

# UNITAS

SPECIAL ISSUE ON FILM CRITICISM



UNITAS is an international online peer-reviewed open-access journal of advanced research in literature, culture, and society published bi-annually (May and November).

UNITAS is published by the University of Santo Tomas, Manila, Philippines, the oldest university in Asia. It is hosted by the Department of Literature, with its editorial address at the Office of the Scholar-in-Residence under the auspices of the Faculty of Arts and Letters. Hard copies are printed on demand or in a limited edition.

Copyright @ University of Santo Tomas

### Copyright

The authors keep the copyright of their work in the interest of advancing knowledge but if it is reprinted, they are expected to acknowledge its initial publication in UNITAS. Although downloading and printing of the articles are allowed, users are urged to contact UNITAS if reproduction is intended for non-individual and non-commercial purposes. Reproduction of copies for fair use, i.e., for instruction in schools, colleges and universities, is allowed as long as only the exact number of copies needed for class use is reproduced.

### History and Coverage

Established in July 1922, UNITAS is one of the oldest extant academic journals published by a university in the Philippines as well as in Asia. Still, UNITAS is perhaps the oldest extant academic journal of its kind in the Philippines and Asia in terms of expansive disciplinary coverage and diverse linguistic representation through the decades. While always cognizant of disciplinary specialization, it has been “multi-disciplinary” in publishing scholarship that is intra-disciplinary within the humanities and the arts, and interdisciplinary across the other disciplines. As it was in the beginning, it has aimed for “unitas” by conjoining disciplinary difference through its pages.

Moreover, it has been multi-linguistic on the whole, allowing itself to evolve from a journal published purely in Spanish, and then in English, becoming bilingual eventually in the various issues in which articles are written in Spanish and English, or

as has been the case in the last several decades, in English and Filipino. And, of late, **UNITAS** has also published articles in other languages.

Apart from its disciplinary inclusiveness and crossovers, in almost 100 years of its existence, **UNITAS** has expanded the conceptual terrain of academic and topical coverage. It has published on cutting-edge and time-honored themes in which both established and emerging voices in research and scholarship are heard in articles that range across traditions, modernities, movements, philosophies, themes, politics, geographies, histories, musical types, architectural styles, gender relations, sexualities, government and non-government institutions, educational philosophies, media, forms, genres, canons, pedagogies, literary and cultural relations, and comparative studies, among others, in book review essays, critical commentaries, scholarly papers, and monographs. Such an expansiveness has allowed for establishing new lines of inquiry or exploring new lines of thinking about old ones.

### **Editorial Policy**

**UNITAS** invites work of outstanding quality by scholars and researchers from a variety of disciplinary, intra-disciplinary, interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary principles, protocols and perspectives for its readership consisting primarily of academics, researchers, and graduate students, as well as of a diverse public consisting of scholars and leaders who are at the forefront of their fields and advocacies, undertaking research on multidisciplinary aspects of national and global issues within and beyond academia broadly from the perspective of but not limited to the human sciences.

In general, **UNITAS** aims to publish leading-edge and challenging articles and monographs in regular and special issues in relation to the critical currents and themes of the nation, the Asian region and the world which try to meet the various problems and opportunities of today's globalization.

Although single-authorship of articles remains typical, **UNITAS** encourages the submission of papers that are co-written by authors working across multi-cultural and multi-linguistic settings, which have resulted from an inter-cultural, inter-regional or inter-national collaboration of researchers in an effort to internationalize knowledge production, circulation and reception.

In particular, under the rubric of literary and cultural studies in Asia, **UNITAS** aims to be a platform for ethically engaged studies that represent intersections of national and international literatures, arts and cultures, crisscrossing critical and creative categories, authors and readers, "East" and "West," "North" and "South," text and

context, close readings and fieldwork, original works and translations, and theoretical and practical methodologies.

**UNITAS** welcomes submissions from all locations of the globe which are published in English, Philippine national and regional languages, and other foreign languages. Non-English language articles are required to submit an extended abstract in English containing the full argument rather than just a digest of the main idea.

Submissions to **UNITAS** are to follow the 8<sup>th</sup> edition of the MLA Style Manual. During the evaluation process, unless otherwise recommended by the double-blind peer reviewers to use a different documentation format, articles must be published following the MLA guidelines.

### **Ethical Policy**

Every submission is assumed to have not been previously published and is not under consideration elsewhere for possible publication, unless it is a major submission meant as a reprint, and later approved for publication as such.

Plagiarism is the copying of large blocks of texts of someone's work and representing them as one's own. If plagiarism is ascertained after publication, the article may be withdrawn or retracted. Self-plagiarism or duplication of passages without proper citation will be evaluated on a case-to-case basis.

After the protocols of peer review and editing, **UNITAS** may or may not ask the authors to review the article prior to publication due to constraints.

Securing the publishing rights of all photos, images, or charts accompanying the article is the responsibility of the author.

