

From the Preface to the Digital Edition:

If ever a publication could have made use of the then-unavailable open-review process, this would have been it. I'd wanted a long-form writing project that departed significantly from the earlier books and built up from mostly reviews in the first publication and mostly critiques in the second. On the other hand, Laura Samson, then director of the University of the Philippines Press (whom I'd known since my days as aspiring campus journalist), helped me conceptualize a volume that would raise recent concerns in film theorizing.... Whenever I decided to subsequently expand any of the materials here, I wound up confirming what I'd known from the beginning: that several of these pieces could stand improvement. Nevertheless the book still managed to score a few prizes and distinctions during its time.



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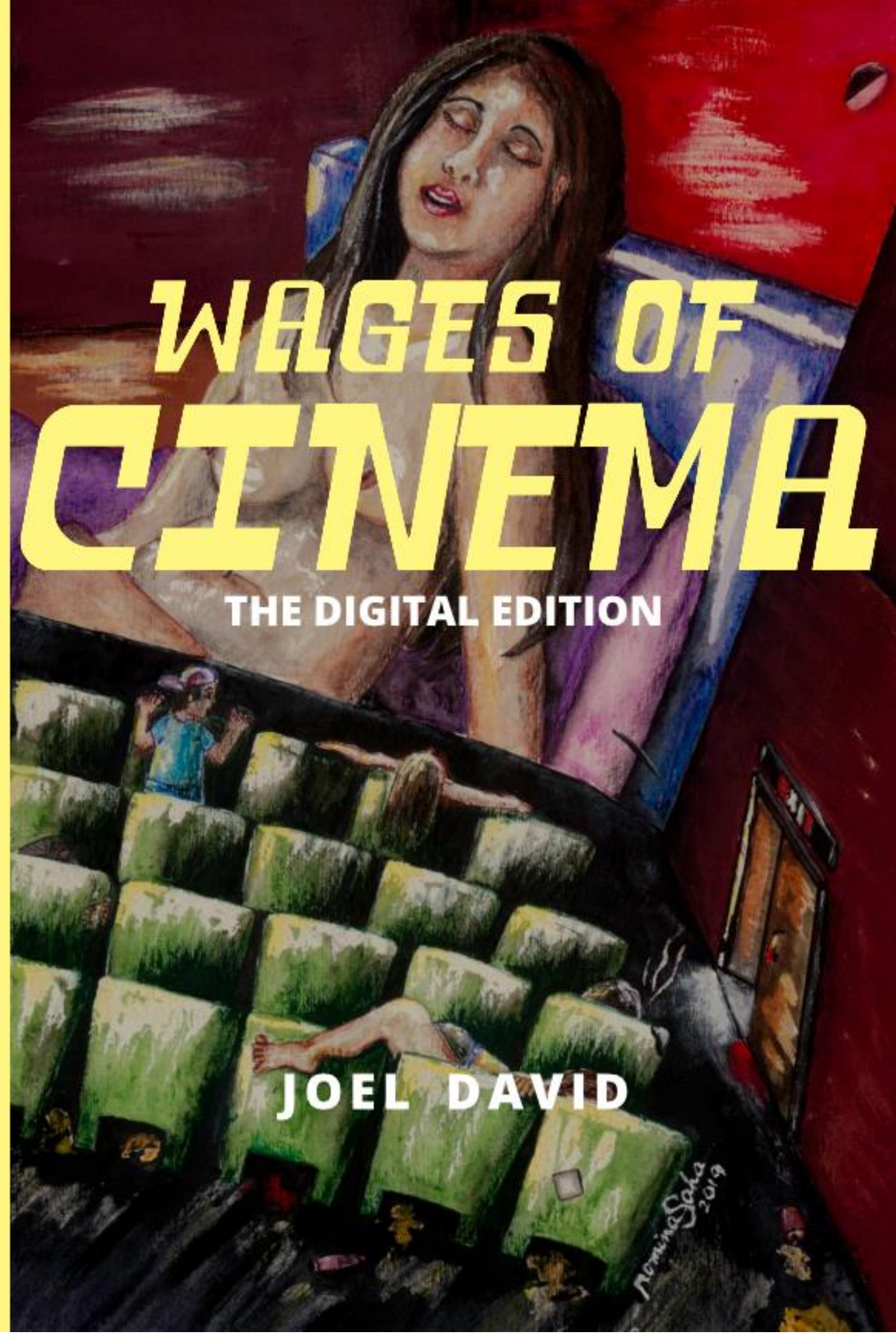
WAGES OF CINEMA

