massified living – as in the case of the Renaissance culture of Da Vinci’s time – is required to have a revolutionary insight into the order of things. Da Vinci defied disciplinary boundaries and dipped his fingers in almost every field of knowledge: art, biography, engineering, astronomy, etcetera. As a man of multiple literacies, Da Vinci proved to be a fine exemplar of self-fashioning. His example, too, demonstrated how self-fashioning requires a creative response to any sort of change or shift in modes of thought.

The New Humanities, extending the solitary and autonomous engagement associated with old or traditional/classical humanities, proposes that all scholars work for a particular community, putting to actual use all the constructs and concepts held in great esteem by the humanists. As the UNESCO Secretary-General Bokova (2010) has said: “Individuals become whole in society, as members of a community” (p. 3).

Meanwhile, the same UNESCO document cites the global emphasis on New Humanism. As Bokova (2010) further opines, “Being a humanist today means building bridges between North, South, East, and West and strengthening the human community to take up our challenges together” (p. 4). The building of an international human community, though, may be accomplished through the following suggestions: (1) Building bridges and strengthening the human

community to take up challenges together; (2) Access to quality education; (3) Scientific cooperation; and (4) Projecting culture as rapprochement and as means to a shared vision. These efforts at building community, education, and cooperation are important in combatting the dehumanizing impact of technology.

These specific features of new humanism, however, require new modes of inquiry that may take any of the following forms:

1. The introduction of inclusivity, mixed methods, and the reflexive approach to research methods may help achieve the aspiration to bridge bridges between cultures and strengthen a global human community.
2. The consideration that may be paid to how knowledge is produced, circulated, and consumed as part of the problematics of new humanistic education.
3. The commitment of new humanities to seek other voices by striking international cooperation and collaboration with other disciplines.
4. The premium paid on multiculturalism to address the concepts of pluralism, diversity, and difference that are prevalent as a condition of our postmodern life.

Pursuing projects that address the idea of humanitarian commitment is paramount in the UNESCO declaration. Tangible and intangible world heritage must serve as monuments and sites where a common understanding can take root. New humanities may take advantage of its affinity with visual art, architecture and design, and literary and performative arts to make a case for universal respect for diverse ideas and expressions. Of critical importance to new humanism is the specific application of the idea of social humanism, where humanistic ideals may converge with social action through policymaking, advocacy, teaching, research dissemination, and extension activities.

In recent decades, university curricula have been adjusted to accommodate the innovations being required by the third industrial revolution, which is given over to digital technology, and the fourth industrial revolution, which has required human skills and potential to adjust to the changes introduced by advanced technologies. Making these new adjustments also means re-introducing a humanism that can strike a balance between and among the impact of interactivity, interface, and computing.

Crafting Global Research Agenda

In recent decades, the drive to build research institutions and universities has become a means to jumpstart a knowledge economy that is systematic, methodical, balanced, and impactful. Creating research universities means creating loci for

specialized knowledge. However, the move to revitalize humanism may help balance the two tendencies of twenty-first-century university education, which include the emphasis on specialization and the use of technology in rendering the various disciplines more relevant to the times. On such two accounts, the new humanities may aid in counteracting the fragmentation of knowledge and the depersonalizing effect of technology.

The 1998 UN World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21st Century: Vision and Action and Framework for Priority Action for Change and Development in Higher Education notes in its preamble the crucial role of new technologies in updating the framework for education in the twenty-first century. One of the missions and functions of higher education, says the 1998 Declaration, is “to advance, create and disseminate knowledge through research and provide, as part of its service to the community, relevant expertise to assist societies in cultural, social and economic development, promoting and developing scientific and technological research as well as research in the social sciences, the humanities, and the creative arts” (<https://unesdoc.unesco.org>).

In the classical sense, a university can never be a university without a liberal arts college. In other words, the humanities have always been the foundation of university education. This is true of the Universities of Paris, Oxford, and Cambridge from the Middle Ages. Harvard College, founded in 1636, began as a Liberal Arts college but, beginning in 1890, gave birth to separate departments that catered to the various disciplines.

In the eighteenth century, some higher education institutions immediately began as research universities, as exemplified by the University of Göttingen, the University of Berlin, Johns Hopkins University, Clark University, Stanford University, and the University of Chicago. As the universities tended toward specialization, the humanities have been relegated to a minor position. As fragmented as the curricula have been, the role of the humanities in the various fields has gradually been obscured.

Meanwhile, the two tracks of humanistic communication research that have been referred to earlier as part of Craig’s seven traditions are crucial in re-mapping communication and media studies under the banner of the new industrial era. These tracks include the phenomenological tradition and the critical tradition. As applied to communication, phenomenology trains its lens in the unique way people make sense of their common experiences, interpret them, and negotiate them according to their specific subjectivities. The phenomenological exercise can be self-reflexive, meaning it can reflect on its own methods, an option that the positivist sciences seem to evince. On the other hand, critical tradition sees the interconnection between power and communication and highlights the potential of discourse in influencing social action.

Be that as it may, how can the new humanities help craft a more relevant research agenda for communication? The new humanities may function as guiding epistemology or as a way of approaching knowledge. It could offer a way of making sense of the world. An example of the critical tradition is historicism, which tries to understand the past and its contexts as a way of explaining the present. Specific examples of this include the following:

1. The revitalization of media history courses through poststructuralist, deconstruction, and postcolonial approaches; or,
2. Approaching communication and media theories from the perspective of communication and media history.

Similarly, the contribution of qualitative social sciences such as constructionism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics may help remind us that subjective interpretation of phenomena is inextricable from being an individual in the world or an inquirer deeply rooted in one's discourse environment.

Critical theory and research afforded by Marxist and Neo-Marxist Approaches, Structuralism and Semiotics, Post-structuralism, Deconstruction, and Postcolonial theory will continue to remind scientists, industry leaders, policymakers, and academics that social and cultural change should always benefit humanity. More than the ease, comfort, speed, and efficiency of technological breakthroughs, human flourishing is the greater aim of cultural change.

Research Agenda for Communication and Media Studies from the New Humanist Perspective

Therefore, any research agenda for communication and media studies from the New Humanist perspective should come from three broad perspectives that somehow point to the direction of the discourse globally. These are race, class, and gender.

The discourse on race could put the Asian perspective on many research agendas that are sometimes still operating around Western or received theory. This will also address the postcolonial argument and trauma of nations after the colonial moment or at the conclusion of Western imperialist projects. This will also help rationalize efforts to pursue nation-building projects.

The discourse in class could tackle concepts of global labor and capital in the age of late capitalism and as the world confronts issues of migration, diaspora, information divides, and climate change.

The discourse on gender could address issues of inclusivity and the cultural roots of gender difference. The New Humanist perspective will assist in filling the gaps in gender discourse.

Re-inserting humanism in programs of communication and media studies will, however, bear some implications on the following:

1. Deploying the continuing relevance of Rhetoric and humanistic theories and research frameworks: This would allow us to counter the problem of manipulative speech, fake news, disinformation, and misinformation.
2. Ensuring the influence of phenomenological and hermeneutical traditions will enrich the literature on the varieties of communication cultures and the hermeneutic approaches and their balancing effect on mainstream discourse.
3. Acknowledging the contribution of structuralist, semiotic, and poststructuralist frameworks: This will help ensure that humanity will still be at the core of contemporary technological innovations and that the threat of a post-humanist future may, however, be contained by countering master/dominant narratives and unraveling new voices from other sectors of the world communication cultures.

New Humanism in the context of communication research can be achieved by first conceiving a historical framework and learning from the past by comparing revolutionary media periods. Secondly, New Humanism in communication and media studies could be pursued by identifying the needs and challenges of the present.

As already mentioned, a certain dose of historicism is important in understanding the need for new humanism. Renaissance humanism and twenty-first-century humanism had certain parallels and departures. Renaissance thinkers' first reaction to societal changes was to promote humanism. This can strike some parallels with how twenty-first-century media generations have reacted to revolutionary changes in the technological, social, and cultural spheres during their time.

Under Renaissance humanism, human beings occupied the center of the world. In twenty-first-century humanism, people extend their function through the media of communication. The human senses find their extension in several components of the print, electronic, and digital media: the eyes through the linearity of the print medium, the sensory experiences through electronic media, and the interactive, nonlinear, immersive, but fragmented experience through the digital media.

Classical humanism promoted free and critical interpretation of classical texts during the Renaissance. In the twenty-first century, it is hoped that New Humanism could be at the forefront in rationalizing the use of technology in our lives while also holding a critical attitude toward it.

Furthermore, classical humanism fostered individual autonomy during the Renaissance and discouraged conventional thought. This resulted in beautiful

inventions, works of art, and profound ideas. In the twenty-first century, New Humanism can foster a sense of autonomy to combat global communication's tendency to engender ideological and doctrinaire thought, apathy, and cultural pluralism.

Likewise, classical humanism provided the intellectual fuel that helped the imperial powers justify discovering new worlds across ocean seas. This action became the launching pad for the conquest of then-yet uncharted lands, including much of Asia. In the twenty-first century, New Humanism can promote a renewed respect for the sovereignty of various states and nations, the cultural diversity they embody, and the distinct cultural identities they have constructed.

Moreover, Renaissance humanism promoted the classical idea of a cosmopolitan, universal citizen possessing clear rights and responsibilities. In the twenty-first century, New Humanism can promote the revival of such a notion. It can re-ignite the full flowering of humanity the way it did in the sixteenth century. In ushering in an age of new humanism, one can be mindful of the expectations that will attend the unraveling of the Fifth Industrial Revolution. Pratik Gauri and Jim Van Eerden of the World Economic Council have foreseen a new industrial age that will be responsive to the twenty-first century in so far as it acknowledges the connection between innovation and high-minded moral purpose. Quoting Gauri and Van Eerden:

In the end, it all comes down to people and values. We need to shape a future that works for all of us by putting people first and empowering them. In its most pessimistic, dehumanized form, the Fourth Industrial Revolution may indeed have the potential to “robotize” humanity and thus to deprive us of our heart and soul. But as a complement to the best parts of human nature – creativity, empathy, and stewardship – it can also lift humanity into a new collective and moral consciousness based on a shared sense of destiny. It is incumbent on us all to make sure the latter prevails (2016, para 31).

Technology with moral clarity means taking control of our destiny as humanity, which the likes of new humanists like Irving Babbitt, Stuart Sherman, and Paul Elmer Moore articulated in the 1930s. It means re-asserting a new humanist agenda for communication research, which translates into committed social science and free and imaginative humanism. This takes into consideration the universal aims of the sustainable development goals and the transcendent superiority of humanity over everything else. This can use mixed methods as the agency of social research in communication and the critical framework of humanist communication and media research. This means that the macro-framework of recuperating the human from the post-humanist tendency of depersonalized technology should complement the micro-framework of communication research approaches where the subject of inquiry is not only the impact of technology on man but also the continuing re-assertion of human talent and will. This is supposed to be the true

face of innovation and change. Simply put, insisting on humanistic communication and media studies could complement the evolving discourse of a purported fifth revolution, which, at its core, should be more than industrial. It should be a revolution that locates the human person as both agency and beneficiary of a social and cultural revolution of a different – albeit superior- kind.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the pressing need to re-examine the ideals of new humanism in re-creating a new media culture dominated by the technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. It has compared the current ideas of new humanism with Renaissance humanism and, in so doing, realized that many of the concepts of sixteenth-century humanism persist to this day. While the scientific community could suggest new contexts for a digitized world, one should not abandon the sobering influence of the humanistic view. Because of the legacies of Renaissance humanism and the insights gained from new humanism, there has been a perceived need for a new research agenda for communication and media studies, surely ones that attend to the promises of the new technologies and at the same attentive to maintaining the humanizing impact of their utility, applications, and purpose.

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Mula Pelikula Tungo sa Pagkamulat Tungo sa Pag-aklas

Clodualdo del Mundo, Jr.

Abstract

The essay examines the transformative power of cinema in narrating and inspiring revolutionary movements, focusing on the Filipinos' struggle against various colonial and authoritarian regimes. Utilizing Getino and Solanas' notion of "Third Cinema," the essay explores how film transcends mere entertainment to become a potent tool for social change and political enlightenment. By surveying key cinematic works that depict the Philippine revolutions against Spanish, American, and Japanese colonization, as well as the resistance against martial law, the essay highlights the unique capacity of cinema to educate, mobilize, and galvanize oppressed communities. It underscores the enduring relevance of revolutionary storytelling in film as a catalyst for awareness and action, fostering a deeper understanding of historical and contemporary struggles for freedom and justice.

Keywords: Philippine cinema, Third cinema, postcolonialism, film genres, martial law

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May kasabihang nagsasaad na ang kasaysayan ay sinusulat ng nagwagi sa digmaan. Sa larangan ng pelikula, ang kasaysayan ay nasa kamay ng may hawak ng kamera. Gayon nga ang nangyari sa ating kasaysayan ng pelikula. Nang lumabas sa *New York Times* ang balitang sinakop ng Estados Unidos ang Pilipinas at nagkaroon ng sagupaan sa iba't ibang sulok ng bayan, agad gumawa ng kanilang istorya ang mga alagad ng Edison Films. Gumawa agad ang Edison Films ng kanilang mga pelikula ng mga engkwentro sa pagitan ng mga Amerikano at Pilipino, mga pelikulang hango sa kanilang imahinasyon. Kailangang ipalabas agad sa mga manonood ang tagumpay ng Amerika sa ibayong dagat, kaya di na hinintay na makarating sa Pilipinas ang mga cameraman ng Edison Films. Ginawa ang maiikling pelikulang ito sa New Jersey.

Sa mga pelikulang ito, matagumpay na iwinawagayway ang bandila ng Estados Unidos. At ang mga sundalong Pilipino ay laging talunan. Bagsak ang kanilang bandila na isang kapisang tela lamang na mahirap uriin dahil hindi pa alam ng mga Amerikano kung ano ang itsura ng bandila ng bayang sinasakop nila. Ang ganitong istorya ang karaniwang takbo ng mga maiikling pelikulang Edison, gaya ng *Advance of Kansas Volunteers at Caloocan* (White, 1899), *U.S. Troops and Red Cross in the Trenches at Caloocan* (White, 1899), *Filipinos Retreat from Trenches* (White, 1899), at *Capture of Trenches at Candaba* (White 1899).

May istorya ring nilangoy ng isang Col. Funston ang ilog sa Bagbag, isang maliwanag na pagmamalaki ng kagitingan ng sundalong Amerikano (White, "Col. Funstan [sic] Swimming the Baglag [sic] River," 1899). Kinunan din ang mga sundalong Amerikano na lulan sa malalaking bapor patungong Pilipinas - at ang tinaguriang "navy" ni Emilio Aguinaldo na lulan sa maliliit na bangka (White, "Troop Ships for the Philippines," 1898; "Aguinaldo's Navy," 1900). Minaliit ang Pilipino, pinalabas na talunan sa kathang pelikula.

Nang matutunan ng Pilipino ang kamera at paggawa ng pelikula, nagkaroon ng pagkakataon ang Pilipino na ilahad ang kanyang istorya. Isa sa mga pangunahing direktor na Pilipino noong dekada 1920 ay si Julian Manansala. Kung titingnan ang mga titulo ng kanyang mga pelikula, mukhang tinalakay niya ang mga isyung mahalaga sa bayan noong panahong iyon. Ang kanyang unang pelikula na pinamagatang *Patria Amore* (1929) ay naging kontrobersyal sapagkat tinalakay nito ang mga pang-aabusong naranasan ng mga Pilipino sa kamay ng mga Kastila. Nabahala diumano ang komunidad ng mga Kastila at sinubukan nilang ipatigil ang pagpapalabas nito ngunit hindi sila pinagbigyan ng korte (Salumbides, 1952, p. 15) Sa kasamaang-palad ay walang kopya ng pelikulang ito, kaya walang masasabi tungkol sa nilalaman ng pelikula at ng kalidad nito.

Mula noon, hindi na napigil ang pagsasapelikula ng mga istorya, damdamin, at pangarap ng Pilipino. Sa listahan ng mga pelikula ng iba't ibang kompanya sa ating bayan na ginawa ng Society of Filipino Archivists for Film (SOFIA) para malaman ang kalagayan ng mga pelikulang Pilipino, umabot sa mahigit 3,000

pelikula ang filmograpiya. Iba't ibang uri ng pelikula ang nasa listahan, iba't ibang genre. May mga kopyang mapapanood pa; ngunit ang kalagayan ng ibang pelikula ay nakalulungkot. Ang iba'y hindi na kumpleto; ang iba'y masama na ang kondisyon at amoy suka na (ang tinatawag na “vinegar syndrome”); ang iba'y wala na.

Bukod sa listahan ng SOFIA, tiningnan ko rin ang URIAN, ang antolohiya ng Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino, na may filmograpiya ng mga pelikulang ginawa sa bawat dekada, mula dekada '70 hanggang '90.

Kung pag-aaralan ang pelikula at ang pakikipaghamok ng Pilipino para sa kalayaan at pagbubuo ng isang bayan, marami-rami ring halimbawa ang magagamit. Maaaring ikategorya ang mga pelikulang ito sa sumusunod: 1) panahon ng kolonisasyon sa ilalim ng Espanya hanggang sa pumasok ang Estados Unidos at pinamahalaan ang bayan; 2) panahon ng Pangalawang Digmaang Pandaigdig at mga sumunod na dekada; 3) panahon ng diktadurya sa ilalim ni Marcos; at 4) mga pelikulang tinatalakay sa kasalukuyang panahon ang isyu ng kalayaan, bayan, di pagkakaisa, at kawalan ng katarungan.

Unang Kategorya

Ang unang kategorya ay may kinalaman sa panahon ng kolonisasyon sa ilalim ng Espanya, at patuloy na paghahari ng Estados Unidos. Mula sa mga pelikulang LVN, kabilang sa kategoryang ito ang *Dagohoy* (1953), sa direksyon ni Gregorio Fernandez, at *Lapu-Lapu* (1955), sa direksyon ni Lamberto Avellana. Noong dekada '60, ginawa naman ni Gerardo de Leon ang *Noli Me Tangere* (1961) at *El Filibusterismo* (1962), ang kanyang pagsasapelikula ng dalawang nobela ni Jose Rizal. Mula sa dekada '70, maaring isama ang *Ganito Kami Noon, Paano Kayo Ngayon?* (1976), sa direksyon ni Eddie Romero. Noong sentenyal ng kamatayan ni Rizal ay ginawa ang *Rizal sa Dapitan* (1997), sa direksyon ni Tikoy Aguiluz; *Jose Rizal* (1998), sa direksyon ni Marilou Diaz-Abaya; *Bayaning 3rd World* (1999), sa direksyon ni Mike de Leon. Sa mga pelikulang mula sa bagong milenyo, mabibilang ang *Heneral Luna* (2015) at *Goyo: Ang Batang Heneral* (2018), kapwa sa direksyon ni Jerrold Tarog.

Pangalawang Kategorya

Pagkatapos ng Pangalawang Digmaang Pandaigdig, di kataka-takang ilang pelikula ang ginawa na tumatalakay sa panahong iyon. Ilan sa mga pelikulang ito ay ginawa ng LVN. Tinatag ang LVN noong taong 1938, ngunit natigil ang produksyon nang mag-umpisa ang digmaan. Bumangon ang LVN at ilan pang kompanya ng pelikula mula sa abo ng giyera noong kalagitnaan ng dekada '40. Ilan sa mga pelikulang ginawa ng LVN na may kinalaman sa Pangalawang Digmaang Pandaigdig at sa mga sumunod na taon ay *Victory Joe* (1946), sa direksyon ni Manuel Silos. Sinundan ito ng *The Voice of Freedom* (1946), sa direksyon ni Ramon Estella; *Capas* (1949), sa direksyon ni Gregorio Fernandez; *Hantik* (1950), sa direksyon ni Lamberto

Avellana; *Candaba* (1950), sa direksyon ni Gregorio Fernandez. Mabibilang din ang mga pelikula noong pagkaraan ng digmaang pandaigdig, gaya ng *Korea* (1952) na sinulat ni Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino, Jr.; *Huk sa Bagong Pamumuhay* (1953); at *Anak Dalita* (1956), mga pelikula ni Lamberto Avellana.

Pangatlong Kategoriya

Kabilang sa ikatlong kategoriya ang mga pelikula tungkol sa panahon ng diktadurya sa ilalim ni Ferdinand Marcos. Isa sa mga pelikulang ito ay ang *Eskapo: The Geny Lopez-Sergio Osmeña Story* (1995) ni Chito S. Roño. Sina Lopez at Osmeña ay pinaratangang nagplano ng asasinasyon ni Marcos kaya kinulong sila. Mabibilang din sa categoryang ito ang *Dekada '70* (2002), mula sa nobela ni Lualhati Bautista at sa ilalim pa rin ng direksyon ni Roño. Ang istorya ay umiikot sa buhay ng isang pamilya na ang isa sa mga anak ay naging biktima ng diktadurya. Mula sa bagong milenyo ay ang *Liway* (Oebanda, 2018) na tinampok sa Cinemalaya Philippine Independent Film Festival. Ang *Liway* ay hango sa karanasan ng mismong direktor ng pelikula na si Kip Oebanda at ng kanyang ina na nakulong noong panahon ng diktadurya. Ilang dokumentaryo rin ang ginawa ukol sa diktadurya ni Marcos, gaya ng *Signos* (de Leon, 1983) na ginawa ng Concerned Artists of the Philippines, at *Batas Militar* (Red, 1997) na produksyon ng World People Power Foundation at prinodyus ni Kara Magsanoc. Ngayong nasa administrasyon muli ang pamilya Marcos, may ilang pelikulang ginawa para tingnang muli ang kasaysayan at baguhin ang kasaysayan; nangunguna rito ang *Maid in Malacañang* (2022), sa direksyon ni Darryl Yap, ang ipinagmamalaking direktor ng streaming platform na Vivamax.

Pang-apat na Kategoriya

Sa categoryang ito, tinatalakay ang isyu ng kalayaan at pagiging isang bansa sa kasalukuyang panahon. Ano ang kahulugan ng kalayaan ngayon? May kahulugan ba ang pagiging isang bansa? May kalayaan ba kung lagapan ang kahirapan at kawalan ng hustisya? May pagkakaisang-bayan ba kung may pagkakawatak-watak? Ilan sa mga pelikulang kabilang sa categoryang ito ay mga pelikula tungkol sa isyu sa Mindanao: *Diligan Man ng Dugo* (1993), isang aksyon-drama sa direksyon ni Jose “Kaka” Balagtas at pinangungunahan ni Anthony Alonzo; *Isang Lahi, Isang Dugo sa Lupang Pangako* (1998), isa ring pelikulang aksyon sa direksyon ni Jhun Ortega, at pinangungunahan ni Dante Varona; *Lagablal sa Lupang Pangako* (1982), tungkol sa pangangamkam ng lupa sa Mindanao, sa direksyon ni Jose Miranda Cruz; *Maguindanao* (1982), sa direksyon ni Diego Cagahastian, tungkol sa planong hiwalay na Muslim state; *Anak ng Sultan* (1983), sa direksyon ni Jerry Tirazona. Kabilang din sa categoryang ito ang mga pelikula tungkol sa kalagayan ng mga magsasaka, kahirapan sa lungsod, kawalan ng hustisya, at pang-aabuso ng gobyerno. Kabilang dito ang *Alex Boncayao Brigade* (1989) ni Joey del Rosario, na tinatalakay

ang papel ng New People's Army (NPA) laban sa korapsyon at pang-aabuso ng gobyerno; *Demolisyon (Dayuhan sa Sariling Bayan)* (1995) sa direksyon ni Roland Ledesma, tungkol sa sitwasyon sa mga slum area; *Diligin Mo ng Hamog ang Uhaw na Lupa* (1975), direksyon ni Augusto Buenaventura, na tumatalakay sa kalagayan ng mga aping magsasaka; *Sister Stella L* (1984), direksyon ni Mike de Leon, tungkol sa manggagawa, kawalan ng hustisya, at ang kahalagahan ng unyon; *Bayan Ko, Kapit sa Patalim* (1985), direksyon ni Lino Brocka, na umiikot din sa kalagayan ng mga manggagawa; *Balweg, The Rebel Priest* (1987), direksyon ni Butch Perez, tungkol sa buhay ni Conrado Balweg, isang dating pari ng simbahang Katoliko na naging rebelde at tagapagtatag ng Cordillera People's Liberation Army (CPLA); *Kumander Dante* (1988), direksyon ni Ben Yalung, tungkol naman kay Bernabe Buscayno, alyas Ka Dante, lider ng NPA; *Walang Panginoon* (1989), direksyon ni Mauro Gia Samonte, tungkol pa rin sa NPA at problema ng mga magsasaka sa lupa.

Baril at Pelikula

Marami sa mga pelikulang mabibilang sa apat na kategorya ay aksyon-drama. Sa mga engkwentro ng mga nagsasagupaang militar at rebelde, ang karaniwang sandata ay ang baril. Bagay na bagay ito sa pelikula, dahil di bago sa pelikula ang barilan. At may kuneksyon ang kamera sa baril. May mga terminong ginagamit sa pagsasapelikula na hango sa baril, halimbawa *shooting*. Ang bawat kuha ay tinatawag na *shot*. May uri ng mikropono na tinatawag na *shotgun microphone*. At isa sa pinakamaagang disenyo ng kamera ay mukhang riple, kaya tinawag itong *photo gun*.

Ngunit may malaking pagkakaiba ang kamera sa baril. Ang hangarin ng taong kumakalabit sa gatilyo ay pumatay, tapusin ang kalaban, Ang hangarin naman ng taong ginagamit ang kamera ay lumikha – lumikha ng imahe, lumikha ng istorya, lumikha ng pelikulang makabubuo ng mensahe.

Ngunit hindi malaya ang filmmaker na basta-basta na lamang lumikha o idaan sa pelikula ang kanyang istorya at mensahe. Sa isang maikling pelikula na pinamagatang *The Art of Cinema*, binanggit ni Andrei Tarkovsky ito: “Cinema is an unlucky art as it depends on money” (TheGaroStudios, 2020, 00:54). Karamihan sa libu-libong pelikulang Pilipino ay produksyon sa mainstream o sentro ng industriya, kung saan ang unang-unang layunin ay gumawa ng pera sa pamamagitan ng pelikula. Ganito rin ang kalagayan sa telebisyon sa ating bayan na umaasa sa anunsiyo o isponsor para magawa ang mga programa. Ang medyum, sa madaling salita, ay isang komoditi. Kaya sa mga pelikulang nabanggit ko na tumatalakay sa isyu ng kalayaan at pagiging-isang bansa, karamihan ay nakasalalay sa pangunahing aktor o istar, at karamihan sa mga pelikulang ito ay aksyon-drama. Mapapansin na ang mga aktor ay mga action stars. Hindi naiiba ang takbo sa telebisyon. Noong 2017, nagprodyus ang GMA Public Affairs ng espesyal na programa para

gunitain ang batas militar. Ang *Alaala: A Martial Law Special* (Caringal, 2017) ay isang docu-drama tungkol kay Boni Ilagan, isang aktibista noong panahon ng diktadurya. Bagamat may mga panayam sa mga tunay na personahe gaya nina Boni Ilagan at Pete Lacaba, at dahil kailangang nakaaaliw ang drama at may atraksyon, ang gumanap na Boni Ilagan sa drama ay si Alden Richards, si Pete Lacaba ay ginampanan ni Rocco Nacino, at ang kapatid ni Boni Ilagan ay ginampanan ni Bianca Umali. Matatandaan din ang teleseryeng *Maria Clara at Ibarra* (Atienza, 2022-2023) na ang mga pangunahing tauhan ay ginampanan nina Barbie Forteza, Julie Anne San Jose, Dennis Trillo, at David Licaucó. Kung ito’y magiging walang kabuluhang aliwan o makabuluhang aliwan, iyon ang hamon sa gumagawa.