Articles have to be submitted via e-mail to [unitasust@gmail.com](mailto:unitasust@gmail.com)

Address all communications to:  
University of Santo Tomas Office of the Scholar-in-Residence/UNITAS Office,  
Faculty of Arts and Letters  
G/F, St. Raymund de Peñafort Building, España St., 1008, Manila, Philippines  
Telephone No: 406-1611 loc. 8830

UNITAS Logo by Francisco T. Reyes

Layout by Paolo Miguel G. Tiasas

# International Editorial Board

---



**Patricio Abinales**  
University of Hawaii at Manoa, US



**Syed Farid Alatas**  
National University of Singapore



**Jonathan Beller**  
Pratt Institute, US



**John D. Blanco**  
University of California, San Diego



**Melani Budianta**  
University of Indonesia



**Richard Chu**  
University of Massachusetts, US

# International Editorial Board

---



**Joel David**  
Inha University, South Korea



**Fabian Antonio M. Dayrit**  
Ateneo de Manila University



**Eduardo Deves-Valdes**  
Universidad Santiago de Chile



**Leonard Harris**  
Purdue University, US



**Caroline Sy Hau**  
Kyoto University, Japan



**Loren Kruger**  
University of Chicago, US

# International Editorial Board

---



**Bienvenido Lumbera**  
University of the Philippines



**Pawit Mahasarinand**  
Director, Bangkok Art and Culture Centre  
(BACC)



**Victor Merriman**  
Edge Hill University, UK



**Patrick A. Messerlin**  
Sciences Po, France



**Resil Mojares**  
University of San Carlos  
Cebu City, Philippines



**Mitsuya Mori**  
Seijo University, Japan

# International Editorial Board

---



**Tran Van Phuoc**  
Hue University, Vietnam



**E. San Juan, Jr.**  
University of the Philippines



**Stephen Shapiro**  
University of Warwick, UK



**Inseop Shin**  
Konkuk University, South Korea



**Brian Singleton**  
Trinity College Dublin, Ireland



**Nicanor G. Tiongson**  
University of the Philippines

# International Editorial Board

---



**Megan Thomas**  
University of California  
at Santa Cruz, US



**Lily Rose Tope**  
University of the Philippines



**Ruanni Tupas**  
National Institute of Education, Singapore



**Christa Wirth**  
Universität Zürich, Switzerland



**Paul Young**  
University of Exeter, UK



**Nie Zhenzhao**  
Zhejiang University, China

# Editorial Staff

Maria Luisa Torres Reyes  
maria.luisa.reyes@ust.edu.ph  
EDITOR IN CHIEF

Joyce L. Arriola  
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Maria Eloisa S. Perez  
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Nicole R. Tablizo  
MANAGING EDITOR

Vae Ann C. Dadia  
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

# Contents

- 1           **Film Criticism in the Philippines**  
Introduction to a Symposium  
          JOYCE L. ARRIOLA, JOEL DAVID
- 17           **Auteurs & Amateurs**  
Towards an Ethics of Film Criticism  
          JOEL DAVID
- 37           **Filipino Film Criticism**  
A Personal Testimony, in a Few Words  
          MAURO FERIA TUMBOCON JR.
- 42           **Lav Diaz's *Ebolusyon***  
A Rearrangement of a Troubled Landscape  
          MAURO FERIA TUMBOCON JR.
- 57           **Kung Paano Ako Natutong Bumasa ng Pelikula**  
          PAUL ALCOSEBA CASTILLO
- 60           **Ang Gabi ng *Baconaua***  
          PAUL ALCOSEBA CASTILLO
- 65           **How I Learned to Read a Film (TRANSLATION)**  
          PAUL ALCOSEBA CASTILLO
- 68           **The Night of *Baconaua* (TRANSLATION)**  
          PAUL ALCOSEBA CASTILLO
- 72           **State of My Opinion**  
          NOEL VERA



# Film Criticism in the Philippines

## Introduction to a Symposium

**Joyce L. Arriola**

University of Santo Tomas

---

**Joel David**

Inha University, Korea

### **Abstract**

The emergence in the Philippines of film commentary as critical practice is fairly recent, if we go by the evidence of book collections. Hence, the debates on the theory and application of filmic principles can also be dated to the 1970s, when the first organized organization of film critics began pondering the applicability of principles drawn from earlier art forms such as theater. A measure of the seriousness by which the audience held film as a popular-culture phenomenon is in the fact that once books on film criticism began appearing, they proliferated to the point of resulting in a glut of virtual volumes during the digital-media era, in the form of film blogs. This paper will look into the motives, causes, and tensions that underlay this condition, and provide speculations on further directions that this trend may take.

### **Keywords**

print publishing; internet blogging; reviews and criticism; Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino; Young Critics Circle; foreign trends

Philippine cinema originated as a direct contribution of the country's colonizing powers—i.e., it was introduced by the Spaniards during the eve of the revolution against Spanish rule, and popularized by the American government to assist in its propaganda campaign against the anti-imperialist Filipino rebel army. In both instances the independence fighters were either outwitted (Spain sold the colony to the US for \$23 million in the Treaty of Paris and staged a mock battle in Manila Bay to surrender to the American, rather than the Filipino, forces) or successfully suppressed. A relevant by-product of these political frustrations has been the still-continuing linguistic divisiveness in the country, wherein the constitutionally mandated languages are derided by nationalists as being either foreign (English and, until the 1986 “people-power” uprising, Spanish) or unrepresentative (formerly Manila-centered collaborationists’ Tagalog rather than the numerically superior Cebuano, and since 1986 the still Tagalog-based Filipino). Thus the emergence of cinema can be seen as representing these two sources of tension in national intellectual discourse: on the one hand, it has served as a cultural binding force—a national language, in effect—that has overridden the perhaps unresolvable issue of which among the orally and literarily available languages should take precedence in national applications; on the other hand, its technological nature serves as a clearer reminder than any traditional language can of the country's defeat in the face of foreign intrusions.

