
FIELDS OF VISION
Critical Applications
in Recent Philippine Cinema

Joel David



Ateneo de Manila University Press

*To Prescy and Maria Prescy,
to Demetrio,
and to Jose's
Aristides, Gamaliel, Leonides, and Aaron*

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Preface

There is a sadness, romanticist but still inevitable, in offering up a body of work that one has carefully and tirelessly assembled but for the purpose of outgrowing it. I could also categorically maintain that these writings, although mostly subjected to pressures of deadlines, never took for granted that they are the only ones of their kind. Perhaps this helps explain why I wish there were more of them, not necessarily by me, and why I feel I could never be mean-spirited or cavalier in looking back at this phase of my film-reviewing career, as I once was while looking back on classical critical practice.

I have divided this anthology into three parts, and classified the essays under three main headings: "Panorama," "Viewpoints," and "Perspectives."

The essay that makes up the whole of part I, "Panorama," was ironically the last to be written. I had originally intended it to be the equivalent of a summing up for this volume. It would then have conformed to the historical chronology of structuralism, the last of the approaches that could still be regarded as modernist. Using this essay as an opener, however, serves an even better complex of purposes. It serves as a situation for Philippine cinema, as an explanation of my position regarding practices prevailing in Philippine film criticism at the time I wrote the essays, and as an exemplification of my belief that however patterns of development (intellectual and otherwise) may have evolved elsewhere, we ought to be able to insist upon a workable degree of autonomy in exploring our own formations. The dichotomy between classical Hollywood and European "art" models that serves as a premise here would also be less viable today even in the Philippines—an insight that surfaces elsewhere in some of my more film-specific reviews. What the essay contributes is a heretofore

untried consideration of the non- or anti-Hollywood influences in local cinema.

"Viewpoints," the second part, is divided into three sections. The first two, "Creations" and "Speculations," are on the traditional opposition between artistic and commercial endeavors, though another and currently more fashionable way of phrasing it would be to regard the first as tackling auteur-related issues and the second as concerned with spectatorship possibilities. These reviews got longer as I went along and my involvement in the releases became more intense—both instances of which did not always recommend them to otherwise review-friendly publications. Once comparative reviewing, or the reviewing of two films—an earlier practice of mine—became more popular among local writers, I tried stretching a little, as it were, intending to stop when I had reached the arbitrary figure of six films in one review. With the four-in-one maximum that I have managed so far, I realize that not only have I reached six in a sense (since one movie is a three-in-one package of shorts), I may also not have been able to give fair emphasis in the end because of the need to attend to too many titles under the same critical article. This even assumes that it would be possible to find a framework workable for such an equal-opportunity compilation. The last section under this part, "Positions," consists of reviews not of films but of film situations. One might want to read a structural progression in this section arrangement, from textual through spectatorial to contextual, or from a recognition of the author through her or his construction by the viewer to her or his absence, or from the formal through the psychological to the political. I would argue though that such insights were never part of a master agenda on my part, hence the prerogative I took in raising, say, auteurist or spectatorship questions in a contextual issue. In the end, I suggest that these pieces be taken on individual and autonomous terms first, the way that they were all originally intended, and that whatever paradigm emerges be regarded as the reader's gestalt that the author would be only too glad to share in.

"Perspectives," the canonizing projects found in the last part, proved to be too popular for my own comfort as film critic, with responses coming in from far and wide. I still have a letter from an Australian cable station asking me how they could avail of the "ten best" Filipino films for possible broadcast. A colleague accused me of "canon-forming during a time of canon-busting," then proceeded to enumerate his choice of ten best films. I mention this not so much to dem-