Ngunit may ibang pelikula naman na ginagawa sa labas ng sentro ng industriya, ito ang mga pelikulang nasa gilid ng industriya at mga pelikulang tahasang nasa labas ng industriya, ang mundo ng independent filmmaking. Sa gilid ng industriya, lalung-lalo na sa labas ng industriya, may pagkakataong gumawa ang filmmaker ng pelikulang may ambisyon ng sining o pelikulang may kabuluhan. Ilan sa mga pelikulang ito ang *Noli Me Tangere* (1961) at *El Filibusterismo* (1962) ni Gerardo de Leon, *Jose Rizal* (1998) ni Marilou Diaz-Abaya, *Dekada ’70* (2002) ni Chito Roño, *Bayaning 3rd World* (1999) ni Mike de Leon, at iba pa.

Pelikula at Ilusyon

Ang isa pang katotohanan na dapat harapin ay ang katunayang ang pelikula ay pelikula. Ito ay representasyon ng mundo, ng istorya, ng ideya ng mga filmmaker. Ito ay hindi kasaysayan. Sa kanyang introduksyon sa *Whirlwinds of Dust (The Fall of Antonio Luna)*, ang dulang pampelikulang sinulat nina Henry Francia at Eduardo Rocha at siyang pinagmulan ng pelikulang *Heneral Luna*, idiniin ni Nick Joaquin na “History is most often viewed from the particular bias of an individual interpreting events through the prism of his own lens so that there may be as many ‘histories’ as there are historians” (Francia & Rocha, n.d.) At dinugtong niya na ang pelikulang nagmumula sa kasaysayan ay gumagamit ng “dramatic license and speculation.” Gayon nga ang dulang pampelikulang nina Rocha at Francia. Ang kongklusyon ni Nick Joaquin, “This screenplay, like the film that will be made from it, is illusion. Enjoy it.” (Francia & Rocha, n.d.)

Teorya ng Pangatlong Cinema

Kung ilusyon nga ang pelikula, ano ang kahihinatnan ng mga pelikulang nagmumula sa kasaysayan? Ano ang mapupulot natin sa mga pelikulang ito?

Marahil, makatutulong ang teorya ng Pangatlong Cinema na nagsimula sa Latin America noong dekada sienta. Sinulat ng mga Latinong filmmaker gaya nina Jorge Sanjines at Octavio Getino, ang kaibhan ng Pangatlong Cinema. Binilang nila sa Unang Cinema ang mga pelikulang Hollywood, ang mga pelikulang komersyal.

Binansagan naman nilang Pangalawang Cinema ang mga pelikula ng mga awtor o *auteur films*. Ang Pangatlong Cinema ay ang cinema ng dekolonisasyon, o ang matatawag nating tunay na pelikulang malaya. Ang isa pang mahalagang ideya ay ang tungkol sa layon ng pelikula. Sa Pangatlong Cinema, ang tunay na layon o layunin ng pelikula ay wala sa loob ng teatro; ang dapat pagtuunan ng pansin ay ang buhay sa labas ng teatro, sa labas ng tahanan, ang buhay sa tunay na mundo (Getino & Solanas, 1970). Ang pelikula ay paraan lamang para maabot ang tunay na buhay sa labas. Kailangang takasan natin ang sinasabing “ilusyon” ng pelikula at harapin ang tunay na buhay, ang realidad sa ating paligid. Kaya hindi dapat matapos sa panonood ng pelikula ang pelikula. Kailangang pag-usapan ito, suriin, pag-aralan ang kuneksyon nito sa buhay at, sa kalaunan, kumilos upang baguhin ang kalagayan sa paligid.

Pelikulang Dokumentaryo

Kung gayon, kailangang burahin ang “ilusyon.” Ang isang uri ng pelikula na maaring maglapit sa atin sa realidad ay ang pelikulang dokumentaryo. Bagamat ang dokumentaryo ay nagmumula pa rin sa perspektiba ng filmmaker, mas malapit ang dokumentaryo sa tunay na buhay, sapagkat ang mga elemento ng dokumentaryo ay mga tunay na tao, tunay na lugar, tunay na pangyayari. Mas direkta ang kuneksyon ng kamera sa kinukunan, dahil hindi kailangan ang mga elementong kadalasa’y ginagamit sa mga pelikulang kathang-isip gaya ng aktor, iskrip, at disenyo. Ang filmmaker lamang ang namamagitan sa kamera at tunay na buhay. Ang materya ng dokumentaryo ay ang buhay sa pananaw ng filmmaker.

Nabanggit ko na ang mga dokumenaryong *Signos* at *Batas Militar*. Maidaragdag pa rito ang *Imelda* (2003) ni Ramona Diaz. May ilang pelikula rin tungkol kina Marcos na gawa ng mga banyaga, gaya ng *Coup d’Etat: The Philippine Revolt* (Couchman, 1986), *The Kingmaker* (2019) ni Lauren Greenfield tungkol kay Imelda, ang reyna sa likod ng diktador at ng anak na ngayo’y pangulo, at *Imelda and Ferdinand: Exile in Hawaii* (Saupe, 2019) tungkol sa buhay ni Marcos pagkatapos na mapatalsik sa Pilipinas. Ang mga dokumentaryong nakatawag-pansin na mabibilang sa Pang-apat na Kategoriya ay ang *Aswang* (2019) ni Alyx Ayn Arumpac, tungkol sa mga biktima ng tokhang, at *A Thousand Cuts* (2020) ni Ramona Diaz, tungkol kay Maria Ressa ng Rappler at ang isyu ng kalayaan sa pamamahayag.

Noong 1977, ginawa namin ang dokumentaryong *Lupa*, tungkol sa isyu ng reporma sa lupa. Pumasok sa isip ko ang dokumentaryong ito dahil, sa tingin ko, nagbigay ito ng isang karanasang mapalapit sa ilang yugto ng kasaysayan. Nakapanayam namin ang asawa ni Pedro Calusa, ang lider ng mga Colorum. Nakausap din namin sina Luis Taruc at Jesus Lava at ikinuwento nila ang kilusang Huk. At nakausap din namin ang isang bayani ng Kilusang Sakdalista. Noong dekada trenta, bumangon ang Sakdalista upang ipaglaban ang karapatan ng mga

magsasaka at sagupain ang kawalan ng katarungan. Kabilang dito si Generala Salud Algabre, na may mensahe at hamon sa bayan. Nang tanungin ko siya kung ano ang nangyari sa Kilusang Sakdal, kung paano ito nagtapos, mukhang nagtaka si Salud Algabre sapagkat wala sa isip niya na tapos na ang kilusan. “Hindi, hindi iyon natapos. Walang katapusan ‘yon.” Sandaling katahimikan, pagkatapos, sinabi niya nang malinaw at walang pag-aalinlangan, “Ang simulain... walang katapusan.”

Sa pagbabalik-tanaw na ito, napakinggan kong muli ang awit na nilikha namin ni Max Jocson para sa dokumentaryong “Lupa.” Ito ang simula ng awit:

Kapatid...

Masdan mo ang tahimik na kabukiran,
Alaala ng labanang walang patlang,
Alaala ng dugo’t luha ng bayan,
Sa ngalan ng minimithing kalayaan.

Huwag kalilimutan ang kasaysayan,
Patuloy na pakikibaka ng bayan,
Upang wakasan ang walang katarungan,
Upang wakasan ang walang katarungan.

Hindi nasilayan ni Elias ang bukung-liwayway; nanatiling isang pangarap ang hangarin ni Heneral Antonio Luna na makamit ang kalayaan para sa bayan; patuloy ang lumalaking agwat ng mayaman sa mahirap. Ngunit maaaring buhayin ang kanilang mga kasaysayan sa pelikula at umasang makatutulong ang mga ito tungo sa pagkamulat ng sambayanan. At sana’y magkaroon ng lakas upang ipagpatuloy ang nasimulan sa kasaysayan sa labas ng teatro. Hindi tapos ang laban. Ang simulain ay walang katapusan.

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Feminine Foremothers and the Cinematic Construction of the Dalagang Filipina

Elvin Amerigo Valerio

Abstract

The discourse on Philippine cinema has been predominantly shaped by a masculine perspective, with critical acclaim and scholarly focus primarily directed toward male filmmakers associated with Philippine cinema's so-called "Golden Ages." Such tendencies have overshadowed the contributions of women on and off-screen. This essay highlights a previously unacknowledged feminine film tradition in Philippine cinema. Using Luce Irigaray's concept of a "female imaginary and a female symbolic" as a framework, I focus on three influential female producers—Narcisa "Doña Sisang" de Leon, "Mother" Lily Monteverde, and Charo Santos—who significantly influenced the artistic development of mainstream Filipino cinema by dictating the kinds of movies their respective studios produce and shaping the representation of the "Dalagang Filipina" (Filipino Maiden) on screen that mirrored the gender politics of the time. By examining their contributions, I seek to establish a "maternal genealogy" within Philippine cinema, recognizing these women's impactful yet historically overlooked roles in fostering a feminine-oriented filmic tradition.

Keywords: Philippine cinema, gender dynamics, female representation, feminist theory, female imaginary

NOTE: An early draft of this essay was presented at a conference entitled "Women Who Create: The Feminine and the Arts," held at the University of Cambridge, UK, on March 24, 2024.

Introduction: A Historical Elision

In her celebrated 1971 polemical essay, the distinguished art historian Linda Nochlin (2010) raised a provocative question: “Well, if women really are equal to men, why have there been no great women artists?” (p. 264). Nochlin’s ostensibly straightforward interrogation marked one of the initial articulations addressing the conspicuous dearth of women within the artistic canon. She contemplates whether this absence substantiates the pervasive belief in the universal inferiority of women’s art or serves as evidence that prevailing standards for evaluating artistic works were fundamentally devised by men for men. Nochlin’s essay brings to light the inner workings of canon formation, exposing the unconscious acceptance of the male viewpoint as the default, thereby establishing an overtly masculine aesthetic paradigm in art that resulted in the marginalization and trivialization of women’s and, more broadly, feminine artistic practices. Her question has led to the realization that women’s engagement in art is not an unfettered, autonomous endeavor. On the contrary, artistic creation unfolds within a social context and remains substantially mediated and influenced by specific male-dominated institutions.

Similarly, much of the discourse on cinema in the Philippines is informed by a masculine frame of reference. The corpus of scholarly literature on the history of Philippine cinema primarily concentrates on pivotal historical junctures, identified as “Golden Ages” (e.g., Lumbera, 1992, 2011; Sotto, 1992; Francia, 2002; J. David, 2018; Deocampo, 2023a). Each golden age is marked by a surge in artistic and creative works spearheaded by a cadre of predominantly male directors who emerged in each period. Lamberto Avellana and Gerardo de Leon are hailed as among the foremost auteurs of the First Golden Age in the 1950s. The Second Golden Age, from the mid-1970s to the 80s, is marked by the groundbreaking oeuvres of directors like Lino Brocka and Ishmael Bernal. Lastly, the rise of independent filmmakers such as Brillante Mendoza and Lav Diaz defined the Third Golden Age, which began in 2005 and lasted until the 2010s. This prevalence of a male-centric perspective can be attributed to the establishment of the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino (Critics of Philippine Cinema), the first and foremost film critics group in the country. Founded by a group of ten young men in 1976, the Manunuri has forged a framework for film assessment deeply rooted in Aristotelian realism, filtered through the lens of Soviet-era socialist realism and post-World War II Italian neorealism (see: Tiongson, 1983, 2001, 2010, 2013). Therefore, it is not surprising that the Filipino film canon is brimming with realist dramas about the everyday struggles of the working class made by mostly male directors. Since it was established in 1976, the Manunuri releases at the end of each decade a list of ten films they acclaim as “Mga Natatanging Pelikula ng Dekada” (The Outstanding Films of the Decade). From the 1970s to the 2010s, there were only two female directors—Marilou Diaz-Abaya and newcomer Rae Red—whose films made the

list. Furthermore, more than half of the fifty films on the list are realist dramas that explore themes of poverty and social injustices. Today, this seemingly masculine-oriented approach to film evaluation is not only practiced by the members of the Manunuri but has become the standard by which Filipino films are appraised by critics and studied by scholars and academics (e.g., Chua et al., 2014; Tolentino, 2014, 2016; Campos, 2016; Deocampo, 2022; Capino, 2023).

The hegemony of realism and the masculine viewpoint has marginalized the study and critical examination of women both in front and behind the camera. Marilou Diaz-Abaya remains the only female filmmaker given serious attention by critics even though there has been a significant rise in the number of accomplished women directors in the past twenty years, e.g., Olivia Lamasan, Rory Quintos, Joyce Bernal, Cathy Garcia-Sampana, Antoinette Jadaone, and Irene Villamor¹. On the other hand, the study of women onscreen has been mostly limited to the character stereotypes in countless melodramas, such as the girl next door, the submissive wife, the suffering mother, or the object of male sexual desire (e.g., E. Reyes, 1989, pp. 43-49; Tolentino, 2000; Gutierrez, 2009; J. J. David, 2015; Sanchez, 2015; Deocampo, 2023b, 2023c). As such, there is an obvious lack of female figures for film scholars and artists to study, read, engage with, or regard as role models or innovators. It was Luce Irigaray (1993) who suggested that a “fully realized alterity” for womanhood and femininity can be achieved through the conceptualization of “a female imaginary and a female symbolic” including the recognition of a “maternal genealogy” (p. 71). This translates to a disengagement from the dominant discourse and the construction of a maternal genealogy, i.e., a matriline or “mother line” in Philippine cinema.

In this essay, I address Linda Nochlin’s question by shedding light on the existence of a feminine film tradition that has operated alongside and, in many ways, affected the dominant masculine narrative. Adopting Luce Irigaray’s philosophy as a framework, my essay aims to establish the groundwork for recognizing a “female imaginary and a female symbolic” within Philippine cinema. I focus on three powerful yet historically overlooked female figures within the movie industry – film producers Narcisa “Doña Sisang” de Leon, “Mother” Lily Monteverde, and Charo Santos. As the decision-makers in matters pertaining to the production of a film, these women contributed to the development of a hitherto unacknowledged feminine-oriented filmic tradition in Philippine cinema, especially in how they shaped the representation of Filipino women on screen, epitomized by the image of the “Dalagang Filipina” (Filipino Maiden), which reflected the prevailing gender dynamics of their respective eras. Furthermore, I chose these women because they were among the primary forces that brought forth each “Golden Age.” In the 1950s, LVN Pictures was one of the dominant and prolific film production companies. It was managed firsthand by its owner and co-founder, Doña Sisang. The 1970s and 80s saw the rise of Regal Films, the movie studio directly supervised by its sole

owner and founder, Mother Lily. Finally, in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, the actress-turned-movie and television executive Charo Santos, who was then the Executive Producer at Star Cinema and the President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of ABS-CBN, was the most influential figure not just in the movie industry but the whole Philippine entertainment landscape.

From Babaylan to Dalagang Filipina: Woman as Ideological Construct

Pre-colonial Philippine society was a society that believed in gender equality and where women played an equal and important role (Santiago, 2007). The central figure and religious leader in the community was a woman known as the babaylan. The babaylan was revered because she was believed to be the link between the physical and spiritual world. She was also an expert in literature, history, medicine, and the other sciences and thus wielded an enormous amount of influence in the community and shared the same social and political status as men (Villariba, 2006, p. 55). While being a babaylan was a societal function, gender was an important determinant because, historically, all babaylan were women. Men can be allowed to perform babaylan duties only if they are dressed as women (Salazar, 1999, pp. 29-30).

When Spanish colonization began in the 16th century, religion functioned as the most pervasive ideological apparatus in conquering and subjugating the natives. The babaylan proved to be a threat because they performed the same duties and held the same stature as the Spanish friars, who were forcefully positioning themselves as the undisputed authority in the community. In an effort to contain these women, all babaylan activities were banned while the friars branded them as “brujas” (witches) and “aswangs” (demonic creatures); and in an act reminiscent of the Spanish Inquisition, many of those who still refused were chopped to pieces and fed to the crocodiles while others were beheaded or burned at the stake (Melencio, 2013, para. 7). The friars likewise preached the Catholic feminine virtue of docility and submissiveness as the ideal traits for women. This was dogmatized not only on the pulpit but through popular literature as well. Catholic priest Modesto de Castro’s *Ang Pagsusulat ng Magkapatid na si Urbana at Felisa* (The correspondence of the sisters Urbana and Felisa) (1864) is an example of a literary text that was intended to instill proper conduct—“urbanidad” or urbanity, hence the name Urbana—for young women. Although the girls are the main characters, the voice of the male priest/author resonates throughout the text. *Urbana at Felisa* was such an authoritative work that it was considered essential reading in schools, especially for girls, until the mid-twentieth century (S. Reyes, 2001, pp. 91-92). It was through this systematic discrediting of the babaylan, and women in general, that the notion of the “Dalagang Filipina” was born.

“Dalagang Filipina” is a common expression used to extol the Filipino maiden's ideal beauty and innate quality. Its entry into the national lexicon began with *Ang Dalagang Pilipina* (The Filipino maiden), a popular 1928 folk song by Jose G. Santos with lyrics from renowned poet Jose Corazon de Jesus (a.k.a. Huseng Batute). It underscores the Filipino maiden's physical and behavioral attributes as primary determinants of her value. In the song, she is compared to a morning star (“parang tala sa umaga”), her beauty is magnificent (“dakila”), and her aura is akin to that of a fragrant flower (“bulaklak... na ang bango ay humahalimuyak”). The song also celebrates the ideal feminine characteristics – modest (“mahinhin”), demure (“mabini”), and a pure heart (“malinis ang puso”). These physical and behavioral traits are best embodied by Maria Clara, the pious and submissive heroine in Jose Rizal's novel *Noli me Tangere* (Antonio et al., 2022, para. 1). The result of an illicit relationship between a Spanish friar and a native woman, Maria Clara is described by Rizal as a woman with “semi-European features” (2006, p. 42). She has “curly blond hair,” a nose that is “straight in profile,” “dimpled cheeks,” and “skin as white as cotton” (2006, p. 42).

For nearly a century, the image of the “Dalagang Filipina” as the feminine ideal has functioned as a pervasive ideological benchmark concerning the physical and behavioral attributes considered desirable in a woman. The preference for fair skin, gold-leaf hair, and a sharp nose reflects the Eurocentrism of the Filipinos (E. J. David, 2013, pp. 53-78). Women are also assumed to show humility, piety, and an exceptionally nurturing disposition towards their romantic partner, often subordinating their own needs (Valledor-Lukey, 2012, p. 17). The sanctity ascribed to a woman's virginity, framed as her “purity,” is intricately interwoven with these behavioral traits (Manalastas & C. David, 2018, pp. 23-48). This idealized image of the Filipino woman bears a close resemblance to that of the “eternal feminine,” a European/Christian male-constructed philosophical principle that valorizes an “immutable concept of woman” (Abraham, 2009, p. 207) and places her firmly within the “domestic sphere and therefore eternally homebound” (Kuersten, 2003, p. 16).

In cinema, however, the image of the “Dalagang Filipina” is never static and is always subject to constant change and adaptation over time. In the 1950s, Doña Sisang fought against the pervasive influence of American liberal attitudes by instituting a cinematic iconography of the “Dalagang Filipina” based on Maria Clara, creating what Behn Cervantes later called the “mestiza mystique” in Philippine cinema (2000, pp. 16-20). In the post-sexual revolution era of the 1970s, Mother Lily subverted the meek and passive figure of Doña Sisang's “Dalagang Filipina” by creating a more sensual and sexually liberated heroine. Alongside this shift, the woman's ideal physical guise has similarly changed as actresses with *morena* or *kayumanggi* (brown skin) complexion rose in popularity and challenged the mestiza standard. Lastly, inspired by the influx of Korean and Taiwanese soap operas,

Charo Santos reconfigured the image of the “Dalagang Filipina” for the twenty-first century, whose beauty is now derived from a mix of East Asian and Austronesian features. Thus, despite women’s marginal position within film discourse, the ever-evolving construction and representation of the “Dalagang Filipina” in movies is more reflective of gender discourses and women’s realities, thereby offering a lens through which societal shifts and changes in attitudes towards women can be observed. This continually changing characterization challenges the conventional image of the “Dalagang Filipina,” revealing a disjunction between the perceived ideal and the actual roles women assume and their actions.

Feminine Roots: *Dalagang Bukid*

Filmmaking in the Philippines began during the American colonial period. When the Americans bought the Philippines from Spain in 1898, part of their pacification campaign (which became known as the “policy of attraction”) was to share their language and culture with their “little brown brothers.” This included a steady influx of movies from Hollywood to keep Filipinos entertained and pacified. Cinema soon served a secondary function as an ideological apparatus meant to sell the “American Dream” to America’s Filipino subjects. However, as soon as Filipinos started making movies on their own, the cinema became a site where attitudes oscillating between welcoming and resisting American culture were articulated.

Jose Nepomuceno was the first Filipino to produce and direct a film. In 1917, he founded Malayan Movies with his brother Jesus. In what already seemed like a response to American cultural imperialism, the goal of Malayan Movies was to adapt the production of films to the conditions and tastes of the Filipinos, “*a las condiciones y los gustos del pais*” (Pilar, 1983, p. 14). For his first production, Nepomuceno took inspiration from an older and more established form of entertainment, Philippine theater. The result was *Dalagang Bukid* (Countryside maiden) (Nepomuceno, 1919), an adaptation of a hugely popular *sarswela* (stage musical) by Hermogenes Ilagan and Leon Ignacio. *Dalagang Bukid* is a love story centered on a female protagonist, Angelita, a flower vendor who falls in love with a poor law student even though her parents have already arranged for her to marry a rich old man. To further boost the film’s commercial appeal, Nepomuceno cast the same lead star of the stage version, the famous teenage ingénue Honorata “Atang” de la Rama. *Dalagang Bukid* was released with English, Spanish, and Tagalog intertitles. During its theatrical run in Manila, de la Rama sang the songs live at every screening. The film equaled the success of its stage version and enabled Malayan Movies to produce more films, including its sequel (Pilar, 1983, p. 15).



Figure 1. Honorata “Atang” de la Rama. *de la Rama* was only fifteen years old when she starred in the 1917 stage version of *Dalagang Bukid*. Two years later, she essayed the same role in *Nepomuceno’s* film adaptation. *de la Rama* was proclaimed National Artist for Theater in 1987 by President Corazon C. Aquino.

By the end of the 1930s, filmmaking in the Philippines has become an industry. Nepomuceno’s *Malayan Movies* was joined by *Filippine Films*, a studio owned by American expatriates George Harris and Eddie Tait. Then came *Parlatone Hispano-Filipino*, *Excelsior* and *X’Otic* (del Mundo, 1998, p. 61). In 1937, Congressman Pedro Vera of Albay, together with some friends and members of the Vera family, formed *Sampaguita Pictures*. *LVN Pictures* opened a year later and was formed by three wealthy friends—Narcisa “Doña Sisang” Buencamino de Leon, Carmen Villongco, and Eleuterio Navoa—whose initials make up the name *LVN*. By the 1950s, *LVN* and *Sampaguita* were joined by *Premier Productions* and *Lebran International* to make up the so-called “Big Four” movie studios. *Premier* was founded in 1946 by Ciriaco A. Santiago, a medical doctor, while *Lebran* began operations in 1949 and was established by businessman Rafael Anton (Villano, 2019).

Like *Dalagang Bukid*, the first films produced by *Sampaguita*, *LVN*, and *Premier* are all centered on a female protagonist. *Sampaguita’s* first production was *Bituing Marikit* (Beautiful star) (Tolosa, 1937), a musical film starring Elsa Oria. For *LVN*, it was the musical *Giliw Ko* (My beloved) (Tolosa, 1939) with Mila del Sol. *Premier Productions’* first release, *Probinsiyana* (Country girl) (de Guzman, 1946), was another musical starring Carmen Rosales. It is easy to argue that these studios chose a musical film as their first production simply to capitalize on the

popularity of Hollywood musicals. However, upon closer examination, it becomes more appropriate to contend that these films were thematically influenced by the conventions of the *sarswela*. It reveals that musical romances have always been a favorite among Filipinos precisely because of the popularity of the *sarswela* and not because of the Hollywood musicals that were being imported from America (del Mundo, 1998, pp. 91-124). Furthermore, many of the classic Hollywood musicals were told from the perspective of a male protagonist, such as *Top Hat* (Sandrich, 1935) starring Fred Astaire, *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (Curtiz, 1942) featuring James Cagney, and *An American in Paris* (Minnelli, 1951) with Gene Kelly. In contrast, *sarswela*-inspired Filipino musicals typically focus on a female protagonist, thus highlighting a female perspective.



The first features of the three biggest movie studios of the First Golden Age of Philippine cinema: **Figure 2.** (left) *Bituing Marikit* (Beautiful star) (Tolosa, 1937). **Figure 3.** (center) *Giliw Ko* (My beloved) (Tolosa, 1939). **Figure 4.** (right) *Probinsiyana* (Country girl) (de Guzman, 1946).

The significant number of female-centered films that Sampaguita, LVN, and Premier produced in the 1950s could be attributed to the substantial involvement of women in the management of each of these studios. Dolores Honrado-Vera, affectionately known as “Mommy Vera,” involved herself in the day-to-day operations of Sampaguita Pictures alongside her husband and Sampaguita’s co-founder, Jose Vera. Similarly, Adela Hermosa-Santiago, addressed by industry workers and actors as “Doña Adela,” assumed a comparable position of authority at Premier Productions, founded by her spouse, Ciriaco Santiago (Orsal, 2007, p. 13). On the other hand, Doña Sisang bought out her partners and assumed full control and ownership of LVN Pictures. Her astute business acumen and discerning project selection placed LVN in a preeminent position, making her the foremost industry leader of her generation.

Doña Sisang: The Dalagang Filipina as Counter Narrative

Born on October 29, 1877, Doña Sisang was the daughter of Justo Buencamino, a poet and politician, and Atanacia Lim, a Filipino-Chinese. She came from a well-known family of politicians and sarswelistas (the Buencaminos of San Miguel, Bulacan) and was, therefore, more familiar with the theater and, according to her son Manuel, has not seen a movie prior to entering the film business (Torre, 1977, p. 10). Her uncle was Don Felipe Buencamino, a prominent political figure who served in President Emilio Aguinaldo's cabinet. In 1901, as he was about to be proclaimed by the Americans as San Miguel's town mayor, Doña Sisang's father was ambushed and killed by Filipino guerrillas.

In 1904, she married Jose de Leon, a powerful government official in San Miguel, with whom she would have five children. They went into the rice production business and were soon recognized as among the leading rice producers in Central Luzon. When her husband passed away in 1934, Doña Sisang moved her family to Manila and refocused her attention on real estate, a venture that brought her considerable wealth and prestige. This enabled her to have powerful friends, including the President of the Philippine Commonwealth, Manuel L. Quezon, whom she invited to be the guest of honor at the inauguration of LVN Pictures in 1938.