Philippine film criticism, like the country's film industry, has exhibited the tendency to emulate the model of the US, its primary colonizing power (other foreign power sources in the country would be Japan, in the economic sphere, and the Vatican State, in the religious sphere). Unlike local movie industry practitioners, however, Filipino film critics have demonstrated an ambivalence toward acknowledging the ascendancy of their models for practice, especially since the rise of the nationalist movement in response to the US's Cold War politics and Ferdinand Marcos's fascistic policies from the 1960s onward. Nevertheless, it is the position of this essay that trends in Philippine film criticism can be outlined according to the general developments of classic, modern, and poststructural schools of approaches in the

West. Both the “poetics of fracture” and metacritical method are ascribable to the project of deconstruction, but it would also be helpful to consider William Ray’s caution not to let go of historiographic significances, since “talking about ‘the past’ (can become) a perfectly ‘natural’ way to talk about ourselves; exposing the belief systems of a former age becomes a reasonable strategy for examining our own” (210). One possible (though definitely still deconstructible) means of providing a historical grounding for this type of metacriticism would be to place the critics under consideration within the context of the institutions with which they identified themselves—either as founders or as members. This resort to a structural approach may appear too rudimentary, but it has proved crucial to Philippine practice, as may become evident later.

Early film criticism, in the Philippines as in the US, was an outgrowth of an essentially journalistic imperative to provide newspaper readers with increasingly expert accounts of a recently opened film’s merits and/or weaknesses. In fact, decades after making declarations as to which productions were the best of their periods (or of all time, up to that point), the country’s most powerful newspaper group, the Manila Times Publishing Company, instituted the first-ever prizes for Philippine movies, the Maria Clara Film Awards,<sup>1</sup> in 1950. Two years later the Filipino Academy of Movie Arts and Sciences, or FAMAS, was organized to serve as a local award-giving counterpart of Hollywood’s Oscars; interestingly, the founding of the FAMAS was spearheaded and controlled not by the industry, but by the movie press, with the Maria Clara awards dissolved to seemingly give way to the more legitimate group (Lumbera, *Pelikula* 17-18). This would eventually lead to the current redundancy of having the FAMAS and, since 1982, the Film Academy of the Philippines, which actually comprises guilds within the industry, both dispensing annual trophies. Further proof of film commentators’ need to devise a structure for influence is the existence of other (sometimes overlapping) groups—another (apart from the FAMAS) for the movie press, one for television-based reviewers, one for the Catholic Church, two for local governments (through annual film festivals), and two for film critics.

The FAMAS can be regarded as the original organized purveyor of formalist sensibilities in Philippine cinema, with the period of its flourish coinciding with the rise in influence of New Criticism in the US and the Philippines. In fact, the very notion of handing out awards for excellence is itself reducible to the now-problematic issue of formalism—a subject that has had to be grappled with by the critics’ groups in their own awards announcements. Among the leading lights of the FAMAS (and its one-time chair) was the late T.D. Agcaoili, a fictionist, journalist, scenarist, director, and sometime movie teacher and censor; such an agglomeration of grave, even conflicting responsibilities can be traced to the practice of early film practitioners of covering as many fields of specialization as they can, owing to both the lack of trainees then as well as the need to compensate for financially unstable but still necessary functions. Agcaoili, however, became best known as a reviewer-critic, and was at one point considered for an Outstanding Achievement Award by a latter critics’ group, which in the end decided against handing him the prize because of his support for Marcos’s martial law-era cultural policies. Due perhaps to this multiplicity of responsibilities, Agcaoili was unable to venture beyond an unattributed echoing of classicist principles, with such pronouncements as “Proper composition of motion will normally guarantee sound static composition but it must be clearly understood that this will be due not to the direct application of the principles of graphic art, but to the more general canons of esthetics germane to good cinema” and “The film or cinema (and by this is understood the entire body of technique...) is a time-space art with a unique capacity for creating new temporal-spatial relationships, projecting them with the incontrovertible impact of reality” (134, 138).

### **Outside the Establishment**

Alternatives to the ensuing dominance of such ideas were consistently generated in academe, specifically the state-run University of the Philippines, which was founded by the US government during the early years of its occupation. At the forefront of this challenge to establishment-sanctioned aesthetics was the revitalized (pro-China rather than the earlier pro-Soviet)

Marxist movement, whose ideologue was a former UP student and teacher, Jose Ma. Sison. Using the nom de guerre Amado Guerrero, Sison maintained that the malaise suffered by the country was due to a combination of imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucrat capitalism, and that a revolutionary struggle must be waged on the peasant front, with the interests of all other forces including the proletariat and bourgeois intellectuals subordinate to this main task (276-86); because of his organizational activities in founding the Communist Party of the Philippines and linking up with the New People's Army and the National Democratic Front, Sison had to engage in his theorizing underground, on the run from then already emerging Marcos fascism. The so-called Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zhedong movement found aboveground expressions in student activism, as well as on the cultural front; interestingly, a simultaneous experiment in the libertarian lifting of film-censorship controls, which resulted in the proliferation of graphic sex movies, was imputed by Guillermo de Vega (who was later mysteriously assassinated) to Marcos's martial-rule game plan (see *Film and Freedom*).