DAVID

WAGES OF CINEMA

THE DIGITAL EDITION

JOEL DAVID



Wages of Cinema

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Wages of Cinema: The Digital Edition

Joel David

AMAUTEURISH PUBLISHING
Quezon City, Philippines

Wages of Cinema: The Digital Edition

Revision and update of *Wages of Cinema*:

Film in Philippine Perspective

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WAGES OF CINEMA

The Digital Edition

The *Amauteurish* Preface

Wages of Cinema was published by the University of the Philippines Press in 1998. If ever a publication could have made use of the then-unavailable open-review process, this would have been it. I'd wanted a long-form writing project that departed significantly from the earlier books, and built up from mostly reviews in the first publication and mostly critiques in the second. On the other hand, UP Press director Laura Samson, whom I'd known since my days as aspiring campus journalist, was helping me conceptualize a volume that would raise recent concerns in film theorizing.

Whenever I decided to subsequently expand any of the materials here, I wound up confirming what I'd known from the beginning: that several of these pieces could stand improvement, and a few of them would never be considered as publishable as when they appeared in the context of their respective designations here. Nevertheless the book, showing up as it did toward the first hundredth year of the Philippine revolution, scored a few "centennial" prizes and distinctions.

I'd originally also prepared an annotated bibliography, drafted for a directed-readings course under my dissertation adviser, the late film historian Robert Sklar. Since it would have occupied the equivalent of three of the regular articles, I decided to retain only the bibliographic entries and look for an occasion to restore the fuller file. Unfortunately this was one of the rare moments I was adjusting computer hardware usage—from DOS to late-adapting Windows, with the notorious Iomega ZIP drive as a means of storage, prior to my subscription to an online storage service—and it was too late when I realized that I had deleted the original copies in my regularly emptied home and office hard drives. It wasn't the first—or even last—time that I had lost an important file, but it was one of a few instances of carelessness that I keep regretting to this day. Since, come to think of it, the book's final "Selected Bibliography" section overlapped with the individual articles' lists of works cited, I decided there was no further point in maintaining it here.

Wages of Cinema was the only time a book publisher coordinated closely with me in completing a book volume; in 2020, she passed away (though not from the then-raging pandemic) just as I was intensively going over the digital-edition manuscripts of my 1990 publications. Though she didn't insist on a closing statement from me for the 1998 print edition, I felt that a tribute to her contribution to my growth as a public intellectual should serve as the epilogue that once never was.

The print edition had an introduction by Luis V. Teodoro, then the dean of the national university's college of mass communication, that read, in part, "Since he began writing in the 1980s, the critical efforts of Joel David have been among the most consistent as well as the most comprehensive, addressing such diverse and necessary concerns as audience response and the Filipino documentary. ¶"Not all academics are necessarily equal to the effort. But in David we have someone whose involvement in and

love for the medium have created a body of work that in this particular time both Philippine cinema as well as the study of it sorely needs” (page x). [*Book cover design*: Arne Sarmiento; *book design*: Mona Lisa S. Escara; *editorial & production supervision*: Laura L. Samson; *dedicatees*: Bliss Lim, Lauren Steimer, Roger Hallas, Theo Pie.]