For Doña Sisang, LVN was simply her plaything, her “libangan” (source of entertainment), and her “pasa tiempo” (pastime). She had no background in film production and learned on the job by becoming involved in LVN's day-to-day operations. Displaying a deeply maternal approach to running the studio, she treated every actor, director, crew, and rank-and-file employee as part of a family and made sure that each worker was compensated properly. However, this also meant scolding them, like any caring mother would if they started behaving unprofessionally. Her stern yet motherly nature also inspired some actors to come to her for advice on personal and financial matters (Tirol, 1977, pp. 128-147).



Figure 5. *Narcisa “Doña Sisang” Buencamino de Leon.*

Doña Sisang's approach to filmmaking can be described as nativist, i.e., the indigenized Hispanic culture that evolved over three centuries of Spanish colonization. As American Hollywood movies began influencing Filipinos' attitudes, she focused on films that promoted traditional values and traditions. Thus, her fondness for stories set in rural places, stories that examine the clash between the simplicity of provincial life and the fast and loose nature of city life, and her insistence on the use of Tagalog as dialogue, *kundiman* as music, the *terno* or *traje de mestiza* for women and the *barong Tagalog* for men as costume can all be regarded as an attempt at creating counter-narratives. Furthermore, Doña Sisang's love for romantic stories meant that her films often centered on female characters. She crafted her leading ladies to embody her vision of the "Dalagang Filipina"—prim and proper like the girls in *Urbana at Felisa* and light-skinned with fine features like Maria Clara in *Noli Me Tangere*. In other words, she countered the liberal attitudes of twentieth-century Hollywood female characters by evoking nineteenth-century figures of women who are submissive and soft-spoken while also promoting Eurocentric beauty standards. This was already apparent in LVN's first production. *Giliw Ko* (My beloved) (Tolosa, 1939) tells the story of Guia (played by Mila del Sol), a beautiful and fair-complexioned country girl who sings American songs on the radio. After being infatuated with images of Hollywood and the attention lavished on her by the radio orchestra's bandleader, she moves to Manila and finds fame but is soon disillusioned by its superficiality. She returns to her province to sing traditional Tagalog songs and back into the arms of her childhood sweetheart.

The narrative of *Giliw Ko* also provides us with a view of Doña Sisang's conviction that Filipino audiences will always choose a good love story. Coming from a family of musical artists, she knew how much Filipinos loved the *sarswela*. Therefore, a love story is at the core of any LVN film—be it a melodrama, musical, comedy, or costume epic—and Doña Sisang made sure that the story is visually told in the most romantic way. For instance, the "suyuan sa ilalim ng puno" (courtship under the tree), a scene typical in many LVN films, was Doña Sisang's idea (Chaves, 1977, p. 21). This image has become a recurring motif in romantic films in the decades that followed and is also an example of the kind of feminine flair that she introduced to Filipino filmmaking. She also read scripts, decided on projects, supervised the casting, designed costumes, and viewed dailies to ensure that every movie conformed to the standards she herself has set, creating what came to be known as the "LVN style" (Torre, 1977, p. 14).



Figure 6. (left to right) Mila del Sol, Rogelio de la Rosa, and Lopita in *Sarungbanggi (One night)* (de Guzman, 1947).

Similarly, Doña Sisang's leading men symbolized the European construct of the ideal man as virile, brave, and, most importantly, loyal to his lady love, i.e., a knight in shining armor. Like LVN's female stars, they have fair skin and sharp noses. Doña Sisang's eye for talent resulted in the creation of some of the most memorable movie stars of the First Golden Age – Mila del Sol, Norma Blancaflor, Tessie Quintana, Rosa Rosal, Delia Razon, Charito Solis, Lilia Dizon, Nida Blanca, Marita Zobel, Lita Gutierrez, Rogelio de la Rosa, Jaime de la Rosa, Leopoldo Salcedo, Jose Padilla, Jr., Pancho Magalona, Mario Montenegro, Armando Goyena, Nestor de Villa, and Leroy Salvador.

To promote her stable of stars, Doña Sisang came up with the idea of an exclusive onscreen romantic pairing of her actors in what came to be known as the "love team." These include Delia Razon and Mario Montenegro, Tessie Quintana and Armando Goyena, and Nida Blanca and Nestor de Villa. These romantic pairings were so immensely effective and successful that the "love team" formula continues well into the twenty-first century with popular tandems of the past

twenty years, such as Bea Alonzo and John Lloyd Cruz, Nadine Lustre and James Reid, Kathryn Bernardo and Daniel Padilla, and more recently, Belle Mariano and Donny Pangilinan, and Alexa Ilacad and KD Estrada.

When LVN was forced to stop producing movies in 1961 due to cash problems, Doña Sisang redirected the studio's operations to post-production services and continued as a producer through Dalisay Pictures, an independent production company. The movie matriarch likewise attended to other family businesses and was active until her passing on February 6, 1966, at the age of 89.

Mother Lily: The Dalagang Filipina as Femme Fatale

The trend of powerful women producers continued with Lily Yu Monteverde, the founder and matriarch of Regal Films. Addressed by everyone as "Mother Lily," she was a key industry leader from the late 1970s until her retirement in the early 2000s. Like Doña Sisang, she ran her studio with her own unique and often eccentric style.

Mother Lily was born to a wealthy Filipino-Chinese family on August 19, 1938. Her father was the copra magnate Domingo Yu Chu, a Chinese immigrant from Fujian, China. The youngest of twelve children, Mother Lily was spoilt and headstrong and eventually grew up to be the family's rebellious black sheep. To instill some discipline, her parents sent her to conservative Catholic schools. However, the self-confessed movie lover frequently skipped classes and instead stood at the gates of Sampaguita Pictures to catch a glimpse of her favorite movie stars. This was the 1950s, the peak of the studio system. Decades later, Mother Lily would recall how she was once shoved aside by a studio security guard at the gate. Hurt, she vowed to return "not as an actress, because I don't have the looks, but as a movie producer" (Ang See, 2012, pp. 1380-1382). This unforgettable experience could explain why the original Regal Films office is located right next to the Sampaguita Pictures compound.

In 1960, Mother Lily dropped out of college and married Leonardo "Remy" Monteverde, a popular basketball varsity player from San Beda College who was also the basketball team captain of Mao Fa Company, the copra company owned by her father. Mother Lily's decision to marry Monteverde, who is only half-Chinese, did not sit well with her father, and she was denied her inheritance. She found work as a clerk in her father-in-law's Montemart Department Store, earning Php600 a month. When she could save enough money, she bought two popcorn machines, which she installed at Cherry Fooderama in Mandaluyong City and at the Podmon Theater in Sta. Cruz, Manila. The two machines eventually produced a hefty profit and allowed Mother Lily to finally pursue her dream of going into the film business. In 1962, she founded Regal Films, initially as a local distributor of foreign films, mostly Hollywood B-movies.



Figure 7. *"Mother" Lily Yu Monteverde.*

By 1974, Regal Films ventured into film production. The 1970s was a turbulent time marked by violent student protests and the imposition of martial law. Meanwhile, the sexual revolution and the women's liberation movement resulted in a loosening of the Filipinos' attitudes toward sex and romance and the questioning of women's secondary position in Philippine society. The decade was also a fertile period for the arts. In cinema, a new breed of socially conscious

filmmakers led by Lino Brocka and Ishmael Bernal depicted the social, political, and cultural maelstrom that the country was going through. It was against this backdrop that Mother Lily produced her first film – *Magsikap: Kayod sa Araw, Kayod sa Gabi* (Work hard day and night) (Carlos, 1976). The film was a big hit and demonstrated Mother Lily's talent for choosing projects with immense commercial appeal.

In envisioning the “Dalagang Filipina” of the 1970s, Mother Lily subverted the fair-skinned and subservient image that Doña Sisang nurtured. Instead, she chose to represent the modern woman—a product of the sexual revolution whose features align closely with the natural physical characteristics of Filipinos. Such was the case with Regal Films' first contract star, Alma Moreno. One of the most bankable stars of the 70s, Moreno belonged to a new breed of leading ladies whose physical attributes signified the evolving tastes of Filipino audiences. Moreno and her contemporaries (which included the likes of Elizabeth Oropesa, Daria Ramirez, Amy Austria, Beth Bautista, and Lorna Tolentino) represented a “Dalagang Filipina” that was intended to be perceived as being closer to the Filipina's natural physiognomy. Keenly aware of their physical allure and their effect on men, they have transformed into cinema's seductresses—the archetypal *femme fatales*.



Figure 8. The “Dalagang Filipina” as *femme fatale*. (left to right) Beth Bautista, Amy Austria, Elizabeth Oropesa, Lorna Tolentino, Alma Moreno, and Daria Ramirez.



Figure 9. Alma Moreno in Bomba Star (Gosiengfiao, 1978).

If Doña Sisang favored wholesome love stories, Mother Lily produced any movie she thought would sell, including soft-porn movies (known in the 70s as “bomba” films). Alma Moreno capitalized on her sexiness and femme fatale image in movies such as *Walang Karanasan* (Inexperienced) (Bautista, 1976), *Bomba Star* (Bold star) (Gosiengfiao, 1978), *Nympha* (Gosiengfiao, 1980), and *Diary of Cristina Gaston* (Gosiengfiao, 1982). Critics dismissed these types as nothing more than “bomba films” and regarded Moreno—as the title of one of her movies suggests—as the ultimate sex symbol, a true “bomba” star. As the 1970s gave way to the 80s, “bomba” films diverged into two distinct types. The first was the more hardcore erotic cinema targeted specifically at an adult audience. The graphic and extended sex scenes in Regal Films’ arthouse erotica *Scorpio Nights* (Gallaga, 1985) exemplify this genre. The second was a softer, though still sexually themed, variant aimed at a broader audience. This became a kind of “rite of passage” for young actors, signaling their transition to more mature roles while maintaining a wholesome image. This can be seen in the light and sexy melodrama *Under-age* (Gosiengfiao, 1980), where Mother Lily launched her first batch of teenage contract stars whom she branded as her “Regal Babies.”

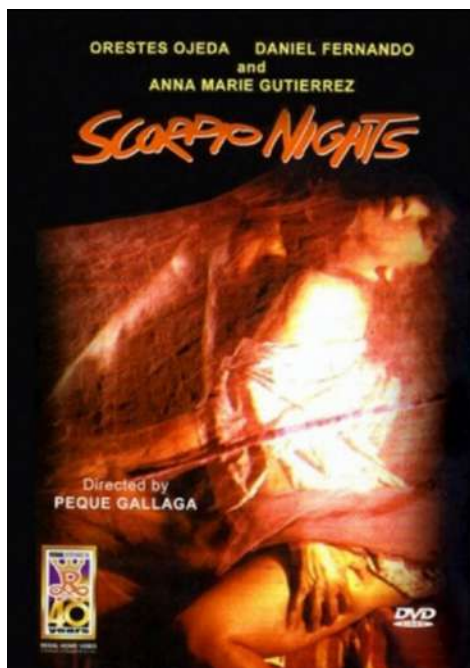


Figure 10. (left) The quintessential Filipino erotic film - *Scorpio Nights* (Gallaga, 1985).

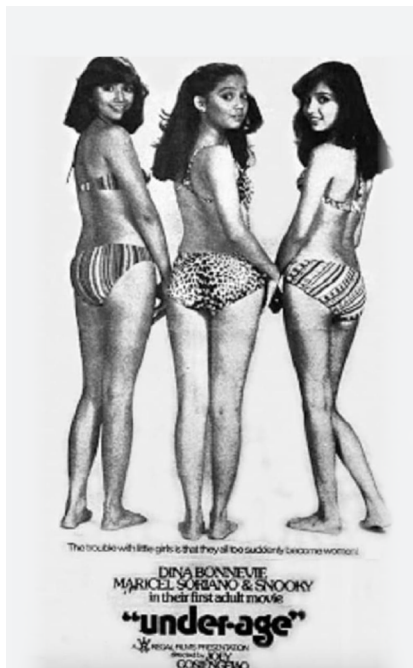


Figure 11. (right) The original Regal Babies: Dina Bonnevie, Maricel Soriano, and Snooky Serna in *Under-age* (Gosiengfiao, 1980).

Such films accurately reflect the changing gender politics of the 1970s and 80s as women began emancipating themselves from the restrictive and stifling image of the “Dalagang Filipina” of Doña Sisang’s time. Actresses no longer need to maintain a “virginal” image to appeal to moviegoers. They could take on more daring and sexy roles without damaging their appeal to a general audience. When viewed within the broader history of the “Dalagang Filipina” on screen, the *femme fatale* of the 1970s and 80s represents a transitional phase that paved the way for the twenty-first-century reinvention of the “Dalagang Filipina” as a woman who is more *desiring* than she is desirable.

Charo Santos: From Beauty Queen to Entertainment Mogul

By the onset of the twenty-first century, the four biggest media companies in the Philippines are all managed by women. Mother Lily retired as President of Regal Films and was replaced by daughter Roselle Monteverde-Teo, while the studio has since been renamed Regal Entertainment, Inc. Meanwhile, Viva Films, Regal’s biggest rival in the 1980s, has likewise expanded and is now known as Viva Communications, Inc., run by sisters Valerie and Veronique del Rosario together with their brother Vincent III, the children of the studio’s founder – Vicente del Rosario, Jr. Meanwhile, lawyer Anna Teresa “Annette” Gozon-Valdes, daughter of GMA Network Chairman and CEO Felipe Gozon, is president of the network’s movie outfit, GMA Films. Women have also conquered the world of independent filmmaking. Quantum Films, the production company of lawyer/producer/director Josabeth “Joji” Alonso, is behind some of the most successful independent films in recent years.

But it is Maria Rosario Navarro Santos, more popularly known by her screen name as Charo Santos, who was perhaps the most influential and most accomplished female movie industry figure in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, up until ABS-CBN was shut down in 2020 after earning the ire of then-President Rodrigo Duterte. As the network’s President and CEO from 2008 to 2016 and Executive Producer at Star Cinema since 1993, she has been behind many of the highest-grossing Filipino movies of all time. But compared to the eccentric nature of Doña Sisang and Mother Lily, Santos is relatively low-key and prefers to stay out of the limelight. Within the busy corridors of the studio, she is simply referred to by employees as “Ma’am Charo.”

Santos was born on October 27, 1955, to Dr. Winifredo R. Santos, a government doctor from Baliwag, Bulacan, and Nora C. Navarro, a native of Calapan, Oriental Mindoro. Santos’s route to show business was through joining beauty pageants. At the age of 14, she was crowned Ms. Calapan. Two years later, she won the 1971 Ms. Southern Tagalog Athletic Association (Acebuche, 2024, paras. 3-6). While

pursuing an AB Communication Arts degree at St. Paul's College Manila (now St. Paul University Manila), Santos cross-enrolled in film production classes at the nearby De La Salle University. There, she met professor Clodualdo "Doy" del Mundo, Jr., the screenwriter of *Maynila, Sa Mga Kuko ng Liwanag* (Manila, in the claws of light), the groundbreaking 1975 film by Lino Brocka which later became the subject of her college thesis. Santos took her internship at ABS-CBN, where her uncle, Jimmy Navarro, was the program director. She also had a short stint as a production assistant for *John en Marsha*, a popular weekly television sitcom at Radio Philippines Network (RPN) starring Dolphy and Nida Blanca (Ang, 2016, para. 10). In 1974, she gained national attention by winning the Ms. Green Race, a pageant promoting the Green Revolution project of First Lady Imelda Marcos. A year later, she was named one of Manila's Five Prettiest. Finally, in 1976, Santos graduated cum laude at St. Paul's College Manila and won the Baron Travel Girl pageant, a prestigious title that allowed her to travel to different countries (Castro, 2016, paras. 2-3). It was during this time that she was chosen for the lead role in the supernatural thriller *Itim* (The rites of May), the debut film of Doña Sisang's grandson, Miguel "Mike" de Leon, and co-written by her former professor, Doy del Mundo, Jr. *Itim* launched Santos' career as a major movie star, but her real goal was to work behind the camera. In 1981, she re-teamed with Mike de Leon to co-produce and star in the crime thriller *Kisapmata* (In the wink of an eye). The following year, she married Cesar Rafael M. Concio, Jr., a wealthy businessman 24 years her senior whom she met during her stint as a Baron Travel Girl.

Being a co-producer of a Mike de Leon film gave Santos the credibility to produce films for the short-lived Experimental Cinema of the Philippines (ECP), a government-owned film company that was created to further the artistic development of Filipino movies. Concurrently, Santos also worked as a producer for Vanguard Films, an independent film company. In 1985, Santos began line producing for Regal Films. When ABS-CBN reopened a year later (after being shut down by President Ferdinand Marcos, Sr. at the onset of martial law), the network invited Santos to work as Production Manager. By 1992, she was promoted to Head of Programming and Production. When ABS-CBN launched its film subsidiary, ABS-CBN Film Productions, Inc., or Star Cinema, Santos was tapped to be the Executive Producer. Under Santos' leadership, Star Cinema opened its doors to respected women directors such as Marilou Diaz-Abaya and Laurice Guillen and nurtured the next generation of female filmmakers led by Cathy Garcia-Sampana, Joyce Bernal, Rory Quintos, Mae Czarina Cruz, Antoinette Jadaone, and most especially Olivia Lamasan.



Figure 12. (left) Charo Santos in her debut film *Itim* (The rites of May) (de Leon, 1976).

Figure 13. (right) Thirty years later, as President and CEO of ABS-CBN.

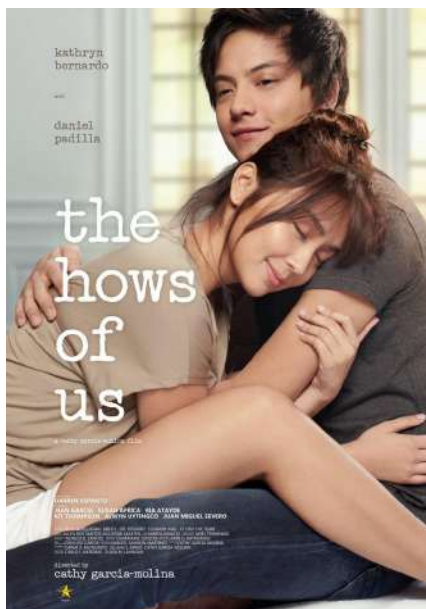
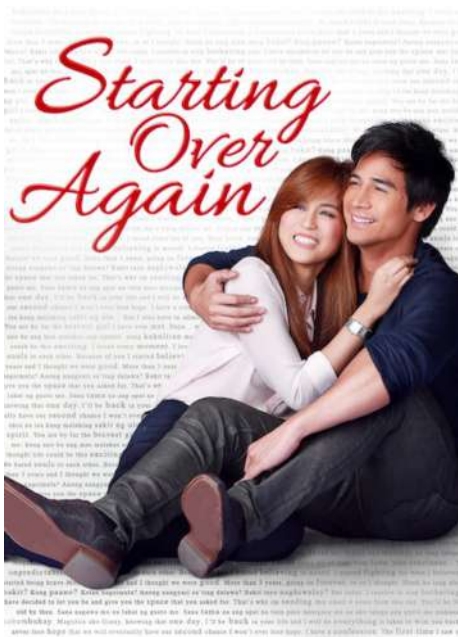
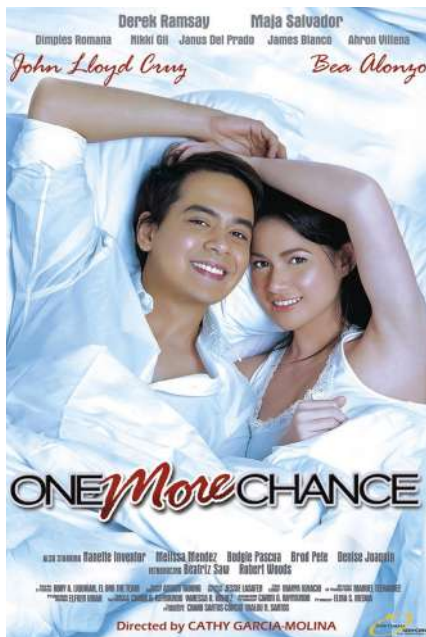
In 2003, ABS-CBN aired the Tagalog-dubbed version of *Meteor Garden* (Tsai, 2001), a Taiwanese romantic soap opera based on the Japanese shōjo manga *Hana Yori Dango* (Boys over flowers) by Yoko Kamio. Starring Barbie Hsu and the members of the popular Taiwanese boy group F4, *Meteor Garden* captured the hearts of Filipino viewers with its simple yet charming story. This marked the beginning of what became known as the “Asian invasion,” a surge of East Asian popular culture—including movies, music, fashion, and especially television—into the Philippines. Asian soap operas (or what Filipinos refer to as “Asianovelas”) are often romance-themed stories that feature an independent and strong-willed female protagonist (exemplified by the character of Shan Cai in *Meteor Garden*) who is not afraid to articulate her romantic desires. Such narratives resonated with Filipino audiences who rediscovered their fondness for melodramas and romance narratives, especially since action and sex-oriented dramas aimed exclusively at male audiences dominated the Philippine movie landscape in the 1990s. Recognizing this shift, Star Cinema released *My First Romance* (Cuaresma & Lazatin, 2003), a box-office hit that featured the first romantic pairing of Bea Alonzo and John Lloyd Cruz, arguably the most popular love team of the late 2000s and early 2010s. The film’s success was pivotal for the movie industry as local film production declined significantly in the first years of the 2000s. *My First Romance*

was followed by other equally profitable melodrama and romance movies such as *Milan* (Lamasan, 2004), *Can This Be Love?* (J.J. Reyes, 2005), *One More Chance* (Garcia-Sampana, 2007), and *A Very Special Love* (Garcia-Sampana, 2008). The success of these movies, often referred to as “chick flicks” due to their popularity with female audiences, encouraged Santos to redirect Star Cinema’s production slate in the 2010s almost exclusively to female-centered melodramas and romance films, e.g., *Miss You Like Crazy* (Garcia-Sampana, 2010), *The Mistress* (Lamasan, 2012), *Starting Over Again* (Lamasan, 2014), *The Breakup Playlist* (Villegas, 2015), *Everything About Her* (Bernal, 2016), *Love You to the Stars and Back* (Jadaone, 2017), *The Hows of Us* (Garcia-Sampana, 2018), and *Hello, Love, Goodbye* (Garcia-Sampana, 2019). With these movies, Santos helped configure a brand-new image of the “Dalagang Filipina.”

Star Cinema’s Dalagang Filipina: More Desiring Than Desirable

The twenty-first-century cinematic representation of the “Dalagang Filipina,” as seen in the movies of Star Cinema, embodies the influence of Asianovelas on Filipino beauty standards. The physical traits of many young female movie stars of the past twenty years reflect a blend of East Asian and Austronesian features. Notable examples include Heart Evangelista, Toni Gonzaga, Sarah Geronimo, Maja Salvador, Kim Chiu, and Kathryn Bernardo. A particularly striking example of this Asian influence is Sandara Park, a South Korean native who grew up in the Philippines and rose to fame after participating in the ABS-CBN talent show *Star Circle Quest* in 2004. Thus, the twenty-first-century filmic image of the “Dalagang Filipina” brings together the Filipinos’ appreciation for East Asian beauty with the “mestiza” aesthetic of the 1950s and the “kayumanggi/morena” movie stars of the 1970s.

In terms of character and disposition, the new “Dalagang Filipina” serves as a vehicle for expressing women’s innermost desires and fantasies. The female characters of the melodramas and romance movies of the past are often trapped within a phallogentric “saint/whore” dichotomy as they were portrayed as either soft-spoken and conservatively dressed or as femme fatales/male objects of desire. In the movies of Star Cinema, the female protagonist is envisioned as a woman with agency. She is a figure seemingly created for the female gaze, and her ability to express her interior thoughts and desires—whether romantic, erotic, or maternal—enables female spectators, especially those with similar yearnings, to live vicariously through her. On film, therefore, the “Dalagang Filipina” of the twenty-first century is more desiring than she is desirable.



More desiring than desirable. The “Dalagang Filipina” in Star Cinema’s movies. **Figure 14.** (top left) Bea Alonzo with John Lloyd Cruz in *One More Chance* (Garcia-Sampana, 2007). **Figure 15.** (top right) Toni Gonzaga with Piolo Pascual in *Starting Over Again* (Lamasan, 2014). **Figure 16.** (bottom left) Kathryn Bernardo with Daniel Padilla in *The Hows of Us* (Garcia-Sampana, 2018). **Figure 17.** (bottom right) Kathryn Bernardo with Alden Richards in *Hello, Love, Goodbye* (Garcia-Sampana, 2019).

Feminine Foremothers

Doña Sisang, Mother Lily, and Charo Santos. These women producers are a testament to the matricentrism that permeates the movie industry and, to a considerable extent, Philippine cinema. Each significant period in Philippine cinema's history has at its center a powerful and influential "mother" figure. The movies that Doña Sisang's LVN Pictures produced helped usher in the First Golden Age, while Mother Lily's Regal Films was at the forefront of the new wave cinema that defined the Second Golden Age. Lastly, Charo Santos, through Star Cinema, produced the much-needed box-office hits that helped revitalize the industry at a time when local productions were at an all-time low.

Having the ability to tap into the zeitgeist of their respective generations, they were able to envision a figure of the "Dalagang Filipina" on film that reflected the prevailing socio-cultural issues of the time; and because they championed the production of female-centered movies that cater to a female audience, they became instrumental in nurturing a feminine-oriented artistic tradition within Philippine cinema. On the other hand, these women producers fostered the careers not only of the movie stars of their respective generations but also of Philippine cinema's "great men" – revered directors such as Lamberto Avellana and Gregorio Fernandez in the 1950s, Lino Brocka and Ishmael Bernal in the 70s and 80s, and Joel Lamangan and Chito Roño in the 90s and 2000s. The honorific title (e.g., "Doña" and "Mother") that people in the movie industry have bestowed on these women is a testament to the respect that they command and to their perceived maternity. To dismiss them as nothing more than movie producers is to disregard their influence and impact on the artistic development of Philippine cinema, thus denying us a deeper understanding of the history and nature of the most popular form of mass entertainment of the last one hundred years.

Endnote

1 A recent example can be found in *Direk: Essays on Filipino Filmmakers* (DLSU Press, 2019). Of the fifteen essays covering prominent auteurs from Gerardo de Leon to Lav Diaz, Marilou Diaz-Abaya was the sole female director considered worthy of inclusion.

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A Network of Multiplicities:

Understanding Philippine Alternative Cinema

Nick Deocampo

Abstract

This essay explores the application of the rhizome concept in analyzing Philippine cinema, particularly its alternative and marginalized forms. Rooted in the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizome represents a decentralized, multiplicitous structure, contrasting with hierarchical models. In the context of cinema, alternative forms such as short narratives, documentaries, and TikTok videos embody this rhizomatic nature, diverging from mainstream commercial norms. Despite digital technology's democratization of film production and distribution, alternative cinema remains on the fringes due to the dominance of industrial capitalist structures. However, its resilience and diversity reflect a people's cinema, shaped by historical, theoretical, and cultural forces. As TikTok gains popularity, it echoes cinema's origins as short, accessible spectacles, challenging the dominance of feature-length films. This proliferation of alternative cinematic forms heralds an "Age of Alternative Cinema", symbolizing the triumph of the rhizome and reshaping cinematic culture.