Guerrero's anti-imperialist critique of Philippine culture was paralleled in the aboveground texts of Renato Constantino, who virtually dismissed Filipino films as "reflective of a Westernized society" (31).<sup>2</sup> A more extensive analysis was proffered by Bienvenido Lumbera, who was imprisoned during the early martial law years for alleged subversion. In proposing a revision of Philippine film history from a nationalist perspective (in "Problems in Philippine Film History," *Revaluation* 193-212), Lumbera was first to point out the exploitation of film as an adjunct of colonialism and its eventual acceptance by the masses as a primary medium of communication and entertainment; he posed the decline of the studio system during the 1960s (following the collapse in Hollywood during the '50s) as a threat in the production of quality projects, and heralded the founding of the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino, of which he was member and occasional chair, as a step toward assisting the practitioners of what he termed the new Philippine cinema. The MPP succeeded in breaking the stronghold of the corruption-ridden FAMAS by introducing the Urian awards, distancing itself from the earlier body by emphasizing both the thoroughness of its nomination and delib-

eration processes, and its modification of formalist criteria in social-realist terms thus:

In the case of two films which are equally well-made, the film with the more significant subject matter is to be preferred...

Accordingly, the content of a film is considered superior if it is a truthful portrayal of the human condition as perceived by the Filipino, and if it deals with the Filipino experience to which the greater number of moviegoers can relate. (qtd. in Tiongson "MPP Criteria" *Urian Anthology 1970-1979* 3)

The MPP for the most part provided a refuge of sorts for critics of various orientations and persuasions, including formalists who obviously felt that association with the FAMAS would affect their credibility; the most prolific among these was Isagani R. Cruz, who prescribed the three elements of technical excellence, literary value, and cinematic sense (3-10) as his criteria for dispensing ratings from zero to five stars. Lumbera, along with his UP-based colleagues Nicanor G. Tiongson and Petronilo Bn. Daroy, devised a proto-modernist means of approaching films as cultural products, with a then-pioneering consideration of spectatorial activity, first articulated in *Revaluation* and affirmed in *Re-Viewing Filipino Cinema*. This consisted of pinpointing elements shared between film genres and traditional theatrical forms, thus implicating the former with the outmodedness and backwardness of the latter (see Tiongson, *Urian Anthology 1970-1979* 94-137; R. Guerrero 83-108). The net result of such efforts was not so much the arrival at reader-response analyses, as in the rejection of what was merely popular, as the FAMAS did, with the additional benefit of replacing the FAMAS's bourgeois formalism with a more progressive canonical build-up. A dissenting opinion was expressed, still from within the UP and, for a time, the MPP circles, by Alice Guillermo, who described as problematic "the insistence [by Lumbera et al.] ... on the role of the theater, which may give one the mistaken impression that cinema is to be considered as an extension or development of the theater" (97).

The MPP would continue publishing decadal anthologies and would dominate the *Philippine Film* volume of the *Encyclopedia of Philippine Art*, all edited by Tiongson. A final category of MPP membership would be one comprising critics who have been considering questions of the applicability of cultural studies frameworks and practices in the Philippines. The more active among this group have found it necessary, for some reason or other, to break away from the MPP, with a number reorganizing and inviting other active practitioners to form an organization openly critical of the older group. Perhaps as befits those who venture onto multivalenced and even contradictory contemporary directions, the originally unified MPP and post-MPP renegades have also found themselves divided into two main argumentative camps, with the promise of further divisions in store for the future.

Emmanuel A. Reyes can be taken to have represented the MPP member who conducted his critical practice with contemporary, specifically structuralist, suppositions, within the limits imposed by the MPP's awards practice (winning in turn an Urian prize for one of his short films). Using David Bordwell's concept of the classical Hollywood narrative as a springboard, Reyes attempted to redefine Philippine films as reliant on a number of factors in relation to Hollywood practice: scenes rather than plots, overt rather than subtle representations, circumlocutory rather than economical dialog, and the centrality of the star rather than her or his performance (*Notes on Philippine Cinema* 15-25). Aside from the possibility that his grasp of Hollywood classicism may be challenged alongside his confusion with it of certain properties that more properly belong to the New American Cinema, Reyes winds up sounding not very different from Isagani R. Cruz where it matters most for local readers—i.e., in his reviews. Both individuals reduce their responses to either liking or disliking the product in question without offering up an inspection of their respective subjective positions, then justify their pronouncements by taking a quick opinionated rundown of elements apparently based on the MPP's awards categories—direction, screenplay, performances, cinematography, production design, editing, and sound and music. Such a methodology became the routine framework of a number of other MPP members who reviewed films on television, where they gave out

not just five-star-maximum ratings but also yearend awards that may be read as a means of lobbying for certain choices within the larger group. (Reyes subsequently published a second anthology, *Malikhaing Pelikula*, which included the screenplays of his films, *Dreaming Filipinos* and *Suwapings*, as well as an interview where he described the latter as an art film.) Reyes's mentor, Clodualdo del Mundo Jr., has published a scriptwriting manual and a collection of scripts, as did another former MPP member, Ricardo Lee; in addition, del Mundo, along with Shirley Lua as co-editor, came out recently with *Direk*, an auteurist evaluation of Filipino directors; this was in effect a more narrowly focused indie-specific study than Bibsy M. Carballo's *Film Directors Up Close*. An invaluable one-shot would be the project initiated by Agustin Sotto for the Cultural Center of the Philippines, titled *Unang Pagtingin sa Pelikulang Babbakan* and co-written with Zeus A. Salazar and Prospero Reyes Covar.