WAGES OF CINEMA

The Digital Edition

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PREFACE

(From the Original Edition)

The main psychological barrier in presenting a third volume of similar material for publication is the naturalized Western tendency to attribute the last installment of a three-part structure to it. It would be, if not the best (after good and better), then at least the resolution, after exposition and development. How I wish that were so in the case of this, my third book on cinema in the Philippines. Oddly enough, the earlier motives that I could not overcome in the first two books—*The National Pastime* and *Fields of Vision*—have somehow managed to inscribe themselves in the present volume. These consist of two related tendencies that perhaps typify the situation of writing (in the traditional sense) in our cultural context: where, for larger historical reasons, cultural production has outpaced critical analysis, writers with ambitious critical projects will often enough find themselves in the predicament of having to set the very same groundwork that good criticism seeks to probe into, modify, and even repudiate; partly as a consequence of this difficulty, I have always regarded my findings as provisional, subject to further discoveries both on the basic empirical level and at the theoretical level as well.

These qualifications I hope should temper the enthusiasms, positive or negative, that may arise in response to the present volume. Readers who might want to insist on building (or demolishing) what can now be called a body of work on the basis of a progression (or regression) from reviews in the first book, old critical approaches in the second, and new theoretical discourses in the current one are of course entitled to do so. It might even be possible to read a similar attempt at structuring in *Wages of Cinema*, in the book's observation of a teleological mapping of postmodernist concerns in cultural theory, with an internationalist component coming in from left field, as it were. I would wonder, however, if real life could be just as definitive.

For one thing, I had always considered foreign-film commentary crucial to the critical practice of any sufficiently cosmopolitan national cinema, and therefore I endeavored to produce reviews of then-current foreign-film exhibitions alongside my usual (and now extensively anthologized) articles on local cinema. Perhaps I should have published an intermediate volume of such reviews, but the absurdity of reading them out of their sociohistorical context was compounded by the danger of regarding these pieces as circulating within and measurable against the canons of Western film criticism. In fact, I had had chapters comprising foreign-film reviews in each of my previous books, but my reservations regarding their effectiveness vis-à-vis the articles on local cinema won out.

The current volume's essays, in contrast, were produced in the course of roughly an academic generation, initially as papers that sometimes made their way to conferences and occasionally as texts written for purposes other than academic credit, minus the few constraints (and many fulfillments) of working within an active national and industrial imaginary. The pressures I had to deal with in overseas graduate studies had to do with the general one of survival, the more specific one of growing in seriously differential ways from my cultural roots (a fact that never failed to frustrate and confound me whenever I visited the Philippines), and the peculiar one of trying to meet my non-Filipino readers,

including faculty advisers, in terms, including choices of film texts, that they could be capable of responding to.

Hence I should indulge in my standard gripe that foreign students get a rawer deal in the First World, particularly if their disadvantages are compounded by circumstances of race, class, and sexuality, but then I should also be the first to know that there are enough exceptions around to challenge this notion; moreover, I have somehow come to suspect such universalizing tendencies as not entirely free of false modesty and reverse egotism—something on the order of one's being ennobled by having suffered more than others did.

As far as I can relate, then, my growth as an academic (which did not start only after I left my home country—an obvious point which I feel cannot be overemphasized) did not strictly observe the pattern presented by this book. That is, I did not start out obsessed with “Subjectivities,” refining these further with “Specificities,” and finally graduating (as I have not, yet) with “Sexualities,” just as I never began consuming and commenting on foreign movies only upon leaving the Philippines. It might be more accurate to say that I was always sexual and subjective from the start, and am still concerned at present with questions of history and cultural distinction—questions that fortunately tend to cut across barriers of nation, culture, and period. On an even more literal level, if one were to chronologize the essays compiled here, one would have to keep leaping from one category to another, even crossing halfway around the world at certain points.