Keywords: Philippine cinema, alternative cinema, Philippine film history, rhizome, digital transformation

Introduction

Introducing the concept of the rhizome in the study of Philippine cinema, this essay applies its significance to a marginalized cinema, the alternative cinema that has grown outside of the confines of the country's dominant commercial movie industry. A rhizome is one informed by multiplicity referring to an acentered body, say that of a ginger or a potato, which grows in nomadic fashion underground. This is unlike the arborescent body, which takes hierarchical growth with its assigned parts from roots and trunks to the leaves and flowers of trees. This concept of organization was developed by two French philosophers, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, referring to a heterogeneous growth, opposing everything that signifies singularity as it is seen as controlling and totalitarian¹. Applied to cinema, the concept of the rhizome takes various cinematic forms that differ from popular full-length movies due to its diverse expressions. They come in the forms of short narrative films and videos, documentaries, experimental, animation, installation art, video art, TikTok, and many more. This cinema initially lived a subterranean life and took nomadic journeys in its early beginnings. Although it has presently become ubiquitous with the emergence of digital technology through popular short-duration videos seen on YouTube and TikTok, alternative cinematic forms have redefined their meanings by maintaining their position outside of what is considered as the traditional industrial cinema (i.e., the movie industry and its feature-length format). Despite their popularity, such as that offered by the short video format and enjoyed by countless users and viewers, it is by no means an assurance that alternative cinema has become mainstream. What remains to be mainstream are those more popular forms that are produced by a vast system of entertainment business complex that is supported by an industrial capitalist enterprise. This is composed of an infrastructure made up not only of producers (Hollywood and its national movie industry clones are examples) but also of the global chains of movie theaters, which assure economic stability by providing a viable market for films. Attached to this main industry are subsidiary markets, like television and print industries, advertising, online streaming platforms, fashion, cosmetics, and other ancillary sectors that provide jobs to sustain the gargantuan appetite for movie entertainment. None of these can be claimed even by the phenomenal TikTok platform as providing similar sustainable income-generating benefits. The dominant mainstream has an incalculable network of business enterprises that could hardly be matched by any other rivals, thus forcing them to remain on the fringes of the film landscape. However, what alternative cinema lacks in terms of mainstream dominance, it compensates by covering a wide swathe of cinematic practices, from newsreels in the celluloid past to short video formats in the digital present. The unique properties of these film forms embody the immanent nature of motion pictures as a form of multiplicity. This

principle has a significant implication on the conception of a Philippine national cinema.

In this essay, I take the occasion to promote alternative cinema as a form of a people's cinema. The history of this form of cinema bore its resiliency in the past, surviving through the crucibles of wars, technological obsolescence, economic collapse, political repression, public apathy, a pandemic, and other forms of disruptions. I cover the historical, theoretical, technological, and cultural issues surrounding the rise of these filmic forms. The epic sweep I discuss in my historical narrative captures the travails of a cinematic form emerging through a century of a troubled past. Alternative cinema's significance to Filipino culture is yet to be fully understood and appreciated. With TikTok as a popular form of moving pictures taking the attention of millions, one may want to think that cinema has surprisingly returned to where it first started: as short images that are as much a spectacle as when the first films were made by the Lumiere brothers in 1895. TikTok reminds us of how cinema first began. It reminds us that feature-length films are not the only forms of cinema and cannot dominate our cinematic culture. With many other alternative cinematic forms, mainstream cinema is challenged. Most notably in the digital age, cinema is reinvented anew. With the pervasive presence of alternative film forms whose numbers defy any inventory, one may think that what is happening now is the Age of Alternative Cinema, the triumph of Rhizome. This is the history that will be told.

The claim of a thousand cinemas to be found in alternative cinema is an audacious one. This goes against the prevalent notion of a monogamous, monolithic, mono-crop object called the Philippine cinema, conveniently referring to the Filipino commercial movie industry. Many times, it is the *only* cinema Filipinos know. Challenging this popular notion, what is suggested is a plural cinema born in multiplicity. It is a cinema that is not one but many, and because of its plurality, this form of cinema travels along nomadic paths. Banished from Eden—or that paradise called the movie industry—alternative films become vagabonds roaming the country's cinematic landscape but hardly finding a home of their own. A sanctuary is offered in schools where they can be densely found, but schools still need to form the necessary infrastructure to provide a permanent home for their growth. They still need to consciously build themselves into a home.

Despite their numbers, alternative film forms continue to remain in the hands of individual filmmakers, unable to (because they do not want to) turn their cinematic efforts into one humongous, centralized, methodized, and monogamized act of making moving pictures. To better comprehend the difference between the mainstream and the alternative, one may conjure two striking images. One is a tree; the other is a rhizome, best exemplified by the ginger, or *luya*. These images may well serve as visual paradigms for what will be discussed. The draconian movie

industry may be likened to a towering tree that has dominated our film culture with its monolithic stature as an industrial system whose sole aim is to entertain. For all its dominance, it has become the *only* way cinema has been popularly known. That such a cinema is feature-length, narrative, escapist, and everything an industrial cinema can massively evoke is a testament to its overpowering and enduring stature, its popularity, too. Its colonial past rooted in Hollywood assured its continuity when it was cloned by Tagalog moviemakers, serving as the foundation and providing the orientation for moviemaking in the country. The public, knowing no better, wildly embraced this singular concept of cinema. Alternative cinema, on the other hand, forms a horizontal growth, creeping underground in subterranean spaces as it continues to spread across generations of its repressed growth. Instead of a hierarchical development, it grows from different parts of the same body, a body without organs² as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have described in the rhizome. A model of an organ-less body, alternative cinema offers a path to cinema's continued emancipation. From it comes the flowering of cinema by a thousand-fold and in ways never before imagined.

When one talks about cinema as a multiplicity, one needs to see its foundational organization as motion pictures. There is no rule that motion pictures can only be industrial in nature, narrative in structure, and entertainment in use. It was the elite capture of the medium that made this possible through the hands of colonial pioneers and elite clones, growing in a capitalist economy with a politically dependent government that made its cultural and social life reliant on foreign models. As moving images, cinema is first a form of communication. It is composed of signs, visual and aural. The semiotics that wraps around its signs produce meanings that need not be restricted to storytelling alone. Starting as scientific experiments, motion pictures have a more distant root in knowledge and cognition, even scientific inquiry. Its reliance on visual images found ancestry in olden pictographs, ideograms, and hieroglyphs. It was only when businessmen, including the scientist-inventor Thomas Alva Edison, had a studio devoted to making fiction films. Edison had designs of monopolizing the early American film market with a thrust toward making films to serve an educational function³. Taking hold of the medium, he was instrumental in changing the course of cinema's early development from its scientific origins to becoming an entrepreneurial commodity⁴. The notion of cinema as an art form only came after. Cinema in the hands of commercial agents, aided by hired storytellers and an army of professional workers creating an empire of illusions, all partnered to devise a medium that would, in the twentieth century, not only build financial empires but also help create nations as well. They helped spread a country's language that equipped the natives to imagine themselves as one—through the dialogues they heard and even in the music they listened to. Capitalizing on the enormous power of motion pictures, financial moguls turned motion pictures into an organized industry,

casting deep influence of its products on any nation's social fabric, where it attaches itself. Represented visibly by Hollywood, motion pictures' success became so enormous that the movie industry became its defining idea of what cinema is. Everything else was marginal. This became the fate of alternative films.

Outside the elite capture of motion pictures by the movie industry lies a world of cinema's many other possibilities. Alternative cinema fulfills its rich potential by doing other acts that escapist cinemas cannot provide. These are to inform, teach, create art, persuade, animate, simulate, and preserve images far beyond what literary stories can tell. Within alternative cinema, films of varying lengths can be found that are not limited only to standard feature-length entertainment. They are made in different modes of production and are not only made by the capitalist studio system. They can be produced personally, collectively, or by other possible means. Alternative films come in various cinematic forms and aesthetics, from documentaries' social realism to experimental films' conceptual abstractions. Also, alternative films are products of political economies that are anathema to the capitalist structure supporting the movie industry. Finally, while alternative cinema does not have the same popular audience to support its products, it claims an audience that consists of the largest segment of the country's population: the young, because many of the films are made and watched by those who belong to academic communities.

Nature of Alternative Cinema

Alternative cinema explodes in filmic forms. Summarily, it differs from the dominant narrative cinema due to the following factors: *length, mode of production, political economy, cinematic form, aesthetics, and audience*. Short films consist of various film lengths that make a difference from the standardized feature-length films (running for approximately 60 to 120 minutes). Alternative cinema flourishes as short films, but longer-length films may also be considered an alternative to conventional feature-length movies. In other words, within alternative cinema, the range of films can be as short as a minute long, e.g., the archival footage of American newsreels such as *Advance of Kansas Volunteers at Caloocan* (White, 1899) or a 647-minute (11 hours) movie like *Ebolusyon ng Isang Pamilyang Pilipino* (Evolution of a Filipino family) (Diaz, 2004). Due to their peculiar lengths, both films are hardly screened in regular, commercial movie theaters, but this should not demean them as moving pictures. They have an alternative way of getting produced, and for this reason, they also have an alternative screening practice. The modes of production and exhibition of alternative films are tied to the political economies that govern this sector. They can be made individually, artisanally, communally (group), or collectively, financed independently by sources that are not dependent on commercial producers. The political economy that dictates a

homogenizing studio-type production prevailing in commercial filmmaking does not apply to the varied conditions of production that make alternative cinema possible. Independently produced, the circulation of films happens differently as it has no fixed market to rely on for its distribution. Different forces govern the consumption of alternative films that are more developmental (i.e., educational, cultural) than commercial (profit-oriented). This is due to the market that alternative cinema serves: students and the young population. If profits were made, they would barely sustain an industrial type of film practice.

For cinematic forms, there are plenty to choose from: documentary, experimental, animation, short fiction, educational, scientific, advocacy, propaganda, home movie, archival compilation, reportage, political, newsreel, or short-duration videos, to name a few. In mainstream cinema, you only have one standard type for the film to be in an entertainment format, using genres to diversify the interest. If documentary or experimental elements stray into these films, they all support the dramatic narrative, which rules supreme in the storytelling structure of feature-length movies. This is not so in alternative cinema. The integrity of form and consistency of style make each film form in alternative cinema what it is and merit its name. Diversity of filmic forms and expressions are options a filmmaker can choose from. Each form offers a totally different approach to filmmaking, for example, non-narrative abstraction in experimental films, observational approach in documentaries, pixelation in animation, and infographics in scientific films, among many others. For aesthetics, there are myriad styles to choose from: non-narrative, no dialogue (silent), mixed genres, documentary-type, conceptual and abstract, virtual, music video, montage-driven, diaristic, scientific, ethnographic, long-duration, without losing sight of the fictional and the narrative that get made but take on a less conventional style. The culture of alternative filmmaking, both in content and material organization, continues to defy the dictates of commercial cinema. With a history of a hundred years of struggle, it has become resilient and diverse as technology allows it to multiply its form.

Brief History of Alternative Filmmaking

A condensed history of alternative cinema shows its origins from the colonial era. The first motion pictures came at a time when the country was dominated by foreign filmmakers, all males. The foreign filmmakers who served as the colonial-era's founding fathers included the Spanish Francisco Pertierra and Antonio Ramos, who brought the first film projectors to the country, and the Americans James Henry White, E. Burton Holmes, C. Fred Ackerman, who shot the first films about the Philippines. Among the films they shot were short films like *Battle of Manila Bay* (Blackton, 1898), *Rout of Filipinos* (White, 1899), *The Escalita* (sic) (American Mutoscope & Biograph, 1899), *Manila* (American Mutoscope & Biograph, 1900), and *Cockfighting in the Philippines* (Warwick Trading Company,

1901). Two more Americans pioneered making films locally, Albert Yearsley and Edward Meyer Gross, who laid the foundation of the country's movie industry. The white domination was broken when a local photographer, Jose Nepomuceno, embarked on making the first domestic film production. He first made a short newsreel in 1918 in Cebu⁵ before embarking on making the first Filipino-made feature-length film, *Dalagang Bukid* (Country maiden), in 1919 in Manila. There were no visible divisions between short and feature-length films during the early years of cinema until the end of World War II. One may even claim that short films dominated the early cinematic practice due to the technology that was available. Cameras and projectors could only contain and screen fifty-foot-long reels, although this length increased as years passed and technology improved.

In 1912, there was a bifurcation in movie production when, in Hollywood, producers took the feature-length format as their preferred film form. This was to stave off competitors, thus protecting their capitalist intent to monopolize the growing market. Hollywood producers had more capital, better equipment, and a surplus of talent to ward off their business rivals with less capital and resources. Their dominance was further assured when they contracted movie theaters to focus exclusively on showing feature-length films in the USA and wherever Hollywood movies are shown. Hollywood's worldwide spread picked up steam, especially after the end of the First World War⁶. Globally, foreign markets were penetrated by the American long-feature films. Home markets, dependent on films bought from abroad, could not but imitate the production and marketing models they saw in Hollywood. This included the preference for making long feature-length, dramatic movies that offered only escapist entertainment. Relegated to the side were short films and other film forms that had purposes to offer other than entertainment. Short films continued to be made, but they only grew parallel to what became a draconian mainstream cinema. This way, they became "alternative" in nature.

The division between industrial and alternative cinemas became palpable after World War II. But during the three-year war in the Philippines, the film formats used by the Japanese propaganda team, the Eiga Haikyusha (Japanese Film Import and Distribution Office), were mainly the short film newsreel and the documentary—identified closely with alternative cinema. These favored the propaganda intent that the Japanese filmmakers had in making movies. Due to the lack of film supply, only two full-length feature films were made: *Ano hatta o ute* (Dawn of freedom) (Abe & de Leon, 1944) and *Tatlong Maria* (Three Marias) (de Leon, 1944)⁷. Soon after the war ended, the division between the mainstream and the alternative became evident. This came about as the country was deluged with Hollywood movies, followed by the recovering homegrown studios' resurgence of the same entertainment format. When movie theaters opened, the format that naturally dominated was the feature-length format. Short films (mostly newsreels) served only as add-on features in between screenings.

After the war, there was the formal emergence of alternative cinema. As the domestic movie industry recovered, the production of non-mainstream films also accelerated as a separate film activity. With movie studios busy humming with film productions, the newly installed Philippine government, with technological and manpower support from the U.S., set up a government information office complete with film laboratories and production facilities. It even had projection facilities that roamed the country and showed government information films. As the post-war era was also a period of the Cold War, films supporting the United States and its allies were shown while the communist adversaries were demonized in the movies that were screened in communities and schools. In 1953, the government established its own production studio, the National Media Production Center (NMPC). It specialized mainly in producing documentaries and short films, thus contributing highly to non-commercial films' visibility. Adding to NMPC's prodigious production were mainstream film studios like LVN and Sampaguita, which occasionally produced short films and documentaries.

Since after the war, one may consider four alternative film movements to have happened⁸. The first movement occurred in the 1950s and 60s with the efforts made by the pioneering Benedicto Pinga. Pinga was a photographer in the Army Signal Corps during World War II. After the war, he studied filmmaking in New York. In 1956, Pinga returned to the Philippines and started to push for the recognition of short films and documentaries by organizing film festivals and workshops and participating in international film competitions. One illustrious documentary practitioner of that era was Lamberto Avellana, more known for his award-winning feature-length films that have become classics of Philippine cinema. Avellana's short films and documentaries, like *El Legado* (The legacy) (1959) and *La Campana de Baler* (The bell of Baler) (1961), brought recognition to the country with awards from international film festivals like those he won in Bilbao, Spain. Among the other filmmakers of the period were Ferde Grofe, Jr., Dik Trofeo, Bibsy Carballo and Romy Vitug, Henry Francia, and more. They brought honors to the country by winning and getting attention locally and abroad. They organized workshops and exhibitions. Celebrated works include short films like Rod Paras-Perez's *Conversation in Space* (1961), Grofe's *Soul of a Fortress* (1964), Henry Francia's *On My Way to India Consciousness, I Reached China* (1968), Carballo and Vitug's elegiac *Recuerdo of Two Sundays and Two Roads that Lead to the Sea* (1969) and *Plaza Miranda Bombing* (1971), and Trofeo's *Borobudur: The Cosmic Mountain* (1972). This post-war movement ushered in the first organized flourishing of Philippine short films and documentaries.



Figure 1. A scene from *On My Way to India Consciousness, I Reached China* (Francia, 1968).

The initial burst of post-war creativity was stifled when martial law was declared in 1972. Under the military regime, the government information center was turned into a propaganda machine to promote the administration of President Ferdinand Marcos and his wife, Imelda. NMPC churned out films that built the larger-than-life portrayal of the first couple in the public imagination. Propaganda was also made about the military, as well as the foreign trips that Imelda made and her various pet projects like the lavish holding of the Miss Universe in 1974.

During the martial law period in the 1970s, the second alternative film movement formed. This was a radical generation of young filmmakers who reacted against the military dictatorship and rampant commercialism by making anti-establishment films in the margins of the mainstream film market. The medium that provided the platform for a counter-cinema movement was the short film. This movement was bred in schools, mainly at the University of the Philippines, where radicalized ways of producing films happened using experimental film and documentary genres. Similarly, three academic institutions were also at the forefront of advancing the short film, with the Super 8 film as the preferred format. These were the Ateneo de Manila University, De la Salle University, and the industry-affiliated MOWELFUND Film Institute (MFI). Together, they became

the seedbed for a new cinema, finding radical expression through alternative forms, taking on a variety of short fiction, experimental, animation, documentary, music video, video art, political films, and more. These socially engaged films spawned new cinematic styles and genres from many talented and committed filmmakers. The remarkable generation responsible for the films ushered in the golden age of alternative cinema in the country. Their commitment to cinema allowed them to document life under the dictatorship, and this served them well in the struggle for a new government leading up to the People Power Revolution in 1986.

It was during this era when alternative cinema clearly defined its cinematic forms. Known for being marginal, these peripheral films populated a parallel cinematic landscape installed using the amateur Super 8 film technology. The explosive styles and genres resulted in a rhizomatic organization that accounted for the multiplicity of forms available for filmmakers of the period. The short film provided many avenues of growth, transforming itself from documentary to experimental, music video to commercial advertisement, and into countless student films and home movies—all making the short film a versatile film form. As the “mother” of all cinemas, it resulted in many film forms that shaped the alternate film world starting in the 1970s and maturing into the 80s, even spilling over to the 90s when the celluloid medium finally met its end. A few of them are discussed below.

The second movement was defined mainly along two major genres: experimental filmmaking for its innovation, best exemplified by Raymond Red’s *Ang Magpakailanman* (Eternity) (1982), and documentary for its realism, like my own Super 8 trilogy, *Oliver* (1983), *Children of the Regime* (1985), and *Revolutions Happen Like Refrains in a Song* (1987). Outstanding works of the period also included Fruto Corre’s *Isang Araw sa Bangketa ng Kanto Katipunan* (A day on the sidewalk of Kanto Katipunan) (1985), Roxlee’s *Tronong Puti* (White throne) (1983), Joey Agbayani’s *The Eye in the Sky* (1984), Joey Clemente’s *Daluyong* (Waves) (1984), Nona Ocampo’s *Ka Satur* (1983), and a host of other noteworthy shorts. Films made in the aftermath of martial law included Communication Foundation for Asia’s *People’s Power Revolution* (1986), Emmanuel Dadivas’ *Junkzilla* (1995), Roxlee’s *Spit/Optik* (1989), Kidlat Tahimik’s *Why is Yellow the Middle of the Rainbow?* (1987), and a plethora of other short works.



Figure 2. A scene from *Magpakailanman (Eternity)* (Red, 1982).



Figure 3. Reynaldo Villarama, a.k.a. Oliver, preparing for his infamous “Spiderman” act in *Oliver* (Deocampo, 1983).

Among the alternative works was the documentary format, which had much at stake for being made during the harsh military dictatorship. It came to prominence during the martial law era for the courage films of this type took in revealing the truth that was being suppressed by state censorship and strict media control. They were films that took up factual events and personages against a barrage of disinformation and media manipulation. Although marginalized, the production of documentaries increased each time the country was in a state of conflict, and the period of martial law had its handful of contributions to make. These included films about a peasant march against the dictatorship, Joey Clemente and Nil Buan's *Lakbayan* (Travel) (1984); human rights violations, Asia Vision's *No Time for Crying* (1986); street children, MFI and Goethe Institut Manila's *Masakit sa Mata* (Eyesore) (1991); indigenous communities, Jo Cuaresma and Freddie Espiritu's *Sabangan* (Shed) (1983); and many more. In times of war, as in times of peace, the documentary under martial law remained a powerful genre that sought out truth in cinema.

Experimental films are motion pictures that challenge the official narrative cinema because of their formalistic deviations and oftentimes nihilistic intentions in producing moving picture images. In a sense, films of this nature "destroy" the way cinema has been conceived as story-driven, popularly exemplified by Hollywood movies and their clones. Extreme experimental works hardly have a resemblance to traditional narrative films. Some contain purely abstract images, while others are stories that take absurd turns, breaking the highly rational and coherent traits one traditionally sees in commercial cinema. Two filmmakers from Germany were sent by Goethe Institut Manila to help define the experimental genre. They were Prof. Ingo Petzke and Christoph Janetzko, both instrumental in crafting a new film language never seen before on local screens. A few of the examples from the second movement extending to the aftermath of martial law in the 1990s included Roxlee's *Tronong Puti* (White throne) (1983), Regiben Romana's *Pilipinas; or What do you think of the Philippines, Mr. Janetzko?* (1989), Cesar Hernando's *Botika-Bituka* (1987), Kiri Dalena's *Red Saga* (2004), Vicky Donato's *Hubog* (Trained) (1989), Rune Layumas' *Malay Tao* (Conscious person) (1985), Mario de Guzman's *Dung-aw* (Look) (1989), Aureus Solito's *Si Suring at ang Kuk-ok* (Suring and the Kuk-ok) (1995), Tad Ermitaño's *Tributaries* (1995), and many others.

Animated shorts form another genre counted among marginalized films. It lacks adequate infrastructure to sustain its production while having a limited audience reach. Despite the Philippines being known as an outsourcing haven for talented animation artists, the sad reality of local animation shows only a small group of film artists producing animated works that delve into Filipino content. Philippine animation has yet to create its own distinct identity, but it could undeniably count on a pool of film artists with enormous talent: Roxlee



Figure 4. Banner promoting the 3rd Manila Short Film Festival (1983).

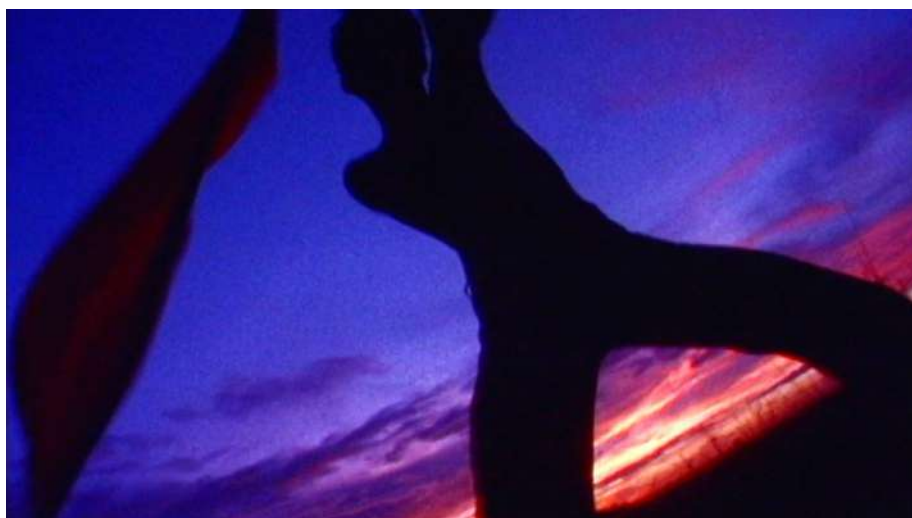


Figure 5. A scene from Kiri Dalena's experimental documentary film, *Red Saga* (2004).

with *The Great Smoke* (1985), Joey Agbayani with *The Eye in the Sky* (1984), Mike Alcazaren with *Huling Trip* (Last trip) (1983), Ellen Ramos with *Doon sa Kabila ng Bulkan* (There on the other side of the volcano) (1997), Christine Carlos with *I've Got Nine Lives* (1998), among a few others.



Figure 6. *The Great Smoke* (Lee, 1985)

Other popular films made then were music videos, which allowed for a visual interpretation of popular music, and short fiction films, which gave life to many young people's fantasies. Whether made as school requirements or were self-produced, the short films that surfaced during the second alternative film movement were produced by students. It turned academic institutions into a wellspring for alternative filmmaking in the same manner that movie studios became the source of mainstream movies. Despite the countless student films that were made, the history of this class of films has generally been left unwritten. Consequently, the films remain unpreserved. This is a lamentable situation as student films are significant not only because they are produced as part of an educational process. They also reveal the creativity and imagination of a young generation of filmmakers as they express their aspirations and discontents. This was particularly important for films made during the military repression period.

Despite all the success reaped by the second movement, it saw its end with the change in technology. The Super 8 film format that allowed amateur filmmakers to thrive and make their films independently ceased to be available when Kodak, the main film supplier, closed its office by the end of the 90s. What came after was a change from celluloid to video. The technological revolution that took place ushered in a new set of equipment, bringing with it new challenges and

opportunities. This led to a new generation of tech-savvy filmmakers taking over the alternative film scene.

Digital Era

As cinema technology moved into the digital age, the third movement emerged with digital cinema's emergence. The coming of the 21st century brought about the obsolescence of celluloid film, and a new age in alternative filmmaking took shape using video technology. There were two phases in the early growth of video: analog and digital. Video production and its market first found expression through analog formats like Betamax, U-matic, and VHS. Soon made obsolete, the digital revolution rampaged through the market and set the standard for video technology. The change has been profound, making chip-based, non-linear technology as the engine driving alternative production to become a ubiquitous film activity, both in the making and in viewing. Given its tentative nature, analog videos were produced but, like their celluloid counterparts, were hard to preserve. Worth recalling are works like Mike de Leon's *Bilanggo sa Dilim* (Prisoner in the dark) (1986) and those made by a team-up between SONY and Repertory Philippines. While they were full-length movies, their production using two-inch video provided a promising alternative to the celluloid movies that still dominated the exhibition circuit. Among the short films were Yam Laranas' *Death of a Butterfly* (1989), Larry Manda's *Ang Bulag sa Eskinita* (The blind man in the alley) (1984), and MOWELFUND's documentary *Beyond the Mainstream* (1986), capturing the era of the second alternative film movement with interviews of its filmmakers and excerpts from the films.