### The "Other" Critics

Qualitative improvements in the output of MPP-identified critics include a number of book-length studies by Rolando B. Tolentino on film (see *Contestable Nation-Space*, *Indie Cinema*, *Richard Gomez at ang Mito ng Pagkalalake*, the e-book *Vaginal Economy*, and the edited volume *Geopolitics of the Visible* and the co-edited *A Reader in Philippine Film*) as well as the personal anthology published by the newest member, Patrick F. Campos, titled *The End of National Cinema*. (A similar academe-based publication was a Festschrift in honor of the late Nicasio D. Cruz SJ, coedited by Tolentino with Serverino R. Sarmenta, titled *Movies that Matter*.) A historically urgent collection on Lino Brocka is the eponymously titled anthology edited by Mario A. Hernando. Among the members of the breakaway critics organization, the Young Critics Circle, only Patrick D. Flores has been able so far to publish a personal collection of reviews and criticism in the now-rare *Sites of Review*. (Flores is also preparing a second such volume, after several books on art criticism.) The other YCC members have been able to publish in-depth studies on such related topics as female stardom (Cesar D. Orsal's *Movie Queen*), digital filmmaking (Eloisa May Hernandez's *Digital Cinema*

in the Philippines), and Imelda Marcos's cultural aspirations (Gerard Lico's *Edifice Complex*), all more salient works than Tiongson's old-line auteurist *The Cinema of Manuel Conde*.<sup>3</sup> In terms of anthologies of critical output, the YCC also has its MPP-counterpart publications—*Sampung Taóng Sine* and *Sining ng Sineng Filipino*.

A logical consequence of this flurry of film-book anthologizing is an increase in the publications of non-affiliated members: Joel David<sup>4</sup> and Alice Guillermo were no longer with the MPP when their volumes appeared. Other notable authors of books of film criticism were foreign-based Mel Tobias, with *One Hundred Acclaimed Tagalog Movies*; Johven Velasco, whose *Huwaran/Hulmahan Atbp.* came out posthumously; Jessica Zafra, whose compilations of her articles included one on cinema titled *Twisted Flicks*; and Richard Bolisay, the most recently published author, with *Break It to Me Gently*, an anthology of mostly blog posts. Like the MPP and YCC, Tolentino, David, Vera, and Bolisay all maintain internet blogs devoted primarily to film and film commentary. In fact, it is on the internet where film commentary has proliferated: among blogs that feature a collective of authors are *Cinetactic*, *Film Police Reviews*, *New Durian Cinema*, with other blogs such as *Cinema Bravo*, *Cinephiles!*, and *Philippine Cinema Forum* migrating to *Facebook*. In the present collection, Jeffrey Deyto, whose essay precedes the collection of personal statements, also has a blog of his own, titled *Missing Codec*. Former MPP member and YCC founding chair and current director of the San Francisco-based Filipino Arts & Cinema International's annual film festival, Mauro Feria Tumbocon Jr., contributed his vision for Filipino film criticism (subtitled "A Personal Testimony"); Paul Alcosoba Castillo, who runs the *Kung Sine Sine Lang (With Only Film)* blog, delineated how he learned how to read movies; Noel Vera, whose *Critic after Dark*, like Tobias's volume, was foreign-published, explained his approach by answering interview questions to himself; provided Libay Linsangan Cantor, known for the long-running *Takilya ni Leafless (Leafless's Box-Office)*, advocated for her concept of the intersectional reviewer; and last, but also possibly a first in Philippine journal publishing, Ricardo Espino Lopez explains, in his trademark queer lingo, how he became the *Knee-Jerk Critic* of his blog.

The importance of blog coverage cannot be demeaned, contrary to an MPP official's contention (posted on his film blog, ironically) that film bloggers cannot be counted as qualified film commentators. The variance in writing competence and analytical ability veers wildly, from embarrassingly unformed (or excessively informed by ideological convention)—qualities for which print editors could have served to upgrade or reject; to adequately accomplished, at least enough to confute the aforementioned MPP official's assertion. The function of blogs has been superseded by social networks led by *Facebook*: where once one had to check several critics' blog updates, the combination of website options and socnet algorithms enable these individuals' postings to appear on one's wall. Blogs and their *Facebook* counterparts, in fact, have virtually overtaken the several specialized publications, including those devoted to cataloguing releases, publishing fan appreciations, and espousing specific causes. The overload of information has led to what new-media describe as a numbing of netizens' responses to new output and a complacency in the seeming (though essentially false) permanence of digital material.