onstrate the contradictions in our appropriations of contemporary Western notions (Some local writers have even insisted that poststructuralist ideas are neither Western nor foreign the way structuralisms were). My concern begins rather with the irresistibility of such canonizing activities in the first place, drawn from the relief I felt after I had done each one of them. I could only venture the following speculative explanations. First, it may not be the time or place for full postmodernist commitment on our part. Second, too many official canonizing (mostly award-giving, but also punitive) bodies demand counterpart responses. Third, canons will never be final so long as works continue to be produced, but people need them, anyway as a form of shorthand criticism. Fourth, we may be simply and blissfully capable of nonchalance and masochism at the same time. Perhaps part of the appeal of any canonizing activity is the fact that it tends to generate large-scale responses even as it does not demand radically new ideas or methodologies. "Worth the While," for instance, draws from *Film Comment* editor Richard T. Jameson's annual "Moments Out of Time" feature; "Ten Best Filipino Films up to 1990" recalls a number of regular (most in/famously by the British magazine *Sight and Sound*), as well as one-shot survey projects; and "One-Shot Awards Ceremony" was just my way of pushing all these efforts to their logical as well as illogical extremes. I would like to point out, though, the now outmoded positivist skills that went into these enterprises, and I am entirely ready to admire attempts to outdo them on the same, if not better, terms. Meanwhile, here they stand, invoking hypothetically infinite levels of definitude and delirium, testaments to the inordinate pleasures I once derived in their undertaking.

I wish to list, at the end of this preface, the names of those to whom I owe thanks: Bienvenido Lumbera, Nicanor Tiongson, and Isagani Cruz; Ricardo Lee, Ishmael Bernal, and Nora Aunor; Ellen Paglinauan, Gigi Javier-Alfonso, Delia Barcelona, Lilia Quindoza-Santiago, Brenda Fajardo, Laura Samson, and the late Patricia Melendrez-Cruz; Ricky Lo, Thelma San Juan, Vanessa Ira, Ester Dipasupil, Iskho Lopez, and Eddie Pacheco; Mauro Feria Tumbocon, Jr., Joi Barrios, Glecly Atienza, and Teddie Co; Pete Lacaba, a critic's editor; Karina Bolasco, my first publisher, and Esther M. Pacheco, my current one; Bliss Lim, Roland Tolentino, and Chris Millado; Roger Hallas; and Theo Pie.

Two names also need to be mentioned: the late Lino Brocka, whose death has been imbricated in the text in the form of an afterword;

and the late Rene Requiastas, discussed as a living entity. These names remind us all that how, despite all possible assertions to the contrary, works like the present book would never be possible without the contributions of others. If the fullest measure of my gratitude has to be articulated, it would have to encompass all the names of those credited or not in this book or in the films I have ventured to discuss, who made possible the texts that in turn made possible this text.

The following articles were previously published in *National Midweek* according to the following chronology: "Carnival Cinema," 7 February 1990; "Long Flight" and "Shooting Crap," 4 April 1990; "Fleshmongering," 18 April 1990; "Ma(so?)chismo," 23 May 1990; "Firmament Occupation," 30 May 1990; "I.O.U." and "Men and Myths," 6 June 1990; "Head Held High," 20 June 1990; "Record-Breaking Blues," 27 June 1990; "Ten Best Filipino Films," 4 July 1990 (cover story); "Cool Film," 5 September 1990; "Mudslung," 19 September 1990; "Demachofication" and "Worth the While," 26 September 1990; "Film Critics Speak," 3 October 1990; "Classroom as Theater" and "Woman-Worthy," 17 October 1990; "Family Affairs" (retitled "Nothing Much About Ado"), 24 October 1990; "Movable Fists" and "Sedulously Cebuano," 28 November 1990; "Class Clamorers," 13 February 1991; "Great Philippine All-Time One-Shot Awards Ceremony," 20 February 1991; "Three Careers," 27 March 1991; "Asean Affair," 17 April 1991.

"Ten Best Filipino Films" was written in coordination with Melanie Joy C. Garduño, who also headed a survey team comprising Jesselyn Aldea, Jonathan Aligada, Andrea Angala, Concepcion Ante, Michael Antigua, Alejandro Atienza, Felisa Basco, Ely Buendia, Joseph de Guzman, Elaine Eleazar, Nolan Estacio, Raul Guerrero, Domingo Landicho, Jr., Gerard Legaspi, Jenina Limlengco, Rafael Lukban, Marjorie Neri, Lorenza Salcedo, Patricia Sim, Jennifer Tanseco, Cristina Uykim, Joanne Ybiernas, and Manolito Zafaralla, with Violeda Umali as consultant.

"Film Critics Speak" was intended as a situationer by the Young Critics Circle's Film Desk, then comprising Mike Feria, Patrick Flores, and Joel David.