Not long after, around 2005, the digital format supplanted the analog format. Ready to capitalize on this change were filmmakers who took to their cell phones, computers, and laptops to produce moving images as never done before. The impetus offered by the new format caught like wildfire. With digital technology available in personal gadgets like smartphones, computers, and handy iPads, undertaking short productions has become so much easier than it was before. In the entire archipelago, as it was with the entire world, anyone could engage in moviemaking with none of the ties that filmmakers used to have with the industrial movie system to make and show movies. Working from school or home, freed from the pressures of commercial filmmaking, anyone could shoot a movie and show it through any of the available access that the digital platform could provide. However, while works were countless produced using accessible new media, many cinematic forms were mere reiterations of past styles and genres. More documentaries were made, but hardly any innovation was introduced in the genre. More experimental works were produced, but only those native to digital technology resulted in accomplishments that could not be seen as repetitions of past styles. One outstanding work is *Phone Memory* (2019) by David Corpuz, which



Figure 7. Poster for Mike de Leon's *Bilanggo sa Dilim* (*Prisoner in the dark*) (1985), the first Filipino feature-length film shot on video.

was made in the first digital experimental cinema workshop conducted by Prof. Ingo Petzke at the U.P. Film Institute in 2019. Its aesthetic simulates the sliding movement as one views and reviews images in a cellular phone, an aesthetic that is seen to be native to the digital medium. While more music videos, animations, and home videos were made, they hardly showed innovations of the alternative genre, as seen in the radical second movement. Outside of the academic circle looms large the figure of Khavn de la Cruz. He has mastered the experimental genre in digital format. He has won wide renown at international film festivals, where screenings of his works were accompanied by musical performances in Berlin, Rotterdam, Ji.hlava, and other venues.



Figure 8. Khavn de la Cruz – one of the pioneers of digital filmmaking in the Philippines.

On hand to catch the digital windfall were three festivals that positioned themselves as the new leaders of alternative cinema in the new millennium:

Cinemalaya Independent Film Festival and the Cinema One Originals—both catering mainly to feature-length movies in digital format but including sections for short fiction films (sadly excluding other genres such as documentaries and experimental films)—and the Cultural Center of the Philippines’ *Gawad CCP Para sa Alternatibong Pelikula at Video* (CCP Alternative Film and Video Awards), which welcomes films of alternative nature in all categories. Since the introduction of digital technology, entries to these competitions remarkably increased in number. Significant to note during the early years of the digital era was that the films were physically shown inside movie theaters. One had to go to the screening venues, mostly in limited spaces like the Cultural Center of the Philippines or inside school auditoriums. This would change drastically with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.



Figure 9. Participants to the 2023 *Gawad CCP Para sa Alternatibong Pelikula at Video* (CCP Alternative Film and Video Awards) pose for a photo with pioneering alternative filmmakers Rick y Orellana (center, left) and Raymond Red (center, right). The *Gawad CCP* began in 1988 and is now the longest-running event dedicated to alternative cinema in the Philippines.

The lockdown that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic allowed for a new way of using digital technology to produce and disseminate moving pictures. Forcing people to work from home, the online format has become a new source of creativity and market as videos find new expressions. There was no need to go and physically watch movies in cinema theaters or other venues; one could get as much film entertainment as possible on one’s own phone or computer. Online delivery of movies, whether long or short, has brought a new dimension to the development of alternative cinema (as it has of mainstream cinema). Digital online media has personalized the cinematic experience, allowing people to watch movies individually through their own gadgets. Emerging as an addictive form

of visual entertainment are the short videos that have proliferated in TikTok and other online platforms. This allowed individuals without formal film production training to become instant filmmakers, using only their smartphones to shoot, edit, score, mix, and distribute their films by uploading them to online streaming platforms.

Alternative cinema has indeed found a new life in the digital platform, allowing it to reach its fourth movement. This happened in the 2020s when everyone thought that cinema was dead in its tracks when people could not go to movie houses anymore. The online streaming technology saved the harsh conditions and gave it a leash on life. This even resulted in a favorable situation for alternative cinema, giving rise to non-commercial forms of cinematic expression flooding online platforms. Short films were made and shown as they never had before. Everyone could post their videos, and anyone could watch them anywhere. Short videos have become a very popular medium that is enjoyed by everyone. Undoubtedly, the digital turn has brought about unprecedented growth in alternative cinema. Among the outstanding developments was the emergence of regional cinema, which made possible the widespread growth of cinema happening all over the archipelago. This can be seen in the explosive growth of regional film festivals, from the Abrenian Film Festival in the north to CineKasimanwa in Western Visayas, and the flourishing of film festivals in Mindanao. All over the country, alternative cinema sustains the lifeblood of this new cinema that has come to define the national cinema, a cinema in the hands of common people making films. What is happening today is the triumph of alternative cinema as the country's most popular and most avidly pursued cinematic experience—both by amateur filmmakers and hordes of audiences.

The other consequence of digital cinema is the emergence of gender-based filmmaking, seen through the rise of women filmmakers and those of other gender affiliations. Names like Sari and Kiri Dalena, Ramona Diaz, Jewel Maranan, Adjani Arumpac, Ditsi Carolino, Martika Escobar, Kara Magsanoc-Alikpala, Baby Ruth Villarama, and many more have made their marks in national and international film competitions. It is not only women who are becoming prominent but also those from the LGBTQ community. This sector is represented by filmmakers with uncompromising works celebrating alternative gender consciousness.

Alternative filmmakers brought Philippine cinema back to its origin in short films and its many other forms. They have expanded cinema's terrain beyond the limiting confines of commercialism and linear narrativity. Cinema has unleashed its rhizomatic nature. Alternative filmmakers made notable strides by arriving at new cinematic concepts, forms, styles, techniques, and consciousness. Its continued practice emancipates cinema to fulfill its mandate to create various moving pictures to enrich the country's film heritage. True cinema is happening in alternative works.

Endnotes

- 1 Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (1987). *Mille plateaux* [A thousand plateaus] (B. Massumi, trans.). University of Minnesota Press. (Original work published 1980).
- 2 “Body without organs” is how two French philosophers have defined the rhizome, meaning it refers to a body that “is continually dismantling the organism, causing signifying particles or pure intensities to pass or circulate, and attributing to itself subjects that it leaves with nothing more than a name as the trace of an intensity.” Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their “Introduction.” *Mille plateaux* [A thousand plateaus], p. 4.
- 3 Read leading US film trade journals like *Leslie’s Weekly*, which printed articles such as “How Edison Would Educate Children,” written by W.H. Meadowcroft (described as an “assistant to Mr. Edison”) appearing on September 19, 1912, p. 270. Other articles include Harry Irving Greene’s “Ultimate Users of Motion Picture,” *Motography*, November 23, 1912, p. 387, and “Motion Pictures and the Mind of the Child” by William H. Walker in *Motography*, January 18, 1913, p. 39.
- 4 Charles Musser. 1990. “Thomas Edison and the Amusement World,” *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- 5 Jose Nepomuceno, in inaugurating moviemaking in the Philippines, first shot a short newsreel on the internment of Doña Estefania Lim Osmeña, first wife of Commonwealth Vice President Sergio Osmeña, Sr., in Cebu in 1918. This was followed a year later by his production of *Dalagang Bukid*, which he adapted from a popular “*sarswela*” or stage musical
- 6 American film scholar and Yale professor Charles Musser takes up the widespread establishment of a global Hollywood film system in his essay, “Nationalism, Contradiction, and Identity: or, A Reconsideration of Early Cinema in the Philippines,” in Nick Deocampo (Ed.). 2017. *Early Cinema in Asia*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 71-109.
- 7 The two feature-length films were directed by Yutaka Abe (*Ano hatta o ute*/Dawn of freedom) and Gerardo de Leon, *Tatlong Maria* (Three Marias). Consult Nick Deocampo. 2016. *Eiga: Cinema in the Philippines during World War II*. Mandaluyong City: Anvil Publishing, Inc.
- 8 Refer to Nick Deocampo. 2022. *Alternative Cinema: The Unchronicled History of Alternative Cinema in the Philippines*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press and Film Development Council of the Philippines.

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Caring in Curating: Curating Art, Spaces, and the Self

China Patricia T. Villanueva

Abstract

This paper explores how curation extends beyond the art world and is applied to various professional spheres like libraries, news production, and social media. My approach to historicizing the concept of curation is largely inspired by Van der Heijden's concept of hybridization among media apparatuses. Rather than solely looking at the interrelation of media tools, I also looked into how the role of a curator transpires in offline and online spaces. Meanwhile, my understanding of curation is mainly drawn from Balzer's (2014) book on curationism and Obrist's (2008) discussions with other prominent figures in the art scene. My paper does not intend to discount the profession of a curator, but instead, I argue that users continuously embody the role of curators as they navigate and shape their external identities within the dynamic landscape of digital platforms. This paper posits that such practice not only involves users curating their online personas but also fuels the continued growth and influence of these platforms (Smythe, 1977).

Keywords: curation, digital media, social media, audience commodity

Every week, I receive a notification from my phone about my average screen time. For this week, my daily average was seven hours and nine minutes—with two hours of this spent scrolling through the bottomless pit of TikTok. This popular video-sharing app allows users to upload short-form videos of no more than 10 minutes. My friends mostly use the app to partake in the latest TikTok trends. However, as an introvert, I prefer to go incognito and mostly use TikTok as a search engine for food, travel destinations, and beauty must-haves.

TikTok is widely known for providing a virtual space where one can be their authentic selves (Schellewald, 2023). It's been two years since I created my TikTok account, and throughout this period, I've seen how fellow users leverage the platform to create feel-good content via dance challenges, tutorials, and thrift finds. Popular influencers, personalities, and, to a certain extent, A-list Hollywood stars have also used the platform to present themselves as someone relatable or ordinary who experiences the same joys and struggles as the rest of us. At that time, I found it refreshing to see users and friends deviate from the aspirational and picture-perfect life we once lived on Instagram. However, looking back now—and having the opportunity to look into publications about TikTok—it seems that the authenticity that we enjoy watching on TikTok is just as curated and performative as uploading a photo on Instagram or a vlog on YouTube (Barta et al., 2023).

In scholarship, they attributed authenticity and relatability to what makes content on TikTok viral or popular among its users (Schellewald, 2023; Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2022). This means that the videos that become famous on the platform are primarily determined by users who spend time watching and engaging with these videos. As a result, this becomes an invisible trigger for others who aspire to become famous on the platform, as they aim to create content that resonates with the platform's users (Schellewald, 2023; Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2022). This implies that, as users, we meticulously shape our online identities to align with the norms of each platform, thus assuming the role of curators for our online personas. I find it noteworthy that curation, a practice that has been historically and intricately linked with the organization of artwork in museums and galleries (Obrist, 2011), now extends to the curation of online personas on social media platforms alongside the prevalent documentation of our daily lives and milestones online.

My position to delve into curation on blogs and social media stems from my professional experience in public relations and corporate communications. In these fields, curation was consistently done to garner public favor and bolster brand reputation via press releases, interviews, social media content, and publicity stunts. Meanwhile, my interest in looking into LookBook, Instagram, and TikTok is driven by professional and personal motivations. LookBook and Instagram were once recognized as one of the leading platforms (Ewens, 2021; Iqbal, 2024) and

subsequently held significant influence over my fashion preferences during my collegiate years in an exclusive girls' school. As for TikTok, its rapid rise in popularity intrigues me, despite concerns surrounding data privacy (Samaniego, 2023). I am interested in examining how curation practices unfold on TikTok, especially given the platform's emphasis on authenticity. Recent statistics also indicate that Filipinos lead in video consumption with 50.7% and rank the highest in terms of watching vlogs or influencer videos each week (Tan, 2024). Ergo, the country's rich usage of online platforms, armed with the Filipinos' continuous dependence on mobile phones to access and consume information from the Internet (Diaz, 2024), provides a favorable ground to explore the interconnectedness of the curated self and audience commodification within these virtual spaces.

Given these contexts, I argue that users continuously embody the role of curators as they navigate and shape their external identities within the dynamic landscape of digital platforms. This paper posits that such practice not only involves users curating their online personas but also fuels the continued growth and influence of these platforms. My paper is inspired mainly by Van der Heijden's (2018) approach to historicizing media apparatuses based on hybridization. I illustrate how curation is applied in various professional spheres and online media. Meanwhile, my understanding of curation and its application outside the art world is mainly drawn from Balzer's (2015) discussion on curationism. Although his book discusses the evolution of curated works over time (Balzer, 2015), I mainly apply the fundamental principles of curation in offline and online spaces like the library, blogs, and social media. I also want to make it clear that my paper does not, in any way, intend to discount the profession of an art curator, especially the works of Hans Ulrich Obrist and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev or the likes of Roberto Chabet and Patrick Flores, who are recognized as some of the most influential personalities in the local art scene. Instead, I aim to illustrate how the fundamental concepts of "arranging and editing of things" in curation (Balzer, 2015, p. 35) have become a standard practice when depicting our lives and personas online.

Structured into three sections: I will first briefly discuss a historical overview of curation, tracing its roots back to Ancient Rome, as well as existing literature that engages the practice beyond the realm of art. Then, I will examine how curation manifests in offline and online spaces, particularly in libraries, news productions, and social media platforms such as LookBook.nu, Instagram, and TikTok. Finally, I will conclude my paper by highlighting how immaterial labor is inherent in the curated self, thus making it a currency that users pay to social media platforms in exchange for a safe and interconnected user experience. My conclusion is based on Smythe's (1977) conceptualization of 'audience commodification,' which identifies the immaterial labor of audience attention as a critical contributor to the economies of scale within mass communication systems.

The Curator, To Curate, and The Curatorial

Our perception of curation has become multifaceted due to its prevalence within and outside the art world (Balzer, 2015). To use curator as a noun, to curate as a verb, and the *curatorial* as an adjective is no longer strictly confined to discussions around art but instead applies to a myriad of definitions that can be related to personal branding. In Christov-Bakargie's interview with Balzer (2015), she shares that society has grown fearful of having the same interests in music, books, etc., and wishes to distinguish themselves from the rest. Therefore, curation occurs when we intentionally shape the presentations of our external selves, and similar to institutions and businesses, we curate "to cultivate and organize things in an expression-cum-assurance of value and an attempt to make affiliations with, and to court, various audiences and consumers" (Balzer, 2015, p. 14). Meanwhile, George (2015) likens the role of a curator to that of a "selector and interpreter of works of art for an exhibition" as well as a "person responsible for writing wall labels, catalog essays, and other supporting content for the exhibition" (p. 11). Here, the curator acts as a gatekeeper who protects and preserves the message an exhibition wishes to convey, similar to a blogger or influencer who curates and preserves their online identity. These statements from Balzer (2015) and George (2015) illustrate that the curator adheres to a particular branding or identity they wish to present to their respective audiences.

Such alterations in presenting our external selves can be traced back to Ancient Rome. Obrist disclosed in an interview that the word 'curating' is derived from the Latin word 'curare,' which means "to take care of something" (Jeffries & Groves, 2014). Morton (n.d.) also shared that curators used to be civil servants who oversaw and ensured that public works such as the Empire's aqueducts, bathhouses, and sewers were smoothly running. Meanwhile, in Medieval times, *curatus* referred to a priest responsible for the spiritual welfare of the souls (Mair, 2020). In contrast, others claimed that it meant either "attendant," "keeper," or "guardian" (Rubantseva & Hoffmann, 2020). These early definitions consistently highlight the meticulous care work involved in the curation process, a principle that continues to exist today; whether their role requires them to tend to larger-than-life infrastructures or delicate cultural artifacts, it is the responsibility of the curator to safeguard the preservation of these objects. The sense of guardianship has also persisted into the 20th and 21st centuries, with curators who worked as exhibition makers or those hired by institutions to create or reinforce meanings, narratives, and ideas from chosen works of art (Hosein, 2020). In this context, curators oversee not just human life and physical objects but also the stewardship of spaces that evoke emotions and spark conversations about pressing issues through art.

Provided the arguments about curators as caretakers and meaning-makers in the realm of art, I refer to Balzer's (2015) insights about curation as a widely used

practice in constructing favorable external identities. He argues that curation, outside the art world, is “powerful but also diffuse,” like a celebrity whose image can be customized based on a public event or their scope of work (Balzer, 2015, p. 21). Hence, curation is done “in relation to ourselves, using the term to refer to any number of things we do and consume on a daily basis” (Balzer, 2015, p. 22), which thus makes the curated artifact an extension of ourselves.

Curating Offline Spaces

Curating Libraries

To borrow Van der Heijden’s (2018) approach to historicizing media apparatuses, practices, and discourses, I relate curation to the catalogs in analog media based on their similarity in how things are arranged and edited. Catalogs are universally defined by Oxford (n.d.) as a list of items that people can look at or buy. Although I must say, encountering the word ‘catalog’ makes me feel nostalgic since it immediately reminds me of the magazines I used to read in my pre-teen years, i.e., *Total Girl* and *K-Zone*, and even the Avon representatives who would go to our house to sell perfumes and lipsticks. However, catalogs have an extensive history dating back to how libraries were managed in the 7th B.C. (Mason, n.d.). Fons (2016) reveals that the first name ever recorded in the role of a librarian was Amilanu, a Babylonian whose primary responsibility was presumed to involve listing the contents of his library’s collection to make sure that he and his readers were aware of what he had collected. The act of recording collections has thus influenced how modern libraries continue to manage their books for return or borrowing. From listing items on clay tablets to organizing them on index cards stored in large green cabinets, libraries have developed a system reliant on the diligence found in the coding and decoding of items (Battles, 2013). Furthermore, such meticulous organization gave birth to the concept of ‘bookkeeping’ in the world of finance and business (Hennigan, 2023). In this context, bookkeepers, like the Babylonian Amilanu, are entrusted with organizing, classifying, and maintaining financial records for a business. Thus, rather than simply listing books, bookkeeping and the practice of cataloging are applied to document the activities of one’s business, regardless of its size.

So, how does curation apply to the history and practice of library catalogs? To answer this simply, I base it on Battles’ description of a library as a place that breathes books in and out of its bookshelves and how books “must be counted and classified before they are desired” (2013, p. 9). Cataloging helps demystify the overwhelming quantity of books, transforming them into accessible objects that can satisfy readers’ appetites. This may also shed light on why genres categorize books; those who seek inspiration and hope for love turn to romance; others who need a boost or motivation engage in self-help books; and those who wish to enter

a new and imaginary universe can read fiction. Cataloging books according to genres contributes to the re-mystification of art discussed by Balzer (2015) in the context of curatorship—librarians or bookshop custodians curate these genres to ensure that their book collections meet the users' desire within the premises of their library or bookshop.

Balzer (2015) further illustrates the curator through the concept of connoisseurship, which entails "a display of taste or expertise that lends stylized independence to the act of caring for and assembling" (p. 39). Obrist (2011) also shares the same insight as he reveals the selective curation that Szeeman used during his time at Kunsthalle; he considered both connoisseurship and sharing factual information when he curated an exhibition. Librarians and bookshop custodians embody the role of curators as connoisseurs by meticulously selecting and organizing books to cater to the preferences and interests of their customers. In return, they can build the reputation of their libraries as a place that provides not only credible and sought-after books but also a space that enhances the satisfaction and engagement of readers and customers alike.

Curating Consumption

Beyond art galleries and libraries, the role of the curator-slash-connoisseur similarly extends to various spheres, including the dissemination of information. This application is evident in the development of gatekeeping theory (Lewin, 1943), which examines the flow of information through gates or channels akin to curatorial decisions. Just as curators deliberately select which artifacts can effectively convey a message (Balzer, 2015), gatekeepers in mass communications act as guardians in deciding which news stories to include in shaping public discourse.

Lewin (1943) introduced the gatekeeping theory to analyze the food habits of families in Iowa and defines a 'gatekeeper' as someone who decides which food to buy, store, and consume. Their decisions are then influenced by external and psychological factors such as household finances, daily priorities, and preferences. Building on Lewin's work, Shoemaker and Vos (2009) applied gatekeeping theory to news curation, highlighting how media editors curate information into newsworthy pieces. Meanwhile, Barzilai-Nahon (2008) proposed a network-based gatekeeping theory, suggesting that the Internet empowers individuals to act as gatekeepers. In this digital age, news receivers can curate and disseminate information online, thus reflecting the idea of a participatory culture where users actively engage with content rather than passively consume it (Jenkins et al., 2016).

The evolution of the gatekeeping theory illustrates the decision-making process that governs the act of curating information. Here, the curator becomes a professional necessity that can be applied in non-art domains like a news editor

and a social media user (Balzer, 2015). It becomes an experience grounded on being authorial and undaunted in shaping information, directly impacting them as members of society and individual Internet users.

Curating Online Spaces and Our External Identities

The Rule of Code

Referring to the process of coding and decoding mentioned earlier in the discussion of curating libraries, this resembles Manovich's (2002) definition of data in the era of information technology. He defines data as pieces of interpretable information that computers can read, transform, and analyze (Manovich, 2002). Coupled with the advent of digital technologies such as social media, the internet, and mobile devices, the proliferation of 'time-stamped digital footprints' reflects our online interactions and activities (Golder & Macy, 2014) and thus becomes tangible information for capitalists. With every action we conduct online, from keywords to reactions to posts, we leave behind a digital footprint that can yield valuable economic insights. As a result, the role of the curator extends beyond the action and the noun itself; it now encompasses the tools we use to curate content, becoming an integral part of the curation process.

Shaping the Blogosphere: When Computers Were a Bit High-Tech

In an age where devices and media tools are becoming more handheld and miniature in size, thinking about a heavy-weight and stationary box computer seems archaic. However, I think the computer deserves more credit, especially when it's by far one of the best technological inventions ever known to mankind. The origin of this ultimate machine, as described by Augarten (1984), can be traced back to two starting points: the first during World War II, when scientists from the University of Pennsylvania invented a generic electronic calculator called the Electronic Numerator, Integrator, Analyzer and Computer (ENIAC); and the second with the invention of the abacus. Computers in earlier times were predominantly designed to assist in intellectual work, particularly in the field of mathematics; there was the Arithmometer, invented by Charles Xavier Thomas de Colmar (1820), that enhanced the possibility of mechanics calculations, and the Difference Engine of Charles Babbage (1882) that addressed the inaccuracies in mathematical tables (Augarten, 1984). A computer that was able to code or store programs was only invented in 1935 when Konrad Zuse introduced the Z1, the first mechanical computer that could operate with binary numbers, and the Z3 in 1941, which closely resembles our modern-day computers (Müller, 2023). Meanwhile, John von Neumann, a mathematician who contributed to the US atomic bomb project, designed a fundamental model for all computers in 1945 that facilitated data movement, computations, and sending results to output devices like printers

(Dainow, 2017). After the war, he focused his efforts on devising a more practical and efficient computer, which led to the influential IAS computer in 1951, a design that greatly influenced subsequent computers worldwide (Dainow, 2017).

The life cycle of the Internet mirrors how computers came into being: to address the lack of mobility in sharing information—a vision that is similarly shared by social media platforms wherein interconnectivity, regardless of geographical and time hindrances, is made possible. What's also fascinating to note is how computers and the Internet emerged out of the necessities of war. If von Neumann exhausted his post-war efforts to make computers more useful, then the Advanced Research Projects (ARPA) formulated the Internet's basic framework (Moschovitis et al., 1999). This visionary step in history paved the way for the interconnected world that we experience today in modern computer networks and communications.

Interconnectivity and Democratized Speech

In the continuous ascent of the internet, especially with Web 2.0, interconnectivity has shaped how we engage with media technologies (Alemu & Stevens, 2015). Gone are the days when we simply consumed news from newspapers or television and entered a time when we could actively engage and become content creators ourselves. Like a curator, the journalist before the age of the Internet was a profession that was generally exclusive. It meant earning a degree in journalism or learning on the job from seasoned journalists (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

In contrast, blogs offered amateur writers a platform to share their thoughts and opinions while also democratizing news publishing through participatory journalism or Indymedia (Lievrouw, 2023). The early days of blogging started in 1994, when a university student, Justin Hall, launched 'Justin's Homepage' to share links with friends and American Company Ty, Inc., started Daily Diary, the world's first business-based blog later that year (Hardy, 2024). Since then, blogging has become a popular outlet for aspiring writers, especially from the early 2000s up to the mid-2000s (Digital Limelight Media, n.d.; Duermyer, 2022). Additionally, it was during the height of blogging when content creators were introduced, as bloggers became driven by their entrepreneurial ambition to build their own media brands (Arriagada, 2020).

I didn't get to write my blogs, but I remember creating a Tumblr account, a micro-blogging platform where you can upload photos and write content or re-post, like those created by other Tumblr users (Bercovici, 2013). I also admired the fact that similar to major blog publications, WordPress and Blogspot, I can create my own domain and use it for the same purpose as any existing platform: as a form of expression. My interest in blogging may have died down in recent years, but when dealing with bloggers in PR, I saw how they treat their blog sites as

professional writers. Discussing blogging in the age of proliferating disinformation in the country has its setbacks, but I attest to the fact that blogs allow aspiring writers to use their platforms as a sideline or a hobby that fulfills their creative pursuits.

Like how curators act as connoisseurs or media editors assign journalists to certain beats, blogs have their specialties. Parenting blogs post parenting tips and share their lives as parents, food bloggers publish food reviews, film bloggers upload their film critiques, and fashion blogs upload their “outfit of the day” (or OOTD) online. Their branding has become ingrained in their identity as writers, leading them to curate their content to serve the interests of their audience. This parallels the responsibilities of a curator as bloggers are tasked with envisioning the bigger picture for their blogs, growing their network by attending physical events, acting as ambassadors of their own media brands, and shaping how they arrange their content (Balzer, 2015). It is in the age of blogging where the curator is no longer tied to organizing things for a certain occasion. It rather evolves as a day-to-day act that individuals perform to safeguard their branding.

LookBook and Outfit of the Day

I want to focus on LookBook.NU, a website that my friends and I, dare I say, religiously followed during our college days. We were teenagers constantly trying to figure out what to wear, especially when we could wear civilian clothes instead of our uniform. On top of that, our school was in the middle of Makati City, a place where it was not uncommon to encounter television personalities and fashion gurus, even along the overpass of Greenbelt. There was considerable peer pressure to look good. So, naturally, off to LookBook we went.

LookBook.NU was a fashion, youth culture, and community website. While it's no longer an active website today, it cultivated a dedicated online community focused on street fashion content and boasted over a million monthly visitors during its heyday (MacDonald, 2014). Users were empowered to submit photos of their outfits and stage photo shoots in key cities across the metro. The platform also had state-of-the-art features that went beyond simple search-and-click functionalities, allowing users to vote for their favorite looks and filter content by brand, color combinations, and locations (Allentrepreneur, 2009). This was also a time when I became a fan of Blogger Besties—a group comprised of Filipino fashion bloggers Laureen Uy, Patricia Prieto, and Kryz Uy, among a few others. I'd usually see their outfits being voted on LookBook as one of the most popular, alongside other fashion bloggers from around the world.

The process of uploading photos to LookBook demands a meticulous level of production. Figure 1 shows how a famous Filipina blogger dedicates considerable time and effort to crafting high-quality content, often employing professional

cameras and occasionally enlisting the services of photographers. Moreover, she curates glamorous looks and makeup in pursuit of recognition and popularity within platforms such as LookBook—a blindspot that Smythe (1977) talks about in audience commodification wherein digital platforms profit from user-generated content. He argues that instead of paying for advertising, they rely on the free time that their audience spends engaging with their platform (Smythe, 1977). In LookBook's case, the fact that their users would spend time thinking about what to wear, producing the content, and uploading it to their platform only equates to their economic success rather than the intrinsic value of the content itself (Smythe, 1977). Curation, therefore, becomes an invisible guiding force that shapes trends and encourages users to conform to the platform's standard of what is deemed trendy.