One, admittedly more optimistic, way of viewing this diversification of critical efforts centered on Philippine film discourse would be the recognition of the absence of a common political incentive—which in the past was provided by the call to resist the repressiveness of the Marcos militarist and pro-foreign-interventionist machinery. By reconsidering the dynamics of the current situation, certain priorities could be agreed upon, starting perhaps with the indifference of the post-Marcos dispensations toward culture (especially popular forms), as well as the return of a democracy-threatening form of moralism in the guise of religious fundamentalist dogmatism in political dialogs. The greater nationalist challenge—that of coping with the effort of reversing the trend of underdevelopment, along with the latter's consequential furtherance of social repressions and inequalities—suggests itself as a forthcoming and all-but-overwhelming project that promises to tax all practitioners, including critics, of Philippine popular culture in their accountability to their country's crisis-ridden history. For the meantime, we provide the following symposium-styled collection: a number of critical

position statements—by Mauro Feria Tumbocon Jr., Paul Alcosoba Castillo, Libay Linsangan Cantor, and Ricardo Espino Lopez—introduced by critical studies by Joel David and by Jeffrey Deyto. A seemingly random project wound up with a wide variety of not just approaches but also voices. Such is the vibrancy and variety of Philippine film criticism, regardless of what establishment authorities might believe.

## Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Patrick Flores, Jerrick Josue David, Jim Paranal, Deogracias Antazo, Erick Frago, Victor Velasco, Monchito Nocon, Rolando T. Inocencio, Adriana Agcaoili, Martin F. Manalansan IV, Sari Dalena, Janus Nolasco, Marra Lanot, Mitch Valdes, and Lem Garcellano for participating in a crowdsourced query on available books on Philippine film criticism. A previously unexpanded version of this article came out as “Ideas on Philippine Film: A Critical Survey,” in Joel David’s *Wages of Cinema* (U of the Philippines P, 1998, pp. 92-101).

## Notes

1. Maria Clara is the name of the frail and ultimately tragic romantic interest of the lead character in Jose Rizal's novel, *Noli Me Tangere*; Rizal was declared the national hero by the American colonial government because he opposed Spain (and was martyred in the process) and pressed for reform rather than independence. For a long time historians believed that the first Philippine films were two simultaneous rival projects on Rizal's life, both produced by Americans during the late 1900s. This was superseded by the contestable discovery during the '80s that foreign films (or possibly prototypes thereof) were first exhibited in 1896 and produced (with still-existing paper prints in some cases) in 1897 by a Spaniard, Antonio Ramos (de Pedro 26-27). Perhaps inevitably, movies based on Rizal's life or his fiction dominated the Maria Clara prizes.
2. Joel David would like to acknowledge Patrick D. Flores, for drawing his attention to this little-known fact via a report in a 1990 seminar on Philippine art and society under Brenda V. Fajardo. The review of the literature of local film criticism in this article also takes off from the structure of the aforementioned paper, the only copy of which was lost in the fire that razed the UP Diliman Faculty Center in 2016.
3. Extended studies by individuals unaffiliated with the critics' organizations have also been coming out, including texts written by Filipinos in US academe. Further auteur-oriented collections have also recently been published by film festivals (specifically, Busan and Jeonju) in Korea.
4. As coauthors of the present article, Arriola's and David's books will not be mentioned as part of the narrative of film-book publishing. Arriola's published text and forthcoming title are mentioned in the author's bionote, while David's out-of-print ones are on his blog, *Ámauteurish!*

## Works Cited

- Agcaoili, T.D. "Movies." In *Philippine Mass Media in Perspective*, edited by Gloria D. Feliciano and Crispulo J. Icban Jr., Capitol, 1967, pp. 133-61.
- Bolisay, Richard. *Break It to Me Gently: Essays on Filipino Film*. Everything's Fine, 2019.
- Campos, Patrick F. *The End of National Cinema: Filipino Film at the Turn of the Century*. U of the Philippines P, 2016.
- Carballo, Bibsy M. *Filipino Directors Up Close: The Golden Ages of Philippine Cinema, 1950-2010*. Anvil Publishing, 2010.
- Constantino, Renato. *Synthetic Culture and Development*. Foundation for Nationalist Studies, 1985.
- Cruz, Isagani R. *Movie Times*. National Book Store, 1984.
- De Pedro, Ernie A. "Overview of Philippine Cinema." *Filipino Film Review*, vol. 1, no. 4, October-December 1983, pp. 26-27.
- De Vega, Guillermo. *Film and Freedom: Movie Censorship in the Philippines*. De Vega, 1975.
- Del Mundo, Clodualdo Jr., and Shirley Lua, editors. *Direk: Essays on Filipino Filmmakers*. Critical Voices series, Sussex Academic Press, 2019.
- Flores, Patrick D. *Sites of Review: Critical Practice in Media*. Oraciones, 1996.
- Guerrero, Amado [Jose Maria Sison]. *Philippine Society and Revolution*. 1970. Ta Kung Pao, 1971.
- Guerrero, Rafael Ma., editor. *Readings in Philippine Cinema*. Experimental Cinema of the Philippines, 1983.
- Guillermo, Alice G. *Images of Change: Essays and Reviews*. Kalikasan, 1988.
- Hernandez, Eloisa May P. *Digital Cinema in the Philippines, 1999-2009*. U of the Philippines P, 2014.
- Hernando, Mario A., editor. *Lino Brocka: The Artist and His Times*. Sentrong Pangkultura ng Pilipinas, 1993.
- Lico, Gerard. *Edifice Complex: Power, Myth, and Marcos State Architecture*. Ateneo de Manila UP, 2003.
- Lumbera, Bienvenido. *Pelikula: An Essay on Philippine Film*. Tuklas Sining monograph, Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1989.
- . *Revaluation: Essays on Philippine Literature, Cinema and Popular Culture*. Index, 1984.
- . *Re-Viewing Filipino Cinema*. Anvil, 2011.
- "MPP [Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino] Criteria for Film Evaluation." Tiongson 3.
- Orsal, Cesar D. *Movie Queen: Pagbuo ng Mito at Kapangyarihang Kultural ng Babae sa Lipunan (Formation of the Myth and Cultural Dominance of Women in Society)*. New Day Publishers, 2007.

- Ray, William. *Literary Meaning: From Phenomenology to Deconstruction*. Blackwell, 1984.
- Reyes, Emmanuel A. *Notes on Philippine Cinema*. De La Salle UP, 1989.
- . *Malikhaing Pelikula: Mga Sanaysay Tungkol sa Pelikulang Pilipino (Creative Film: Essays on Philippine Cinema)*. Media Plus, 1996.
- (director & scriptwriter). *Dreaming Filipinos*. Manny Reyes Productions, 1991.
- (director & scriptwriter). *Suwapings (The Laughing Barrio)*. Safari Films, 1994.
- Salazar, Zeus A., Agustin Sotto, and Prospero Reyes Covar. *Unang Pagtingin sa Pelikulang Bakkaban: Tatlong Sanaysay (A First Glimpse at the Fight Film: Three Essays)*. Sentrong Pangkultura ng Pilipinas, 1989.
- Sarmenta, Serverino R., and Nicasio D. Cruz. *Movies that Matter: A Festschrift in Honor of Nicasio D. Cruz SJ*. Office of Research and Publications, Loyola Schools, Ateneo de Manila U, 2008.
- Tiongson, Nicanor G. *The Cinema of Manuel Conde*. U of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2008.
- , editor. *Philippine Film*. Vol. 8 of *CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art*. Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1994.
- , editor. *The Urian Anthology 1970-1979*. Morato, 1983.
- , editor. *The Urian Anthology 1980-1989*. Antonio P. Tuviera, 2001.
- , editor. *The Urian Anthology 1990-1999*. U of the Philippines P, 2010.
- , editor. *The Urian Anthology 2000-2009: The Rise of the Philippine New Wave Indie Film*. U of the Philippines P, 2013.
- Tobias, Mel. *One Hundred Acclaimed Tagalog Movies: Sineng Mundo (Film World)*. Peanut Butter Publishing, 1998.
- Tolentino, Rolando B. *Contestable Nation-Space: Cinema, Cultural Politics, and Transnationalism in the Marcos-Brocka Philippines*. U of the Philippines P, 2014.
- . *Indie Cinema at mga Sanaysay sa Topograpiya ng Pelikula ng Filipinas (Indie Cinema and Essays on the Topography of Philippine Cinema)*. UST, 2016.
- . *Richard Gomez at ang Mito ng Pagkalalake, Sharon Cuneta at ang Perpetwal na Birhen at Iba Pang Sanaysay ukol sa Bida sa Pelikula Bilang Kultural na Texto (Richard Gomez and the Myth of Masculinity, Sharon Cuneta and the Perpetual Virgin and Other Essays about Movie Stars as Cultural Texts)*. Anvil, 2000.
- . *Vaginal Economy: Cinema and Sexuality in the Post-Marcos, Post-Brocka Philippines*. Duke UP, 2011.
- , editor. *Geopolitics of the Visible: Essays on Philippine Film Cultures*. Ateneo de Manila UP, 2000.
- , Jonathan Chua, and Rosario Cruz Lucero, editors. *A Reader in Philippine Film: History and Criticism (Essays in Honor of Nicanor G. Tiongson)*. Festschrift, U of the Philippines P, 2014.
- Velasco, Johven. *Huwaran/Hulmahan Atbp. (Model/Mold Etc.): The Film Writings of Johven Velasco*. Edited by Joel David, U of the Philippines P, 2009.

- Vera, Noel. *Critic after Dark: A Review of Philippine Cinema*. BigO Books, 2005.
- Young Critics Circle. *Sampung Taóng Sine (Ten Film Years): Philippine Cinema 1990-1999*. National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 2002.
- . *Sining ng Sineng Filipino (Art of the Filipino Film)*. Aklat Sanyata series, U of the Philippines Sentro ng Wikang Filipino, 2009.
- Zafra, Jessica. *Twisted Flicks*. Anvil Publishing, 2003.

## About the Authors

---



**JOYCE L. ARRIOLA** is a professor of literature and communication at the University of Santo Tomas where she is Program Lead for the graduate programs of Communication, Literature, and Creative Writing. Professor Arriola is currently Member of the Executive Council of the National Committee on Literary Arts of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, a Regular Member of the National Research Council of the Philippines (Division 11, Humanities), Auditor of the Philippines Communication Society, and one of the founding officers of Cultural, Literary, and Arts Studies Society Inc. Her first book on film adaptation, *Postmodern Filming of Literature: Sources, Contexts and Adaptations* (University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2006), won the National Book Award for Film/Film Criticism. Her second book, *Pelikulang Komiks: Toward a Theory of Filipino Film Adaptation* (University of the Philippines Press) has recently been published. In March 2019, Arriola was conferred a Distinctive Achievement in the Humanities by the National Research Council of the Philippines. <joycearriola@yahoo.com>