Figure 1. A Filipina fashion blogger teaches petite girls how to pose for LookBook. Note: Photo grabbed from Chen, R. (2014, July 17). Calling all petite girls: This Filipino fashion blogger shows you how to elongate your legs. Character Media – Asian Americans in Entertainment. <https://charactermedia.com/calling-all-petite-girls-get-longer-legs-with-this-filipino-fashion-blogger/>

User-Generated Content in Social Media

Smartphones

Curation as a standardized practice in making content has been further amplified with the rise of handheld devices like smartphones. Before, uploading photos on LookBook required taking these with professional cameras and editing

them on laptops or desktops; now, smartphones have become a hybrid of various media technologies that allow us to easily capture, edit, and upload content. To cite Van der Heijden's (2018) concept of hybridization once more, the evolution of media tools is not drawn from thin air but is rather made to comply with the needs of society. And in an age when content is king, there exists pressure on smartphone companies to innovate and market products that can capture moments and milestones instantly. However, what I intend to contribute to this discussion is that not only does hybridization exist among tangible media tools, but it also becomes a concept that shapes how mobile applications are becoming more ubiquitous and intuitive than ever.

Instagram and the Curated Feed

Curation and personal branding continue to go hand in hand in contemporary times. I've already discussed how the act, the noun, and even the very tools we use have become a part of the curated process, and what's left for me to explore is curation as a strategy that sets us apart from the rest. To borrow Balzer's (2015) words, we've become 'contemporary curators' in the age of consumerism, and social media platforms are no stranger to such context.

The Instagram era holds a special place for me. I found Facebook's demographic too old to the point that it felt like my parents and older relatives were monitoring my activity online. Instagram felt liberating because it caters to the younger demographic and focuses on uploading visually pleasing photos (Jin & Ryu, 2024). Additionally, content on Instagram was generally perceived as aspirational, and although the application itself seemed more approachable than a highly produced photo on LookBook, the effort it took to get that perfect, Instagram-worthy shot was more or less the same (Abidin, 2016). Therefore, curation manifests on the platform as a strategy for presenting ourselves online. It echoes what Balzer (2015) said about curation as a personal branding and the performative work I discussed about bloggers. What sets Instagram apart, however, is that the experience on the platform is already curated. By providing in-app filters and requiring content to adhere to its former square format, the users consequently conform to the aesthetic that Instagram dictates through its affordances as a platform.

Furthermore, Instagram capitalized on its feed, a page where users can easily see how all their photos act like pieces of a bigger puzzle in shaping how users want their feed to look. For Instagram users, maintaining a cohesive feed and the content they upload online are crucial to curating their profiles. Figure 2 shows a Filipino beauty blogger who is known for her curated feed on Instagram, even earning headlines from local fashion publications *Preview* and *Cosmopolitan PH*. Mobile applications have also been developed specifically to simulate how a new photo will appear as part of a user's Instagram feed before it's uploaded to the platform (Stephensen, 2018). These applications enable users to preview and schedule their

posts and ensure that the aesthetic of their feed remains consistent. I interpret this as analogous to how curators adhere to the standards and protocols of a specific institution (Balzer, 2015; George, 2015). Yet, within the expansive realm of social media, the platforms themselves govern and delimit the possibilities for content creation.

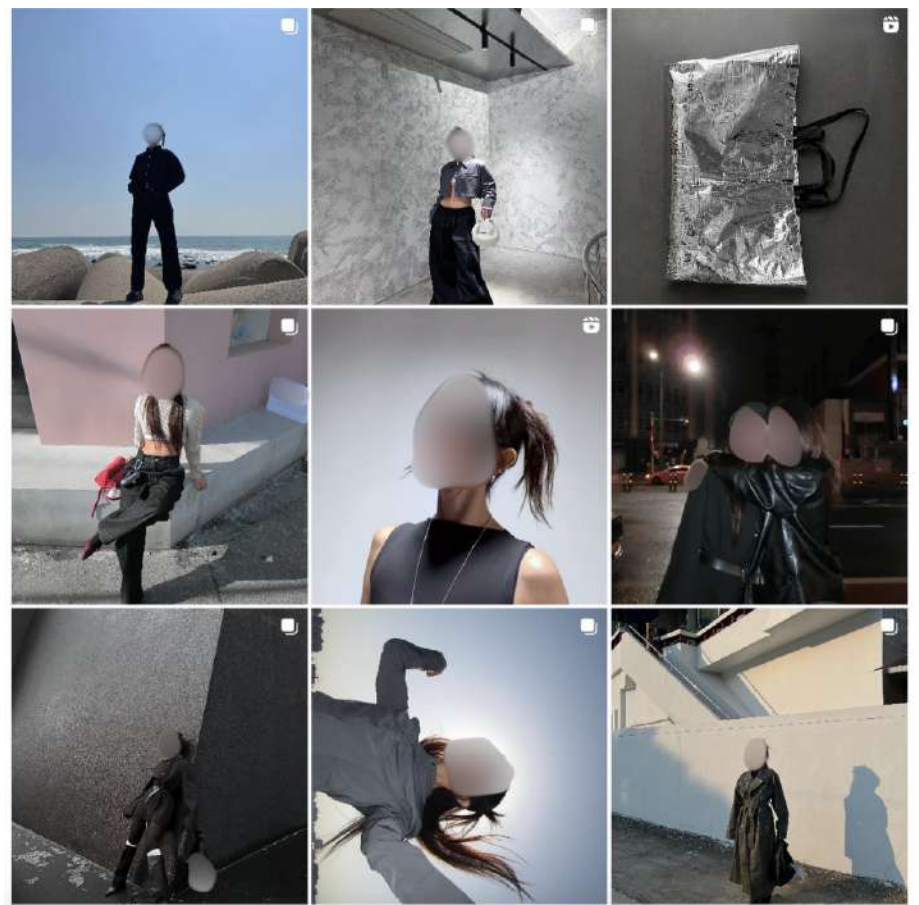


Figure 2. A Filipina fashion influencer's curated feed on Instagram. Note: Image screen-grabbed from her public Instagram profile.

TikTok Authenticity

I mentioned in my introduction that I've spent hours scrolling through the bottomless pit of TikTok. My deliberate use of the 'bottomless pit' was intended to describe my user experience on the platform: the endless feeling of being entertained as I scroll through one video after another, then a few more that follow. Studies have also pointed out the same sentiment when describing users' feelings

when scrolling through their “For You” (Schellewald, 2023). TikTok prides itself on its “For You” page as its most distinctive feature. By employing an algorithm for its “For You” experience, it allows TikTok to detect which kind of videos a user will likely enjoy based on user-initiated data like watching the video and skipping past it (Schellewald, 2023).

TikTok’s branding strategy is heavily anchored by the platform’s authenticity compared to the curated feed of Instagram. I’ve grown fond of binge-watching content from TikTok users who offer backstage passes into their professions. Figure 3 shows how a licensed pharmacist demonstrates his connoisseurship by curating educational and engaging content that reflects his professional identity. His content is centered around real-life encounters with his customers at the botika [pharmacy], and he even leveraged his following on TikTok to call for donations to help his elderly customers pay for their medicines. Another example is shown in Figure 4, wherein a user’s TikTok content is influenced by her work as a professional voice-over artist. Her profile photo does not show her wearing a professional outfit like the TikTok user in Figure 3, but her videos often depict the life of someone who is a voice-over artist for major events.

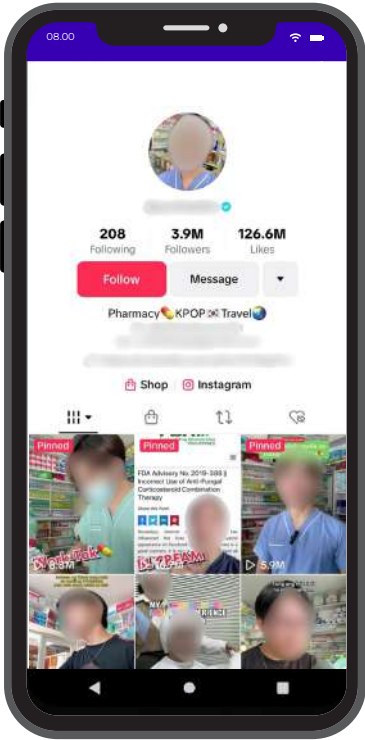


Figure 3. *TikTok profile of a user who’s also a licensed pharmacist. The curated self is demonstrated by skewing his content around pharmacy, his uniform being visible in his profile photo, and mentioning pharmacy in his biography. Note: Image screen-grabbed from his public TikTok profile.*

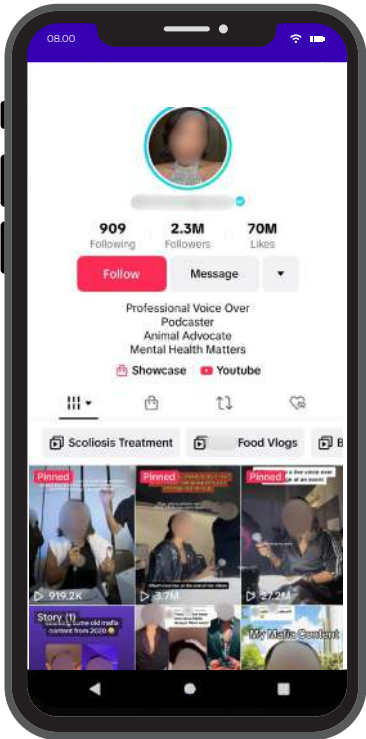


Figure 4. *TikTok profile of a user who’s a professional voice-over artist. The curated self is manifested by creating*

content around her work as a professional voice-over artist. Note: Image screen-grabbed from her public TikTok profile.

These examples illustrate how I see curation in the context of social media. Consistent with arranging and editing artifacts (Balzer, 2015), we see how these TikTok users embody the role of curators as they carve their online identities out of their real-life interests and expertise (Obrist, 2011). We also see this demonstrated in how users gain virality on the platform by engaging in dance challenges and other TikTok-trendy content (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2022). However, when viewed through the lens of Balzer (2015) and Smythe (1977), it becomes apparent that projecting one's self as authentic or unscripted on TikTok requires similar performative efforts on LookBook and Instagram. Therefore, the application of curation in online spaces is a dynamic interplay of conscious, deliberate efforts that both the user and platform adhere to. Moreover, social media users have embraced these characteristics of TikTok, which influence how they behave on the platform and how they curate their content. This further demonstrates how the role of the curator is not only embodied by the users and the platforms themselves but also by their interaction within these spaces—a concept that aligns with Pariser's (2012) discussion on filter bubbles that shape what users see on the internet.

Unpacking the Curator, Curation, and the Curatorial

My paper explores how curation has extended the art world as an identity, a practice, and a concept. From curators dating back to Ancient Rome to libraries and bookshop custodians who safeguard library catalogs and to online spaces that curate the user experience in blogs and social media platforms, the curator has similarly evolved in how we arrange and edit an extension of our identities that we present to others. These insights also align with how Smythe (1977) discussed 'audience commodification' wherein platforms rely on free time in curating content, thus making our curated selves an invisible currency that largely benefits these platforms. At first glance, they appear to adapt and cater to our desire for engaging content that represents our idea of self, but it's crucial to recognize their deeper function. These platforms empower us, as users, to carefully curate our online personas, often at the expense of expression and authenticity.

It also asserts Van der Heijden's (2018) concept of hybridization in approaching media histories. Instead of solely analyzing the interrelation among media apparatus, I historicize how the practice of curation merges not only various professional spheres but also the interrelation of roles that arise out of these hybrid media technologies. While we can still distinguish between the roles of a curator in art galleries and the editors or producers of news production sites, the foundational principles guiding these professions persist in our interaction with digital media tools today. This observation does not diminish the expertise of professionals in their respective fields but instead highlights how practices that were once exclusive, such as curation, can be democratized and employed by individual users.

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Aqua Lateris Christi, Lava Me: Religious Symbolism and Humanism in Contemporary Thought

Robert Nelson Besana

Introduction

I have been involved in academia for the past two decades, currently holding the Executive Director position in the School of Multimedia and Arts at NU-Asia Pacific College. In addition to my academic pursuits, I actively pursue my career as a visual artist. On March 24, 2024, I participated in a group exhibit entitled *Waterscapes*, organized by The Center for Art, New Ventures and Sustainable Development (CANVAS) in collaboration with Manila Water and Manila Water Foundation. I submitted an artwork that I believed aligned perfectly with the theme, reflecting my personal perspective and artistic style I developed over the years.

The show's central theme is centered on water, utilizing art to raise awareness and foster appreciation for this vital resource that is frequently overlooked yet plays a pivotal role in our environment, history, economy, and future as an archipelagic nation. More than one hundred artists were invited to express their reflections on the essence of water - its fluidity, tranquil qualities, and indispensable role in supporting life. They were also challenged to incorporate elements related to water in their artworks. Consequently, each piece represents a fusion of artistic creativity and environmental advocacy.

The title of my entry is *Aqua Lateris Christi, Lava me*, derived from the Latin prayer *Anima Christi*. In English, it means "water from the side of Christ, cleanse me." This phrase came to mind immediately when I learned about the theme, but I knew I needed to discuss it with the curator, fellow visual artist Jaime Jesus Pacena

II. I explained that I intended to create a piece with strong religious symbolism, depicting Christ's suffering with water flowing from the wound on his side. Jaime supported my idea, noting its connection to water and relevance to the upcoming Holy Week and the exhibit's opening on Holy Tuesday.

The painting is created on a medium-sized canvas measuring 40 inches in height and 30 inches in width and mounted on a museum board. I utilized oil as my primary medium for this piece. The artwork mostly features a gray-scale color palette, with the addition of gold oil paint for the slashes incorporated into the main element. These slashes are a recurring motif in my body of work, present in most pieces with a religious theme, often accompanied by red roses symbolizing prayer, specifically the rosary. Although the roses are not included in this work, they have been a symbol I have repeatedly used in past pieces.

Creative Process

The exhibit's title, *Waterscape*, sparked my interest, especially in its religious connotations. I reflected on various biblical stories involving water, such as the transformation of water into wine at the wedding in Cana, Jesus walking on water in front of Peter, and the symbolic act of washing the apostles' feet. These stories highlighted the significance of water as a conduit for miracles and a representation of Christ's role as the redeemer of humanity from sin through his sacrificial death on the cross. I was particularly drawn to the image of water flowing from Christ's wound, mingled with his holy blood. This led me to choose the suffering Christ image as the focal point of my work.

But coming to Jesus, when they saw that He had already died, they did not break His legs; but one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately there came out blood and water.

~ John 19:33-34

I began by sketching some ideas and then used Midjourney, an AI (Artificial Intelligence) text-to-image platform, to create an image. I have used this AI technology for my last seven artworks, three of which have been exhibited. My initial text prompt was to depict Christ in a state of suffering with water flowing from his side. However, I encountered difficulty in getting the AI to portray this accurately. Instead of showing the water flowing from Christ's side, most of the generated images depicted Christ's crucifixion on a rainy afternoon. One image even showed water coming from an external source rather than from Christ himself. I admit that my initial text prompt may have been too simple: "photo of crucified Christ with water flowing from his side."



Figure 1. Robert Nelson Besana, *Aqua Lateris Christi, Lava me*, 2024. Oil on canvas (40 x 30 inches). Image courtesy of the artist.

How can I effectively use an AI text-to-image generator? I have not delved deeply into prompt engineering before, as I typically rely on traditional mediums for my art. However, I see AI art being used as a standalone art form, while in my studio, it serves as a reference for my traditional oil paintings on canvas. Despite multiple iterations of my text prompt, I could not achieve the desired image direction. Realizing this early on, I adjusted the artwork directly after further experimentation.

Over the past years, my focus in oil painting has been on creating a fresh and fluid application of the medium. I aim for a thin viscosity in my paint, particularly in the initial layer, to allow the pigment to flow smoothly on the canvas. During the first stage of my process, I integrate various painting techniques, starting with very thin layers to quickly cover the area. This approach often results in dripping paints and splatters, which help blend the values together. I use these techniques when sketching the image. I use a mixture of odorless solvent and Galkyd Gel as the medium for my paintings. The ratio I follow is five parts solvent to one part Galkyd to achieve a fluid consistency with my pigments. This allows me to easily employ techniques like splattering and dripping that are typically only achievable with thin paints.

After establishing the general form, I added more depth to my painting using less medium. Working in grayscale allowed me to focus on texture and form without the distraction of color. I intentionally blurred the edges to achieve a softer look, as I prefer avoiding harsh lines in my artwork. The painting was completed over two to three days. Once fully dried, I added the gold slashes to the piece. While I typically do not apply varnish, I always oil out my works once they have dried to ensure a consistent finish. For the oil out process, I mix one part solvent with one part Galkyd to achieve a glossy finish.

Religious Symbolism

The parable shared by our adviser for a Catholic organization in high school has stuck with me ever since. It raised a thought-provoking question: “Why do sailors surrounded by water on the vast sea constantly feel thirsty?” We were able to delve deeper into the meaning by adding, “Fresh water is needed to quench their thirst.” The parable highlights the allegory of the impossibility of drinking salt water, symbolizing the insatiable longing for worldly things represented by the vast ocean. Consuming these material goods will never provide satisfaction, only leaving a person wanting more, increasing dissatisfaction that may even cause illness. It is essential to bring fresh water on the journey to survive. Fresh water not only quenches thirst but also cleanses bodies of impurities. The water that flowed from the side of Christ symbolizes this purification. It washes away sins and heals souls, demonstrating that only the word of God can satisfy spiritual needs.

The reason for creating my artwork, *Aqua Lateris Christi, Lava me*, conforms, as I intend, to the generally accepted understanding of religious symbolism. Symbols are representations of meanings beyond the perceptible objects utilized. In religious symbols, they are visual expressions of how the world is conceptualized, which serves as a medium and communicant of another world, i.e., of the imperceptible but conceivable transcendent realm.

Religious symbols are expressions of sacred meanings. Through symbols, the empirical experience becomes spiritual and manifested in visual form. Since religious symbols are visible objects, they are never detached from this world. This understanding forms bridges between the world and the sacred. As Mircea Eliade explains in his book, *The Sacred and the Profane*, “By manifesting the sacred, any object becomes something else, yet it continues to remain itself, for it continues to participate in the surrounding cosmic milieu” (1959, p. 12).

Pointing to the participation of religious symbols in the cosmic milieu, religious symbolism serves as a connection between the tangible human experiences in the world and the pursuit of “salvation.” Through religious symbols, existential aspects become apparent, portraying the limitations faced by humans in terms of biological, psychological, and societal needs. These symbols act as a bridge that transcends human limitations by mediating transcendence and serving as a means of transformation and stability in the world. In times of socio-political unrest, world conflicts, and various crises, the quest for salvation becomes more pronounced as individuals seek freedom from these challenges. In response to the complexities of human existence, religious symbols become significant reference points to the transcendent and the sacred.

Necessarily, the transcendent and the quest of such “freedom from” [to be saved] set boundaries, for the transcendent is the beyond—and to go beyond is to move from one condition to another. Religious symbols are not only bridges but also boundaries that positively point to the existence of “another beyond.” As Wittgenstein once remarked, “If we can draw a boundary, then something must exist on both sides of that boundary” (Lawhead, 2002, p. 513). Beyond imperfection lies perfection; beyond injustice lies justice; beyond chaos lies order; and beyond death lies eternal life. This reflects the belief that “there will be no more death or mourning or crying, for the old order has passed” (Rev. 21:4). Thus, religious symbols purposefully engage man in processes of inversion and transformation.

In the *Waterscape* exhibit, the intention is to convey reflections on the essence of water—its fluidity, tranquil qualities, and indispensable role in supporting life. My entry aims to create a piece with strong religious symbolism, depicting the suffering of Christ with water flowing from the wound on His side. The concept of “cleansing” from the water is associated with “inversion” and transformation, symbolizing a return to the original state of blessedness as described in the book of Genesis (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25).

Eliade pictures religious symbols as a lens through which “the world becomes transparent and is able to show the transcendent.” (1959, p. 130) Strikingly, he brings forward the significance of the transparent “water” in his metaphorical presentation of religious symbols as perceptive of creation and destruction – life and death, birth and re-birth, and, for my work, death and resurrection. In the processes of inversion and transformation, Eliade explains that immersion in water “signifies regression to the pre-formal...to a dissolution of forms” (1959, p. 130-131). In every transformation, there must be a movement from one state or condition to another—regarding religious symbols, from human conditions in this world to the sacred and transcendent.

Philosophical Implications of Humanism

In contemporary thought, what has become the “formal” that substituted the “pre-formal”? What must be immersed into the “water” to be cleansed so that the present forms may regress to the pre-formal?

The idea of a universe governed by physical laws has become mainstream—and no longer by divine providence. Governments and social arrangements no longer need to be organized around the idea of divine right to be legitimate but rather by the consent of the governed individuals. There is no longer a need for God as the source of all morality, value, or order in the universe. The increasing secularization of thought has led to, what may be said, the realization that “not only is God dead” but also that “human beings have killed Him” by shifting their faith solely to reason and science. Humans desire to better understand the world, articulate new moral and civic perspectives and values, and offer guidance through self-fulfilling faith—like now, men turning themselves into gods. As Nietzsche asserted: “God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed Him...Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?” (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 181)

With the “old form” (or pre-formal) meaning gone, a “new one” is created. Not having God means authoring and creating a new philosophical structure—new “forms” replacing the “pre-formal system” of truth, meaning, and moral values. However, in this setting, humanity also becomes vulnerable to ideologies and to those who trick people by gaining their trust, persuading them to believe something that is supposedly “true,” like promising to bring about what is even better than what “God used to do” for individuals and society. Surely, this comes with risks that can ignite the worst in human nature, putting humanity at risk of despair and meaninglessness. Loss of the “beyond” (transcendent) necessarily implies breaking the boundary lines, not in the sense that yonder is broken through, but in that this world is everything there is. The impact this will have on civilization can hardly be imagined—the unfathomable crisis in human history unfolding.

“The capacity to believe is the most significant and fundamental human faculty, and the most important thing about a man is what he believes in the depth of his being. This is the thing that makes him what he is; the things that organize and feed him; the thing that keeps him going in the face of untoward circumstances; the things that give him resistance and drive.” (Tigner, 1942, p.109). Simply, believing compels man to go beyond the very limiting conditions of life in this world. However, in modern humanism, its “beyond” remains in the realm of the worldliness—solutions are found in the affairs of the world for it is everything there is.

Amidst the humanists’ absolute appeal in determining the truth is to empirical facts and man’s verifiable experience through the aid of reason and science, the distinctions between the “sacred” and the “secular/profane” vanish. However, while the sacred disappears, humanism claims to retain the rich values of the human experience of the “pre-forms” as formerly associated with the sacred. The universe is self-existing and not created, disregarding all conceptions of a supernatural “God” and all forms of “divine design and governance.” Humanists are content and assured that the richness of human life and experiences is ultimately a matter of natural phenomena, likely that, alone in itself, “life is a local and episodic phenomenon in the cosmos at large.” (Burt, 1951, p. 341)

Man is viewed as a product of the creative forces of the universe in the natural order—nothing is above and beyond him. Claiming that humanists are gaining a new sense of human values, they are fixed on moving forward in the spirit of humanity’s progress, appropriating the instruments of science to build a more satisfactory life in this world. They aim at naturalizing the spiritual values of life and the material world humanized, improving human life and relationships, and uniting mankind on earth.

The promising impact of humanism, particularly in the creative processes aimed at improving life, is indeed impressive. However, it is important to recognize that this effort is motivated by something greater than the desire for material possessions or scientific advancements. It is motivated by a deeper understanding of man’s place in the natural order. Yet, if the idea of man being the pinnacle of the creative forces of the universe, with only his own aspirations above him, is considered, it is reasonable to question whether these aspirations originate solely from within man himself. In fact, man is influenced by forces external to himself, yet universal in presence. Meaning “the creative processes in the universe have produced self-conscious beings with a degree of intelligence and a drive to search for truth, beauty, and goodness.” (Titus, 1970, p. 218) This view suggests that the universe’s creative processes support and give purpose to humanity’s ideals and values.

Undeniably, a universal reality exists beyond human sensory experience, considered immaterial, and exists in the spiritual realm beyond time and space.

This cosmic and timeless essence is transcendental and objective yet immanent in the fabric of reality. It embodies the highest value as an intrinsic attribute of existence. The universe holds genuine meaning and purpose, sought after by humanity in the quest for truth, goodness, and beauty. These transcendentals are universal values that are not created but rather discovered. Truth, goodness, and beauty are essential elements that communicate meaning to the intelligent, moral, and aesthetic man. They drive human beliefs and actions, guiding individuals towards authentic human flourishing through the pursuit of knowledge, the desire for goodness, and the appreciation of beauty.

The enduring desire of humanity for the transcendentals is a yearning for the universe's ultimate source. As individuals seek truth, goodness, and beauty in this world, they ultimately seek God, as these values are the very essence of God himself. Unless man can get into the source, all his thirst will remain insatiable. As Jesus once said, "Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst, but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life." (John 4:14)

In mediating transcendence, religious symbols are drawn into the truth, into the realm of the cosmic values—the "transcendentals," revealing the unity of beauty to which we are attracted, of goodness which morally binds human relationships in harmony and order, and of the truth that transforms human experiences in relation to one another and to the sacred beyond. Recognition of the transcendence draws man away from himself into something larger than himself, pointing to something greater and more mysterious than himself— giving spiritual significance to man's limited knowledge as transcendence derives from the admission of man's finitude in self-determination.

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Developing a Visual Language: The Urban Environment and Its Inhabitants as a Resilient Organism Through Layers of Painted Wood Assemblaget

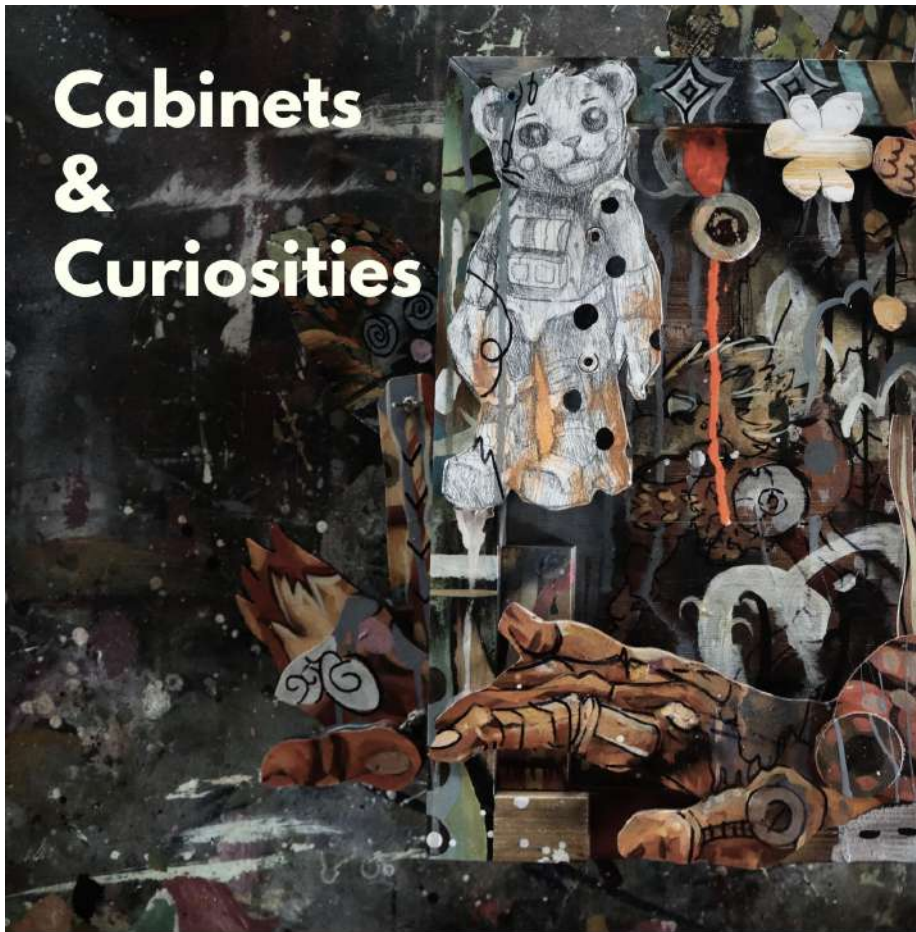
Rainer Ma. F. Cruz

Introduction

In this paper, I want to show my creative process in developing a personal visual language that depicts the city and its inhabitants as a singular, interconnected organism. My recent one-man exhibit, *Cabinets & Curiosities*, held at Vinyl on Vinyl, was inspired by the socio-ecological dynamics of an urban environment. My approach to Urban Ecology aims to illuminate the inherent solidarity within a community - further exemplified by its capacity to foster resilience during periods of adversity (Mukherjee, J. 2015).

Community resilience was investigated through the experiences of survivors following Typhoon Ondoy; positive attributes were exhibited by members of a community significantly impacted by the typhoon (Adviento, M. L. G. & de Guzman, J. M., 2010).

In depicting the city as a single organism, I begin with an inquiry into the socio-spatial context of my hometown, Las Piñas City. The creative process commences with observations of the visual and experiential elements that constitute the daily life (quotidian) of these urban environments. This initial stage is further enriched by a process of introspective analysis, drawing upon my personal experiences within these spaces. The collected observations and introspective insights are then transformed and synthesized into a cohesive artistic depiction of the city.



Rai Cruz

Solo Art Exhibit

VINYL ON VINYL

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Figure 1. *Cabinets & Curiosities*

To execute this synthesis, my artwork will juxtapose two distinct visual elements: the non-living or non-organic built structures and the living or organic inhabitants of the city. This deliberate juxtaposition aims to foster a deeper understanding of the dynamic interplay between these fundamental components of the urban environment.

I will employ wood assemblage as my primary artistic material and technique. This resonates profoundly with the conceptual underpinnings of the work. Dmitrievich (2022) highlights the versatility of assemblage in conveying complex narratives. In this context, the act of assembling disparate wooden elements into a cohesive artwork mirrors the interconnectedness and collaborative spirit inherent within a community. This material choice fosters a thematic bridge between the depicted urban environment and the notion of solidarity amongst its inhabitants.

As mentioned above, a component of developing my visual language is the non-living or non-organic structures of the city. My analysis focuses on the visual presentation of walls within the built environment, specifically those associated with commercial buildings and residential structures. The focus lies on the interplay of weathered paint textures, superimposed layers of vibrant street art imagery, and the diverse visual elements present in advertising materials.

The second component is my examination of the human element within the cityscape. It centers on the transient flow of commuters, the economic activity of street vendors, and the presence of non-human inhabitants like stray animals. Additionally, the unexpected resilience of plant life is evident in the presence of potted plants and vines thriving within the very cracks and crevices of the urban infrastructure.

My assemblage process employs a three-stage process. The initial phase involves the preparation of the component surfaces. This stage encompasses selecting and treating materials that will ultimately be incorporated into the artwork. The second phase focuses on applying paint and drawing directly onto these prepared surfaces. Here, a range of artistic techniques may be employed to imbue the individual elements with meaning and visual interest. Finally, the construction phase involves the composition and integration of the individual components into a cohesive assemblage.



Figure 2. *Plywood of varied thickness is mainly used as a material for the assemblage.*

The foundation of my surface preparation process lies in utilizing various wood types. However, plywood assumes the role of my primary material due to its confluence of practicality and thematic relevance. The affordability of plywood aligns with its prevalence in urban, low-cost construction projects, as documented by Seike et al. (2018). Similarly, Malaque III et al. (2015) highlight its frequent use in economical, incremental housing extensions. This material choice fosters a thematic connection with the subject matter of my work, further solidifying the dialogue between the artistic medium and the explored concepts.

As for the preparatory phase of building the assemblage, the wood undergoes a process of manipulation to achieve the desired shapes and dimensions. This stage commences with creating a preliminary chalk sketch directly on the wood surface. This initial outline serves as a guide for the subsequent cutting process, which uses various tools depending on the project's specific needs. Commonly employed tools include handsaws, jigsaws, bandsaws, circular saws, and scroll saws.

For wood elements with existing paint layers, a light sanding process using 120-grit sandpaper facilitates optimal adhesion for subsequent paint applications. This practice aligns with findings by Yuningsih et al. (2020), who emphasize the importance of surface preparation for successful paint adhesion.

The selection of cutting tools is further informed by the plywood's thickness. For plywood with a thickness of $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$ inch, tools such as circular saws, bandsaws, or jigsaws offer efficient cutting solutions. Conversely, intricate designs on thinner $\frac{1}{4}$ inch plywood are often best executed with a scroll saw, as evidenced by designs in the book of Spielman and Spielman (1986), who highlight the machine's suitability for such tasks.

For wood elements with existing paint layers, a light sanding process using 120-grit sandpaper facilitates optimal adhesion for subsequent paint applications. This practice aligns with findings by Yuningsih et al. (2020), who emphasize the importance of surface preparation for successful paint adhesion.



Figure 3. *Shaped wood with visible sketches.*

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Figure 4. *Using a scroll saw machine.*

Following the wood shaping phase, attention is directed toward surface preparation to optimize paint adhesion. This crucial step involves the application of a sanding sealer. The primary function of the sanding sealer lies in effectively sealing the wood's porous structure. This enhances the overall surface smoothness and fosters a more even and durable paint application, as Hiziroglu (2007) documented.

A key visual component in my assemblage process is capturing the visual essence of the city's non-organic structures. I focused on the layered imagery adorning these structures, characterized by a compelling interplay of non-representational shapes and figurative forms. These visual elements often coexist dynamically, reflecting the history and transitory nature of the urban environment.

To translate this visual complexity into my assemblage, I mirror the layering observed on city walls through a diverse application of painting media and techniques. Just as the built environment exhibits various types of paint accumulating over time, I utilize various artistic materials to create a sense of depth and history within my artworks. This approach fosters a deeper connection between the artwork and the physical spaces it references.



Figure 5. *An assemblage work on the early stages of painting.*

I introduced layers of acrylic and oil paint onto the prepared and shaped wooden surfaces. These applications are executed with deliberate variation in thickness and, at times, subjected to a sanding process. This multi-layered approach

emulates the natural stratification of weathered paint observed on the walls of urban structures (Miniotaite, 2010). In essence, the technique mirrors the passage of time and the environmental factors that contribute to the distinctive visual texture of aged urban surfaces.

I then proceed with techniques that use graphite, acrylic markers, and charcoal to create imagery reminiscent of scribbles and graffiti markings that adorn urban walls. This approach draws inspiration from the artist Jean-Michel Basquiat, whose oeuvre prominently featured glyph-like characters reminiscent of the street art movement (Kaushik, 2011). In essence, I utilize the raw energy and visual vocabulary of graffiti art to imbue my works with a sense of immediacy and dynamism.



Figure 6. *Stencils and aerosol spray cans were used in one of my assemblage works.*

In further enriching the composition, I incorporated stencils and aerosol spray paint. This technique, employing strategically sized stencils with the manipulation of spray paint cans, facilitates the layering of imagery onto the artwork. Using stencils and spray paint finds its roots within street art, which has become a well-established practice for creating bold and graphic elements (Jakob et al., 2008). By embracing this method, I introduced a distinct visual language that resonates with the raw energy and immediacy often associated with urban art forms.

Drawing further upon the visual vocabulary of the urban environment, my artwork features portraits and figurative elements. These are directly inspired by the imagery encountered on advertising materials and election posters that populate the streetscapes of modern cities (Seidman, 2008). This incorporation includes portraits reminiscent of wheat-paste posters, a ubiquitous element within the street art movement (Campbell, 2021).



Figure 7. *One of my works showing multiple layers of images.*

After painting each wood component, the assemblage process begins. This stage involves layering the pre-cut wooden elements to achieve the desired composition. A combination of fastening techniques is employed to ensure a secure and durable construction. Screws and brad nails are utilized for mechanical attachment, while wood glue provides additional reinforcement as an adhesive. This combined approach reflects common practices observed in Philippine house construction, as Malaque III et al. (2015) documented.

The assemblage process itself becomes an act of artistic commentary. This gesture underlines the notion of community and collaboration that is central to the artwork's message. The assembled wood elements, much like the inhabitants of a city, come together to form a cohesive and interdependent whole. The artwork undergoes further refinement through additional drawings and paintings. To ensure their permanence, a fixative spray is applied for elements employing dry media, such as graphite and charcoal. In preparation for the top sealing coat, the entire artwork, including the back panel, receives a coating of lacquer sanding sealer. This application serves a dual purpose: it provides a protective barrier against moisture damage, as documented by Hiziroglu (2007), and fosters a smoother surface for the final paint layers.

To finalize the artwork and enhance its longevity, a coat or two of polyurethane finish is applied via spray (Aristri et al., 2021). This final layer serves a two-fold purpose: it protects the artwork from environmental factors and potential minor scratches and unifies the sheen of the paint.

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This Is My Story, What's Yours: An Educator's Pedagogical Narrative of Documenting Cultural Treasures

Jose Manuel V. Garcia

Introduction

This paper is a collection of my experiences as a lecturer-facilitator for the Philippine Cultural Education Program (PCEP) of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA). I was tasked to teach Media-based Cultural Documentation in many parts of the archipelago, spanning seven summers from 2016 to 2023. Many of the experiences describe the various kinds of interaction among the student-scholars, most of whom are Department of Education (DepEd) K-12 teachers. These interactions are byproducts of the numerous pedagogical innovations I took risks to apply to make the learning experiences more dynamic. Looking back, I realize most of these innovations are quite unorthodox, yet they yield reactions and outcomes that are quite surprisingly positive and spontaneous. This created a dynamic that produced quality outputs that enjoy citations up to this day. Thus, I am humbled and excited to share these teachings and lifelong learning experiences with interested readers of this narrative – in the hope that future teachers, mentors, and practitioners may benefit from them.

To illustrate these pedagogies, I will focus particularly on the journey of documenting cultural treasures using the available multimedia technology.

This is my (multimedia) story.

Having been assigned to various parts of the country to spread a deeper appreciation and love for our own rich cultural heritage, I have noticed that the common denominator among all these engagements is that every class starts with palpable enthusiasm and ends with a contagious sense of duty. No matter how strong the regional flavor of a class makeup was, there was always a collective sense of nationalism.

My story also navigates not only pedagogical approaches that I have applied as I saw fit but also includes concrete self-assessment and realization. It shall also include recommendations based on success stories (and, at times, failures) and how I foresee the role of educators of this specific content in the so-called “new normal” and beyond COVID-19.

I purposely divided the narrative by subheadings not just to compartmentalize my flow of thoughts but also to emphasize the specific relevant learnings and realization at hand.

Media-based Cultural Documentation: An Overview and a Journey

Teaching cultural documentation as coursework is almost second nature to me. I have been dabbling in media productions for as long as I can remember, ranging from being a performer to being a heavily invested impresario. I had the good fortune of directing an award-winning video in the 1990s and have since directed live and recorded stage performances. Appearing in a television magazine show and interacting with stalwarts in various creative industries have exposed me to how powerful mass media could be in Filipino society. But what makes this teaching assignment challenging to me is how to channel my students’ familiarity with the many forms of media into a burning desire to use them to produce documentation that is both relevant and inspiring. Once this challenge is hurdled, the love affair with cultural documentation begins.

This is why I believe everything should start with what human nature dictates. Human beings are social creatures. Humans make stories about life and themselves. I sincerely believe that everyone loves to hear stories. And, most certainly, we Filipinos have lots of stories to say and hear. Also, it is always a good place to start our personal stories. Imagine starting an intellectual discourse with stories that we are most familiar with, stories that we heard in both our childhood and adulthood and effortlessly told everyone who wishes to hear them. Facing a class of about 30 people assures me of 30 stories. Thirty new stories, thirty day-to-day scenarios, thirty aspirations, and frustrations. A fantastic playground for facilitators of this pursuit.

This is how I designed CulEd 207 to start. We begin with a story we live to tell. Then, we choose the one that stands out among many others that we are excited to share with the rest of the world.

Urgency

I always begin serious discussions by raising the need to preserve our cultural heritage by focusing on the vanishing aspects of our local milieu. As I adhere to a reflective style of pedagogy, I encourage my scholars to think and reflect on their own way of life, background, and circumstances. The more parochial the story is, the more intimate. A sense of ownership further develops in them, which drives them to express their authentic narrative.

Soon, they realize that as time passes and technology improves, cultural treasures will vanish and, in most cases, be completely forgotten.

I remember coining the term “cultural warriors” in my early days as a lecturer in various speaking engagements all over the country and was pleasantly surprised that many colleagues and advocates of culture have also coined this term to their full advantage. Since then, we have seen “cultural warriors” prompting a battle cry inside and outside the classrooms and lecture halls. In this course work, each scholar is a cultural warrior with one issue, topic, or agenda that strikes a chord in their hearts with urgency.

A Six-Day Workshop Using Both Reflective and Integrative Pedagogies

With this burning desire in mind, documenting vanishing artifacts, practices, traditions, beliefs, or tangible cultural treasures becomes paramount to every scholar who undergoes this course. Each scholar is given the opportunity to collaborate with fellow scholars to create an output that expresses their goals and aspirations.

Given this documentation, course work and other courses in the program follow a one-full-week timetable; previous facilitators have designed to spread the weekdays into milestone accomplishments to ensure an effective learning curve, building the necessary skills to produce the required final output, and most importantly, to develop a deeper sense of purpose. This is how the days in the pursuit of media-based cultural documentation unfold.

Allow me to tag you along with my journey through the following six days.

Day One: Getting the Engines Started

I consider it an asset that we always start the class with a special interest. No one comes to day one with no expectations. Everyone looks forward to a new learning

experience. And the pressure for me has always been not to disappoint. However, presenting the main content is not enough. As an educator, I aim to make each student listen and learn, think, rethink, and ultimately ask questions. Questions as basic as “Why are we doing this in the first place?” I have always believed in that age-old saying that “Curiosity is the mother of motivation.”

Just like what any syllabus may dictate, the first day of classes will always be an introduction to the content. Like any teacher, I spell out an approved syllabus and then expound on specific learning outcomes, and if a facilitator is well prepared enough, he sets his classroom decorum and expectations with ease.

Engaging scholars in the world of media – specifically popular media – is not difficult. We all live with many different forms of media – from our radios to television, cinema, and now, streaming. Making them understand how we can use the tools of these forms of media to preserve a cultural treasure is an easy task – any passionate facilitator can do that. But it is making them realize the impact of media on society, which is another story. My approach in conducting this lesson is to empower them to think they can use any medium to promote their goals and agenda. In essence, as a facilitator, I allow them to rethink what they themselves could do if they had the power. The power to tell stories.



Figure 1. *As an educator, I aim to make each student listen and learn, think, rethink, and ultimately ask questions.*

The content I am talking about is not just my syllabus but students themselves. So, I began the class by asking them to introduce themselves by sharing their stories. Stories of their life. This method not only breaks the ice on the first day but also provides a golden opportunity to creatively insert parts of the content of

the lessons as I progress with the ice-breaking activity.

Call it more like a television talk show format where the host, like Boy Abunda or Oprah Winfrey, would talk to each participant. Since most of my students come from very different places from where I came from, engaging with their stories was my means of embracing their energies and local vibes. This method proves effective as they see me more like a party host than a lecturer. I instantly become more of a collaborator to work with and an ally in our common pursuit. With this newly found relationship, I am blessed to witness beautiful stories of life, families, struggles and frustrations, and pride in their cultural heritage.

As the day progresses with conversations about culture, media, and technology and how these three intersect with each other over the years, we, as human beings, are witnesses to the ever-changing and evolving cultural landscape of our homeland. Thus, there is an urgent need to preserve this landscape so that future generations will be aware of it and enjoy and embrace it. Hence, the desire to “document” is born.

In my class, “sharing” is my term for recitation. “Stories” is my term for lessons. And “documentation” is my term for “output.”

The cultural warrior begins his battle.

Day Two: The Pre-Prod

This day is the embodiment of the saying: Walk the Talk! Starting this day is like bringing the entire class to an imaginary Production House town hall meeting. I always tell the scholars to imagine being crew members of GMA 7’s Jessica Soho TV program, and they are tasked to roll down the stories to broadcast for the entire nation to watch. Isn’t that so empowering?

Brainstorming is key. It begins with a topic of choice for each member. Each becomes a storyteller sharing their backgrounds, day-to-day lives, scenarios, and milieu. Then, they agree to choose one that speaks volumes of urgency and relevance.

Equipped with minimal guidance on the basic dos and don’ts in production work, every scholar feels the excitement of a very important task. A burden to carry on their shoulders, a sense of pleasant duty to participate.

Documentaries are produced by corporate media giants such as ABS-CBN or CNN, but through this method, NCCA scholars can produce the same authentic content in just one full day.

By the day’s end, not only has each group drafted a working script for the actual shoot, but it also has achieved what could be an unthinkable accomplishment – to successfully assign roles and responsibilities to each member based on their respective skills, strengths, or resources.

This is indeed integrative pedagogy in action.

Day Three: There Is No Business Like Showbusiness

The most fun part of the entire coursework experience is getting your feet wet. Everyone becomes an actor/actress, a director, a cameraman, a soundman, a costume designer, a makeup artist, a lighting man, or even a production manager. With little to no experience, scholars can transform into these important characters to execute their roles in producing a documentary. Considering that time is limited, one day is usually allotted to shoot all sequences required to complete the work. Marching orders are to produce a documentary feature with a running time of not less than five minutes and not more than fifteen. However, some production work often exceeds this limit due to the richness of the content. As excitement and interest built up during the brainstorming, I witnessed how various groups have taken great lengths to achieve their ideal documentation.

In my Baguio city class in 2016, a group of scholars decided to return to their hometown, which took them almost twenty hours round trip by bus. These students insisted that to make the documentation authentic, they needed to return to where the story originated. They documented a peculiar type of rich cake famous in a remote village in Kalinga.



Figure 2. *Stressing the importance of preserving our rich cultural heritage in my Baguio city class in 2016.*

In some cases, certain groups are blessed with serendipity. In Calbayog, one group had a great fortune and good timing to document an ongoing fiesta three towns away. In Vigan, one group dared to explore a village in the northern part of the province to investigate an alleged peculiar practice of eating cats as a delicacy. However, after encountering potentially hostile resource people, they opted for a

less controversial topic about making local sweets called Tira Tira.

In my Cagayan De Oro stint in 2017, a group decided to do a quick roundtrip to the Agusan River to document the floating houses while the river had not totally dried up in the middle of summer – a feat that is remarkable considering none of them had an architectural background.

In Marinduque, a group of young teachers took on an adventure to go into a remote part of the island to document an abandoned Spanish period fortress, which locals fondly call Baluarte. A site that not many locals even know existed.

These are just a few of the dozens of exploits I have witnessed as a facilitator that I now consider treasures as they are testaments of how rich and diverse our culture is.

All magnificent images, all beautiful stories told. Forever documented and captured on video.

Day Four: The Post-Prod

Not everyone is cut out for post-production work – such as video and audio editing. I don't even espouse to teach them this. This is not part of my pedagogical approach. This is not a mass communication course nor a multimedia class. But what I warned them against is that this part of the production work is more laborious than the actual shoot. I presented them with alternatives, considering no one in the class was professionally trained to do post-prod work. There is always an easy way of handling this part of the job.

I did tap into everyone's proclivity to use everyday gadgets such as smartphones, laptops, or DSLR cameras. For those who are brave and techie enough, I informed them of the growing number of apps that make editing work a piece of cake -if one is just willing to learn. Based on my personal experiences over the past five years, hardly anyone volunteered to learn this app in such a short amount of time.

Fortunately, I have devised a group member selection system that enables every group to have someone tech-savvy enough to assume the role of editor. I found out much later that this led to many more scholars wanting to learn a new skill because of their exposure to this process if only more time and specialized training were offered. After a thorough and tiring day, only those who have the energy to continue a tech-heavy day have little participation in the actual shoot. Editors are already pre-selected, pre-anointed, and pre-assigned with this burden, so much so that they were not required to attend the shoot.

A clear division of labor comes naturally after the marching orders are given. Treating the expected output organically without any rigid, corporate-style expectation-setting instructions gives the group a sense of flexibility and freedom in executing their creative ideas.

I remember in one of the classes I conducted in 2023, one of the scholars, who I assume to be already in her 40s, asked me if she could ask her son, who I learned to be an award-winning student filmmaker, to help her with the documentary. “Absolutely!” I told her.

Allowing others to help, especially those with special technical skills, flows naturally if one is impassioned to produce significant output. Sometimes, frustrations and desperation trigger us to be intuitive problem solvers. It does not matter if one belonged to Generation X or if someone has absolutely had zero to limited digital know-how; I still made it clear that everyone can produce their own stories to tell the world. Today, one does not need high-tech equipment to produce a motion picture. Smartphones are enough.

Day Five: The Public Screening

The film festival begins.

All documentations are presented, viewed, and critiqued. And the best part is that the whole proceeding is open to the public. I encouraged each scholar to bring in friends, family, or people who have been part of their documentary.

In some universities, we use their auditoriums; in others, we just use a makeshift covered court for this activity. However, the audio-visual equipment set up is, the public viewing remains one of the most gratifying moments of my teaching life – seeing all the outputs unfold.

This is how it happens. Each group is allowed to introduce themselves and their roles before screening their documentary video. A short introduction to the material is required. The appointed director usually assumes this responsibility. After viewing, the entire cast and crew are again asked to go on stage, like in any film festival, and given the proper recognition they deserve.

Sometimes, a Q and A happens, especially when guests are present. Conversations arise when scholars explore how their materials could be used as instructional aides. Others are inspired to recommend a regular documentation effort in their respective schools with the proper budget and support.

The experience brings limitless potential in collaboration with other interested groups with similar advocacies. However, to me, the most noteworthy effect of this festival is the desire to bring this learning experience down to the level of their constituents. I sincerely believe today's younger generation is even more technically equipped to take on this endeavor of documenting through recorded motion pictures if only given the opportunity and support.

Day Six: And the best picture goes to...

And what better way to encapsulate a week-long learning experience and hard work than to reward everyone with proper and well-deserved recognition?

For most of the end-of-the-week culmination activities I have conducted for CulEd 207, the last day always becomes like a “festival.” Every single day of the course was geared towards this fiesta-like activity. It feels almost like a mandatory component of the course – a celebration after the end of a productive week.

Instead of grades, I give awards in a manner similar to award shows like the Oscars. Sometimes, when the opportunity arises, we invite critics to share their thoughts a-la-Manunuri. This assessment method is more open and spontaneous and seems accepted by most of my students. Constructive criticisms are treated like badges of accomplishment and honor for completing their goals.

A rubric may be drafted to help them understand how they are being assessed in every specific aspect of their documentation, but overall, the public and collective recognition of one’s work is enough to give each scholar a sense of accomplishment.

The fun part will always be when simulating an awards night ceremony, and I encourage every participant to dress up their best as if they are all celebrities. I want them to be proud of their accomplishments - as legitimate creators of documentary features. A feat that has been accomplished in so short a time with the crudest technical equipment accessible to them. At the end of the day, I always emphasize that the story’s authenticity is more important than glaring technical superiority.

Everyone goes home smiling, with a deeper sense of commitment to use what they have learned in spreading awareness and love of our culture to their own respective spheres of influence.

And for me, it is a case of a mission accomplished – and with a smile.

Cultural Documentation in the Time of COVID

As early as mid-March 2020, we at PCEP were at a crossroads to either continue or cancel the delivery of Media-based Cultural Documentation to the scholars of De La Salle University in Ozamis. There were doubts about whether the learning outcome would be achieved despite no face-to-face interaction. Much worry was felt about how, on a lockdown, a group could collaborate and execute production work peculiar to media-based cultural documentation output.

Even as early as January, I had already received my teaching load and was excited to immerse myself in another local culture. However, due to the pandemic, almost all plans had to be put on hold – this engagement included.

However, as weeks passed and coping mechanisms were shared by people in various respective industries, decision-makers in the NCCA and host De La Salle University Ozamis have agreed to proceed with CulEd 207 using available telecommunication and online platforms.

So, on April 27th of 2020, I formally opened my CulEd class with 30 plus scholars based mostly in Ozamis and nearby cities. And yes, it was fully online.

My first choice of platform is Facebook Live. We initially agreed to follow the conventional timetable of five to six daily sessions spread across one week. Because it was still early in the pandemic months, there were not many alternative options to use. Zoom was not yet fully secure. Google Classroom has not been introduced. Microsoft Teams was not free. So, Facebook was not only the most accessible, but it was also, by default, the only social media platform common to all scholars.

What transpired in this new experience is worth another story to tell. Imagine the tremendous effort on my part to get the content and learning outcomes across by talking to a computer monitor. Most old-school instructors would abhor the fact that you directly talk to a machine instead of warm and lively bodies. Scholars faced many challenges on their side in this new relationship. Intermittent and unreliable interconnectivity hampers their learning experiences. I clearly recall that one of the scholars had to excuse herself because she could not travel to a spot outside her house to catch a signal because of the lockdown.

As part of my adjustment as a facilitator, a method I used in relaying the lessons and explaining the required activity to my online scholars (in a lockdown) is relating every part of the syllabus to how it was conducted in the past in a traditional face-to-face setup. Then, I challenged them to think creatively about how best to conduct the activities given their own limitation. I certainly did not have the answers then and had to fish for ideas as we progressed. At that point, I think it was important to establish ways and means to allow the scholars to better appreciate the content and process. These are still as relevant and relatable as the traditional way of delivery in the past, even though we need to embrace changes due to this pandemic.

The biggest difference from how I conducted this summer is that all production phases (pre-, actual, and post-prod) must be stretched from one day to a week for each phase. Lecture hours are limited because of internet hours available, and class interaction is almost negligible. Synchronous sessions were limited to the delivery of instructions and quick updates. This timetable adjustment also meant that their final documentary could be submitted a month later.

While we were treading on new grounds, the adjustment we made proved to be successful. The equivalence of Days 5 and 6 of my conventional delivery was a Zoom meeting where each scholar/viewer shared the screen to play their documentaries – very much like a streaming service in the comforts of your own desks at home. What was absent was the celebratory moments, something that we will need to put on hold until mass gatherings are allowed again.