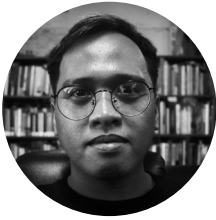
**LIBAY LINSANGAN CANTOR** is a two-time recipient of the Don Carlos Palanca Award for Literature for her short fiction in Filipino. She used to be a script-writer and director of children’s educational television shows in ABS-CBN and GMA. During her 8-year stint as an assistant professor in her alma mater, the University of the Philippines Film Institute, she received the Artist II title under the UP Arts Productivity System. She is the author of the *Media and Information Literacy* K-to-12 senior high school textbook of Vibal Publishing Inc. You can reach her at [libaylc@gmail.com](mailto:libaylc@gmail.com), listen to her podcast TitaTibx, see her IG [@mx\\_libay\\_linsangan\\_cantor](https://www.instagram.com/mx_libay_linsangan_cantor), or follow her FB author page [facebook.com/libaycantor](https://www.facebook.com/libaycantor). [<libaylc@gmail.com>](mailto:libaylc@gmail.com)



**PAUL ALCOSEBA CASTILLO** teaches Literature and Art Appreciation at the University of Santo Tomas where he is also a Resident Fellow of its Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies. He is the author of the poetry collections *Pananangan* (Librong Lira, 2016) and *Walang Iisang Salita* (UST Publishing House, 2018). He won first place for poetry in Filipino in the 2018 Palanca Awards, and has also received honors from the Talaang Ginto: Makata ng Taon, Maninging Miclat Poetry Awards, and Gawad USTetika. [<pow.castillo@gmail.com>](mailto:pow.castillo@gmail.com)



**JOEL DAVID** is a Professor of Cultural Studies at Inha University. He holds a PhD in Cinema Studies from New York University, where he started out as a Fulbright full grantee. He was founding Director of the University of the Philippines Film Institute, maintains an archival blog titled *Ámauteurish!*, and has written a number of books on Philippine cinema, including *Manila by Night: A Queer Film Classic* and *Millennial Traversals* (currently in print) and *Sine: 100+ Films that Celebrate Philippine Cinema* (with Jo-Ann Q. Maglipon, forthcoming). <joeldavid@inha.ac.kr>



**JEFFREY DEYTO** is a lecturer at the Far Eastern University and Polytechnic University of the Philippines. He is currently taking his Master of Arts in Media Studies (Film) at the University of the Philippines Film Institute. He's one of the founders of the media research collective, STRIKE II ([www.strk2.com](http://www.strk2.com)). He was a fellow at the Film Criticism Workshop organized by the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival and FFD Jogja. He's a contributor for *VCinema* ([www.vcinemashow.com](http://www.vcinemashow.com)), a website which focuses on currents in Asian Cinema. He has also directed a number of films over the past decade, which include *The Filipino Dream* and *Pixel Paranoia*. <jeffrey.deyto@gmail.com>



**RICARDO LOPEZ JR.** studied architecture at the Mapua Institute of Technology but chose writing as a profession. He started doing articles for magazines like *Metro*, *Miscellaneous*, and the *Philippines Graphic* before transferring to television, writing for shows like GMA's *RSVP*, *Startalk*, and *Starstruck*. He has also written stand-up comedy monologues for Nanette Inventor, Mitch Valdes, Leo Martinez, and Ai-ai de las Alas. He is currently a creative consultant and writer at GMA and publishes his own movie review blog, *The Knee-Jerk Critic* ([thekneejerkcritic.wordpress.com](http://thekneejerkcritic.wordpress.com)). <arlo0611@me.com>



**MAURO FERIA TUMBOCON JR.**, cultural worker and writer/journalist, has written extensively on Filipino cinema and popular culture for more than two decades, both in the US and in the Philippines. His critical essays on the works of Filipino filmmakers, notably Lav Diaz, and film genres like horror, have been published in film journals and book anthologies in Europe and Asia. He organized the first Filipino American film festival in San Francisco in 1993, the largest ever shown in the United States, and became founder and current director of Filipino Arts & Cinema, International (FACINE), a nonprofit media arts group that aims to promote and develop transnational Filipino cinemas. FACINE has continuously held the annual Filipino International Cine Festival for more than 25 years. He is also a member of the Asian Writers Institute, a California-based organization that advocates for the interests of Asian writers

and journalists, a cause that includes professionalism of the Asian American ethnic press. Tumbocon was a member of the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino (Filipino Film Critics Circle) in 1986-89 and founded the interdisciplinary critics groups, the Young Critics Circle in 1990 and Kritika in 1992. He was correspondent of the Filipino American newsweekly, the *Philippine News*, and was a fellow of the University of Southern California's Annenberg School of Journalism. He is currently a fellow of the Wildflowers Institute, a San Francisco-based organization that works on new concepts of community organizing, and a member of the Wildflowers Arts Council. He works in a nonprofit organization that provides social services to individuals who were formerly homeless in San Francisco. (Photo by Ben Villao). <mftworks@hotmail.com>



**NOEL VERA** worked as officer for the Bank of the Philippine Islands while writing film criticism for *Businessworld*, as night supervisor at an institution for at-risk youths. He has written for *Film Comment*, *Cahiers du Cinema España*, and *Rogue Magazine Philippine*, and translated Filipino films into English for international screenings. He published a book, titled *Critic after Dark: A Review of Philippine Cinema*, in 2005, and maintains a blog at [criticafterdark.blogspot.com/](http://criticafterdark.blogspot.com/). <noelbotevera@gmail.com>