Speaking to scholars and getting their feedback revealed just as what I have observed with my previous face-to-face sessions from previous years, this batch has also expressed their strong sense of duty to continue preserving our cultural treasures through documentaries that are accessible to everyone.

Conversion Into Modules and Online Interaction

Realizing that COVID-19 was here to stay for an uncertain amount of time, there was a need to convert the entire program into blended or fully online delivery. Not all host universities may have the proper Learning Management Systems to support the program, so using alternative media platforms is either expensive to acquire or too inaccessible.

There was a call to reconfigure or recalibrate course content and delivery to make the program more efficient in the new normal. This involved a comprehensive review of the syllabi, resulting in full conversion into palatable modules. Cultural documentation was no exception.

As mentioned, I have successfully facilitated the course online from April to May 2020. Although the learning outcomes are pretty much unchanged, the delivery has been quite challenging. Many platforms were available, but it was not easy to choose one that everyone could easily embrace. By default, Facebook was and has always been the most preferred by all – until Zoom became more accessible.

What did I see next?

Looking back, this was what I saw next. As living our day-to-day life with the COVID-19 scenario was getting clearer by the day, one thing was now most certain: traditional class setup and teaching methods would be a thing of the past – especially for cultural documentation. Video and audio recording equipment improves quality and becomes more affordable; administering information will no longer be shaped by time factors or physical space. Sister Felicitas of St. Paul University College of Education once said that teachers are no longer needed in the classroom if their prime role is just to administer content. Yes, teachers can vanish in the classroom landscape if we only focus on knowledge-based learning. Students can get that from Google. However, what I espouse is that we focus on both critical thinking and skills-building pedagogies.

We have witnessed that even on the 2021 Emmy Awards night, the celebration was conducted fully online. Technology has taken over. Entertainment was still delivered without mass gatherings. Even without mass gatherings, viewing content will still be accessible through streaming and other social media platforms.

What does this prove? It only means to say that the way to survive is to be friends with technology. And in the world of education, technology should be used to advance and support new pedagogical models.

This coursework can still be conducted online, as successfully proven by the positive collective experiences of the scholars from Ozamiz. In a class of 36, they produced ten amazing documentaries that are now part of NCCA- PCEP's rich archive of cultural documentary shorts either on cloud, website, or traditional

hardware such as DVD, USB, or VCDs. These materials are potential instructional materials that are accessible not just for blended learning but also for fully online delivery.

And what do I see in the future for this cultural documentation coursework? I foresee a Netflix-type streaming service where all our documentary outputs are stored and viewed not only as a repository of cultural treasures but also as a depot of instructional materials that are easily accessible - whether there is a pandemic or not. An online and universal testament to our cultural warrior's dedication to preserve our rich culture and of how we perpetually attune ourselves to the improvements in our technology in media. Every participant who goes through media-based cultural documentation should aspire to contribute to a content library. Content that is fully accessible, usable for instructional purposes, and downloadable to spark conversation and cultural discourses.

So, this was my story – pre-pandemic and at the height of it. It is still unfolding and evolving as we speak. I am eager to see what technologies in media may come our way soon. But there is one thing that remains in my heart - it is that sense of duty to pass on to the generations to come, and there is an urgent need to document our rich cultural heritage before they vanish and be forgotten forever.

I end this personal narrative by addressing my colleagues in this endeavor by asking: “This has been my story; now begin yours!”

The end.

Postscript

Fast forward to 2024. This may be somewhat of a rehashed narrative written for a new audience post-pandemic. It would be interesting to note that despite the evolution of more sophisticated technology in media in the past several years, the heart and soul of cultural documentation remain. Time only makes our cultural treasures richer as they vanish even more quickly. Levels of interest in preserving our culture may differ, but there is no denying that cultural heritage will always be a viable content – for as long as we, as human beings, can still listen to a story.

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Women Solidarity sa Pelikulang *12 Weeks*

Katrina Ross A. Tan

May isang eksena sa kalagitnaan ng *12 Weeks* kung saan si Alice (Max Eigenmann), isang 40 anyos na babae na nagta-trabaho sa NGO, ay nagaayos ng mga damit pambata na bigay sa kanya ng kanyang nanay na si Grace (Bing Pimentel). Nasa loob siya ng kanyang kwarto, gabi, at tahimik ang eksena. Katatapos lang nilang mag-ina na maghapunan. Isa-isa niyang pinagmamasdan ang mga damit na dapat sana'y para sa kanya noong sya ay bata pa. Hindi na ito naipadala ni Grace noon habang siya ay namamasukan sa Hong Kong. Ilang saglit pa at tumunog ang kanyang alarm sa cellphone na nagpapaalala ng kanyang appointment para ipalaglag ang kanyang pinagbubuntis. Tinapik ni Alice ang kanyang cellphone upang tumigil ang alarm, hudyat ng pagbabago ng kanyang isip. Sa sumunod na eksena, ibinalita nya sa kaibigang si Lorna (Claudia Enriquez) na hindi sya nakarating sa appointment. Naisip niyang kaya rin niyang maging nanay.

Ang *12 Weeks* ay naka-sentro sa naratibo ni Alice at ang kanyang mga pinagdaanan sa kanyang pagbubuntis at paghahanda na maging isang ina. Binibigyang-pansin ni Anna Isabelle Matutina, ang direktor at manunulat, ang mga middle-aged women na hindi madalas pagtuunan ng pansin ng ibang mga pelikula. Karamihan kasi sa mga pelikulang popular ay tungkol sa mga love story ng mas nakababatang mga babae. Bagaman may halaga rin ang ganitong mga pelikula dahil naglalaman din naman sila ng mga diskurso tungkol sa pagkababae sa lipunang Pilipino, sa huli ay karaniwang napapaloob din ang babae sa patriyarkal na lohika ng lipunan; halimbawa nito ang dominanteng naratibo ng mga heteronormative na relasyon na mauuwi sa kasalan. Sa *12 Weeks*, malinaw ang pagsalungat ng naratibo ni Alice sa mga kahingian sa mga babae sa isang patriyarkal na lipunan.

Sa eksenang nailarawan sa itaas, maaaring sabihing ang *12 Weeks* ay nagpapakita ng esensyalistang pananaw na ang pagiging ina ang puno't dulo ng pagiging babae. Ngunit sa konteksto ng pelikula, ang desisyon ni Alice na ituloy ang pagbubuntis ay isang paraan na maibalik nya sa sarili ang kontrol sa kanyang katawan, kapalaran, at kinabukasan. Nang una niyang malaman ang pagbubuntis, gusto nyang ipalaglag ito. Hindi lamang dahil hiwalay na sila ng magiging tatay na si Ben (Vance Larena), isang lalaking walang permanenteng trabaho sa umpisa ng pelikula. Ito ay dahil wala siyang buong kontrol sa nangyari. Marahil sa isip niya'y kapag tinuloy niya ang pagbubuntis ay para lamang niyang sinusundan ang iskrip ng tadhana ng babae sa lipunan. Ang pagkonsulta niya sa isang abortion doctor na nirekomenda ng kanyang matalik na kaibigang si Lorna ay simbolo rin ng kanyang pag-angkin ng kontrol sa kanyang katawan at buhay. Hindi niya kinonsulta si Ben dito na naging karagdangang sanhi ng kanilang pagaaway.

Mukhang simple ang plot ng pelikula, pero nilamnan ni Matutina ang naratibo ng women solidarity. Una na rito ang pagkakaibigan nina Alice at Lorna. Suportado ni Lorna si Alice sa kanyang mga desisyon, pero hindi rin sya nangingiming pagsabihan ang kaibigan kapag ito'y nagmamatigas ang ulo. Katulad na lamang noong nagpupumilit si Alice bumiyahe pa-Mindanao habang may martial law dahil sa kakatapos lang na Marawi Siege. Dahil nasa unang trimester pa si Alice ay delikado ang pagbabyahe lalo na sa kanyang edad. Maging ang kanyang boss na si Gus (Nor Domingo) ay pinagbawalan din siya noong una. Ayaw pumayag ni Alice, marahil dahil na rin nanggaling ang atas sa isang lalaki. Nagbago na lamang ang kanyang isip ng paliwanagan siya ni Lorna.

Ang pangalawang naratibo ng women solidarity ay sa pagitan ni Alice at ng kanyang ina na matagal na napalayo sa kanya. Ang pagbubuntis ni Alice ay nagbukas ng oportunidad na mapalapit sila sa isa't-isa. Batid ni Grace ang pinagdadaan ng anak sa pagbubuntis. Ikinuwento rin nya kay Alice na minsan na rin nyang tinangkang ipalaglag siya noong pinagbubuntis niya nito. Walang ma-dramang reaksyon si Alice, siguro dahil pang-ilang beses na niyang narinig ito? Katulad ni Lorna, hinayaan ni Grace magdesisyon ang anak para sa sarili, ngunit siya bilang magiging lola ay gumagampan din sa kanyang tungkulin na bigyang giya si Alice sa kanyang pagdedesisyon.

Malaman ang performance ni Bing at Max sa kanilang mga eksena. Laging kasama ni Grace sa eksena si Alice na sumisimbolo sa pagbibigkis ng mga babae dahil sa magkaparehong danas. Kitang kita ito sa eksena sa kuwarte sa ospital sa dulo ng pelikula. Nakahiga si Alice matapos itong duguin. Dumating si Grace, tumabi kay Alice at yumakap sa anak. Bagaman kinayang mag-isa ni Alice na dalhin ang sarili sa emergency room ng ospital nang sya ay duguin, ipinakita ng eksena na may ginhawa sa presensya ng nagmamahal sa oras ng matinding kalungkutan.

Mahusay ring ginampanan ni Max Eigenman ang karakter ni Alice. Dinala niya ang pelikula mula umpisa hanggang huli, katuwang ang iba pang mga

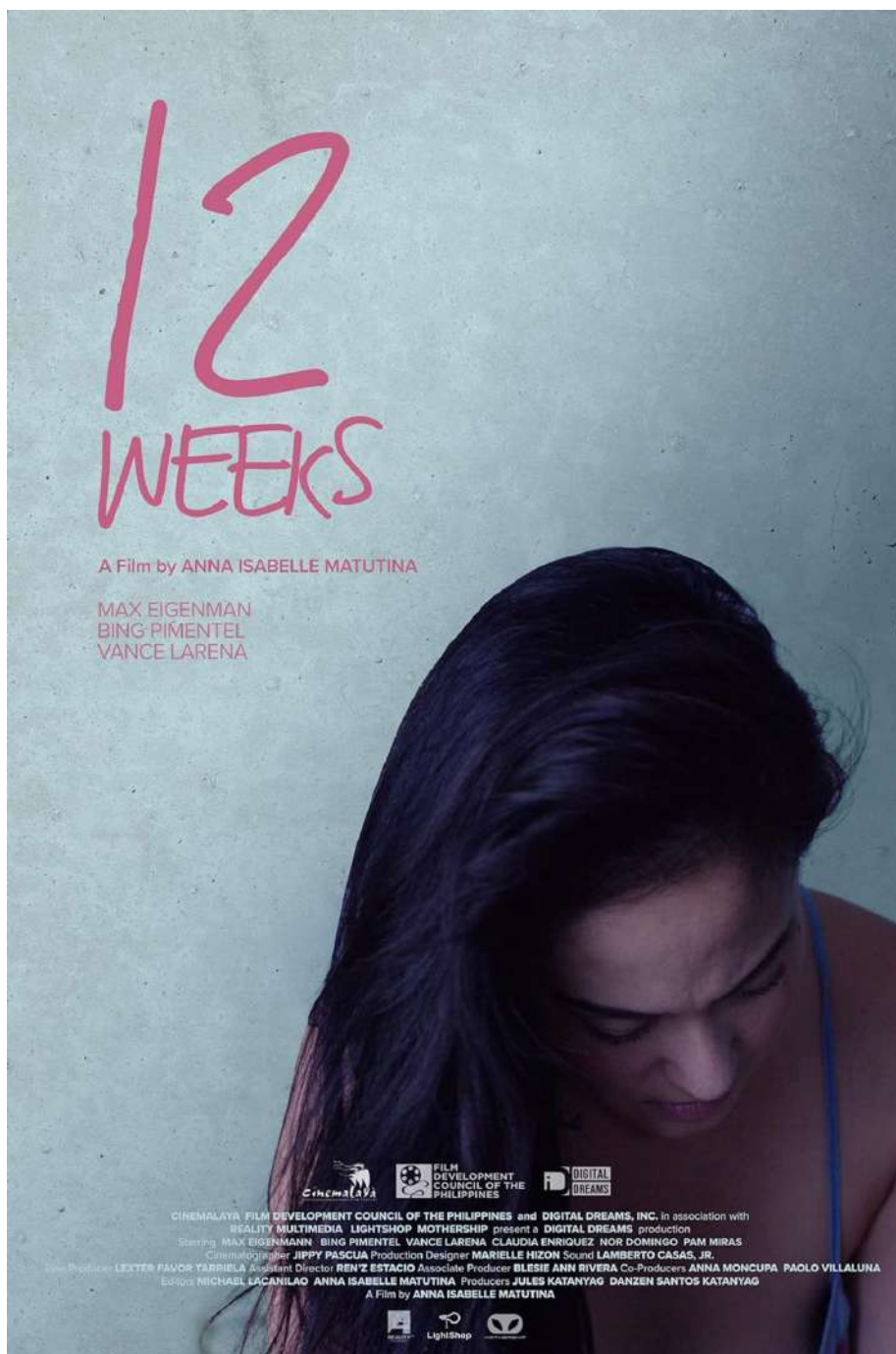


Figure 1. Si Max Eigenmann sa 12 Weeks (Matutina, 2022)

babaeng karakter sa pelikula: sina Lorna at Grace. Naipakita ni Max ang lalim at complexity ng emosyon ng isang babaeng may dinadalang mga problemang personal at propesyonal. Ramdam ng manonood ang inis at galit ni Alice, gayundin ang kanyang pag-aalala at pagmamahal sa kaibigan, maging sa kanyang ina kahit na ito ay pigil at may distansya. Ang paggamit ng realist aesthetics ay nagbigay din ng panibagong biswal na paglalahad ng naratibo ng kababaihan na kadalasa'y nakapaloob sa estetiko ng melodrama.

Sa dulo ng pelikula, may isang maikling eksena kung saan si Max ay nasa loob ng ospital. Sa background ay maririnig ang iyak ng sanggol. May tekstong “1977, Cotabato City” na nagpapahiwatig na ginagampanan ni Max ang papel ni Grace noong nanganak sya kay Alice. Maya-maya'y may Muslim na babaeng nag-abot ng sanggol kay Grace. Pinagmasdan nya ito. Walang tuwa sa kanyang pagtitig sa anak, kundi pagaalala. Marahil iniisip nya kung ano ang kinabukasang aabutan ng kanyang anak lalo na at ipinanganak ito noong 1977 sa ilalim ng batas militar ni Marcos at kung kailan sumiklab ang pagaalsa ng bagong buong MILF sa Mindanao dahil sa di pagtanggap sa kasunduang pangkapayapaan sa pagitan ng MNLF at gobyerno.

Kabaligtaran ang eksenang panganganak ni Grace sa sinundang eksena kung saan nakunan si Alice, pero ang dalawang eksena'y pinagdurugtong ng kasaysayan ng bansa. Parehong nasa ilalim ng batas militar ang bansa sa panahon ni Alice at ng kanyang ina, parehong may giyera. Ibig sabihin parehong nangingibabaw ang militaristikong lohika ng dahas at agresyon na ginagampanan ng mga kalalakihan. Nasa poder din ang mga tinaguriang “strongman” na mga presidente, si Marcos Sr. at Duterte, mga imahe ng machismo. Ang nangyayari sa bansang may giyera at pamamayani ng military culture ay mga malalaking pwersang balakid sa pag-usad ng pagsulong ng mga karapatan ng babae. Kung mas malinaw lang itong naihabi sa naratibo ng pelikula ay mas magiging epektibo at malakas ang posisyon ng pelikula tungkol dito. Ang nangyari ay mas natuon sa pakikibakang personal ni Alice ang naratibo. Mas napahusay pa sana kung naging kasing igting din ang representasyon ng pagiging humanitarian worker ni Alice. Karamihan ng eksena'y nangyayari sa gabi, pagkatapos ng trabaho ni Alice, at ito ay nagpapakita na ang tuon ng pelikula ay mas sa personal na buhay ni Alice. Ngunit, ayon sa ibang sektor katulad ng mga second wave feminists, ang personal ay pulitikal.

Gayundin, ang karakterisasyon ng mga kalalakihan sa pelikula ay mas maaaring dagdagan ng nuance upang mabalanse ang diskurso ng relasyon ng mga kasarian. Halimbawa, hindi lamang sila tumatayo bilang mga representasyon ng authority (boss ni Alice), katamaran at pagiging iresponsable (Ben), o di kaya nama'y mga tradisyonal na pananaw (kapitbahay). May lalim din sana ang kanilang mga karakter nang sa gayon ay mas tumingkad pang lalo ang karakter ni Alice. Sa teknikal na aspeto, isang maliit na puna at suhestiyon na mas pinuhin ang editing

upang maiwasan ang mga kamalian sa continuity. Halimbawa ay ang eksena lagpas sa isang oras kung saan umuwi si Alice galing sa trabaho at nadatnan si Ben sa bahay niya na naglalaro ng video games.

Sa kabuuan, mahalaga ang pelikulang *12 Weeks* sa pagpapayabong ng mga pelikulang gawa ng at para sa mga kababaihan. Naipapakita nito ang iba't-ibang lalim ng mga personal na pinagdadaanan ng mga middle-aged na kababaihan na hindi madalas naiku-kwento sa pelikula. Matagumpay ang proyekto ng direktor na ilahad sa pamamagitan ng kwento ni Alice ang kakaibang lakas ng damdamin ng babae (emotional strength) na kayanin ang mabibigat na karanasan sa ilalim ng patriyarkal na lipunan.

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The Artist as Forager of Material: A Review of Wawi Navarroza's *As Wild As They Come*

Sean Carballo

Wawi Navarroza is a lens-based artist with a collagist's heart. Alternating between two homes, Manila and Istanbul, she is a forager of material, gathering inspiration from a lineage of artists while burrowing deep into her innermost rhythms. In her playfully skewed photographs, we glimpse the marbled victims of Medusa's gaze, the commanding side-eye of Frida Kahlo, and even Balthus's Thérèse cooling down from the Manila heat. Flirting with a variety of personas, places, and histories, Navarroza's body of work emphasizes her role as both actor and director: she edits and assembles, poses and stares, and finetunes lighting and costume.

As Wild As We Come is Navarroza's latest solo exhibition with Silverlens Gallery Manila. Inspired by her relocation to Istanbul and the transformative experience of motherhood, the show testifies to Navarroza's desire to return to art amid all these changes. It asks that we meet Navarroza on her own terms: as a mother, migrant, artist, and technician.

A Showy Strangeness

Within these tableaux, Navarroza pursues a controlled kind of mess. In *Brave New World*, a birthday cake is embellished with gems-and is that a baby snake slithering underneath it? In another, *Todo Lo Que Tengo/Bottomless/Bereket (Self-Portrait with Vessels)*, a barefooted Navarroza sits poised while holding different vases, spliced in uneven fragments, drawing attention to its own construction.



Figure 1. Wawi Navarroza, *Brave New World*, 2022. Archival pigment ink on Hahnemühle Photo Lustre mounted on dibond. Artist frame with wooden mat board and glazed, colored frame (80 x 60 cm). Image courtesy of Silverlens Gallery.



Figure 2. Wawi Navarroza, *Todo Lo Que Tengo / Bottomless / Bereket* (Self-Portrait with Vessels), 2022. Archival pigment ink on Hahnemühle Photo Lustre mounted on dibond. Artist frame with wooden mat board and glazed, colored frame (135 x 101 cm/ 53 x 40 inches). Image courtesy of Silverlens Gallery.

In a previous interview with art historian and curator Roger Nelson, Navarroza said, “I retract and reveal in order to remind the viewer that photography is malleable and is very much a contemporary art medium to construct the image, to propose interstices, to break and tear.”

So, how do we encounter Navarroza’s world? In these new works, we are never quite sure where we are or how we got there in the first place. Instead, we are tasked with accounting for the sheer array of things. Our eyes hover over each tableau, mesmerized but restless. *Portals/Double Portrait* finds our subject in two guises. On the left side, she is draped in a bevy of colors, primed for a night out; to the right, she assumes a more conservative dress in uniform tones. A child sits on her lap. These two versions of Navarroza look at each other expressionless, separated by a drapery bearing flowers and fruits. Hard-boiled eggs form a loose grid on the floor.

These images, in their showy strangeness, exert a talismanic force as though you are just about to witness some ritual spell. Here, Navarroza uses self-portraiture to probe two roles – that of the free-spirited artist and the benevolent mother. But instead of choosing one over the other, Navarroza allows these two roles to coexist amid a cornucopia of images.

Embracing Life’s Mess

This tendency for maximalism seems to be the prevailing principle of the show, and it betrays an artist caught in a transitional moment in her career, basking in the complexity of unfixed identities, determined not to let anything resolve into a single notion. Previously, Navarroza’s self-portraits hinged on a specific concept (the tropical gothic, for instance), which brought her prismatic worldview into focus. But in *As Wild As We Come*, the artist sought refuge in the expansive but vague idea of wildness. From the show’s perspective, wildness can come to mean just about anything—from Eurocentric connotations of savagery to the enigmatic display of Filipino *horror vacui* to explorations of motherhood and female power. It tries to make space for all these interpretations, however unwieldy, but does so at the expense of a legible vision.

For instance, Navarroza tries to cram as many details as possible in *Mouth of Pearls/Oryental & Overseas*, which appears as a jumbled attempt to comment on the state of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). It’s a picture of excess that depicts Navarroza in a luxurious robe, holding up a mirror to look at herself as she clutches a pearl necklace with her mouth. A balikbayan box, a package usually filled with gifts and practical items brought home by returning OFWs, is used as a makeshift table holding up even more pearls.



Figure 3. Wawi Navarroza, *Portals/Double Portrait (Self-Portraits)*, 2022. Archival pigment ink on Hahnemühle Photo Lustre mounted on dibond. Artist frame with wooden mat board and glazed, colored frame (117 x 101 cm). Image courtesy of Silverlens Gallery.



Figure 4. Wawi Navarroza, *Mouth of Pearls/Oryental & Overseas* (Self-Portrait), 2022. Archival pigment ink on Hahnemühle Photo Lustre mounted on dibond. Artist frame with wooden mat board and glazed, colored frame (135 x 101 cm/53 x 40 inches). Image courtesy of Silverlens Gallery.

The Navarroza we find in this tableau is distanced, fixated on the mirror—perhaps trying to discern what lies beyond it and seeking a future of prosperity like so many OFWs. The work has the feel of an impenetrable fever dream, keeping us viewers at a remove.

Deconstructing the Muse

“For me, making self-portraits is a way of bravely asserting my own self-determination and representation as a woman, Asian, transnational [and more],” Navarroza remarked in an email exchange. She has also previously been open in sharing how artmaking has allowed her to unsettle Western and patriarchal conceptions of the gaze. This idea of the gaze traditionally positions the white male figure as the default perspective through which the world is experienced. By situating herself as both choreographer and muse, actor and editor, Navarroza puts forward a set of hyper-specific images that challenge this notion, revealing the exuberance of a woman coming to terms with herself. Beyond confronting the gaze’s traditional role in photography and portraiture, Navarroza has also spoken plainly about the struggles of working as an artist while dealing with the duty of being a new mother—particularly in light of expectations imposed by a productivity-obsessed culture.

In a world that often pits the two roles against each other, Navarroza wanted to resist that binary mindset actively: “I’m claiming that one is not mutually exclusive; it’s in a dynamic interplay now. It informs and strengthens the work. More than that, my self-portraits don’t just belong to me; they are for every woman who has innately in her heart of hearts to create.” The interplay of those two roles coming into contact undergirds many of the tableaus in *As Wild As We Come*, most explicitly seen in *Portals/Double Portrait*. The tension is also apparent, though more veiled, in *Todo Lo Que Tengo/Bottomless/Bereket*, which sees Navarroza holding vases and vessels layered on top of each other. Obviously Photoshopped, the work foregrounds the artificiality of that label of “woman as a vessel.”

With the artist also telling us that “Todo lo que tengo” in Spanish means “all that I have” and “Bereket” in Türkçe means “abundance, blessings, bounty, plenitude,” the work’s many titles call to mind regeneration and bounty, but also dislocation and alienation. Navarroza’s self-portraits, smothered in imagery and allusions, live in these states of confusion, where one meaning can easily be capsized by another.

A Detached Homecoming

By describing her latest show as a “homecoming exhibition,” Navarroza, who has spent some time away from the Philippines after moving to Turkey, also asks something deeper: what does it mean to return to creativity, and in effect, what does it mean to return to one’s source of power?

Her self-portraits can thus be read as attempts to interrogate a woman's many desires and complexities in the face of both internal and external difficulty—where the mishmash of daily life assumes a potential to unravel straightforward meanings. *As Wild As We Come* follows this vein of reclaiming power by avoiding logic and reasoning, albeit pushing that philosophy to its breaking point. Confusion and perplexity can no doubt be compelling, especially when these are directed with intention and specificity. However, Navarroza's show lacks such anchoring and suffers as a result. We are led to wonder to what end this grandeur and obfuscation are aimed at exactly, given all the heavy themes the show wants to tackle. As a result, we get a portrait of the artist as an indecisive figure, immersed in a world of her making, all the while obscuring any commitment to the wider world.

The show's sense of detachment is made even more palpable by Navarroza's facial expressions, which never rise above the air of what seems like rude boredom. *La Bruja II/Vagus (Self-Portrait Rebirthing the Self)*, an otherwise energetically detailed tableau, is dulled by Navarroza's blank posture; she looks like a model struggling to find the right angle.



Figure 5. Wawi Navarroza, *La Bruja II/Vagus (Self-Portrait Rebirthing the Self)*, 2022. Archival pigment ink on Hahnemühle Photo Lustre mounted on dibond. Artist frame with wooden mat board and glazed, colored frame (135 x 101 cm/53 x 40 inches). Image courtesy of Silverlens Gallery.

Homeing, alternatively captioned *Self-portrait of a New Mother*, is afflicted with the same issue, showcasing her hair wrapped up in a towel with the rest of her body cloaked in tropical imagery, such as palm trees and the sun. But her stare here is arctic, her sense of reality completely inaccessible to us.



Figure 6. Wawi Navarroza, *Homeing (Self-Portrait of a New Mother)*, 2022. Archival pigment ink on Hahnemühle Photo Lustre mounted on dibond. Artist frame with wooden mat board and glazed, colored frame (80 x 60 cm). Image courtesy of Silverlens Gallery.

Looking closely at these self-portraits for some time reveals their suffocating flatness. They are at first dazzling displays, chaotic and full of vigor, but this impression soon sours to the point that they fail to elicit any reaction at all. The sumptuousness of the textures becomes cloying, and the lustrous colors wash up into a muddle. One gets the strong impression that beneath the show's veneer of calculated busyness lies an indeterminacy at its core, that despite the urgent and overdue interventions Navarroza advances in her practice, the work itself does not quite live up to her maverick talent.

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