These categories then are necessarily artificial designations—a fact that applies not just to the basic principle of cultural studies in general, but to the purposes of the individual essays in particular. More than in the case of my previous books, I find myself wishing each one (some more than others) were inventive and self-sufficient enough to stand independent of the rest. In the end, I find myself countering that such is the function of a collection, where each piece serves to complete and is completed by the others, and where any exceptions should actually be the ones that do not belong. My personal favorites (perhaps the most fluid qualifier of all) seem to be the ones that happen to raise issues that critical writing and analysis can never hope to answer by themselves. A psychoanalyst might be able to establish deeper and darker reasons for such an outlook; to the best of my knowledge, the only thing I can recognize on my part is a desire to keep at it, meaning productive discourse, with the prospect of failure a necessary risk and that of success an outcome of good timing, better luck, and the best possible readership (“best” here denoting as much generosity and patience as intellectual ardency). Given such undue fatalism, even I might not be able to tell what kind of critical project I could be able to come up with next. This finally is where the reader steps in.

New York City
August 1997

SUBJECTIVITIES

1. A Question of Appositeness: Structuralism to Poststructuralism

At a certain point in Philippine academic experience, terms like structuralism and poststructuralism and their related methodologies of semiotics and deconstruction tended to be lumped together with everything that was not “traditional,” with such contemporary Western ideas arriving in one overwhelming wave. One way of looking at this specific cultural phenomenon is in terms of how the country was caught up in the collaboration between the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos and his supporters in the US political and business establishment, which in effect forced a dichotomization between the so-called forces of democracy (the pro-US and pro-Marcos sectors) and those of Communism (all anti-Marcos sectors, including pro-US oppositionists like the assassinated ex-Senator Benigno S. Aquino jr.). Hence in terms of practicable applications, no space was allowed for anything between an orthodox Marxist position and a right-wing ideology that each defined the other—i.e., the Marxists characterizing the enemy with Mao Zhedung-inspired accusations of imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucrat capitalism (see Guerrero) and the Marcos regime countering that their opponents represented godlessness, political tyranny, and economic stagnation.

The February 1986 “people-power” revolt that ousted Marcos and installed Aquino’s widow Corazon in his stead provided sufficient leeway for most sociocultural critics and academicians (who were mostly the same individuals) to update themselves on trends and developments in Western cultural and critical theory. Hence the initial split between the “old” circles of classicalists and formalists and the “new” ones of neomarxists and cultural-studies advocates, including structuralists and poststructuralists, with a number of social-realist practitioners finding themselves within either the “new” group or neither of the two. The distinctions between the structuralist and poststructuralist schools in the Philippine experience, however, emerged only during the early 1990s, with film critics divided between those who utilized recognizably structuralist principles in their use of semiotics and genre criticism, and those who deliberately formed an organization to announce their engagement in what they termed was a “deconstructionist project,” which resulted in a full-blown media controversy with the (presumably) structuralists and social realists aligned with artists against the deconstructionists.

The value of looking into the shifts in methods from structuralism to poststructuralism within this specific cultural moment lies in how one may relate the salient elements of these ideas within a new situation, inspecting these in terms of both the demands of the situation as well as the effectiveness of the methods in their original contexts of emergence. In terms of the larger “cultural studies” grouping, Ferdinand de Saussure is acknowledged as having laid the groundwork with his theory of language, primarily with the compilation of his lectures in *Course in General Linguistics* (Turner 13); Hodge and Kress include C.S. Peirce and Sigmund Freud (*Social Semiotics* 14–15), but nevertheless still begin with Saussure, whose contributions include the concept of the arbitrariness of signs, the construction of “value” by semantic oppositions (or binary

principles), the recognition of syntagmatic and paradigmatic structures in a code, and the assertion that transformations in structures and relations are derived from material and social life (Saussure 21–35). Saussure maintains that writing “exists for the sole purpose of representing speech” and that “spoken forms alone constitute the object” of linguistics as science (23–24), in effect giving priority to spoken forms over written forms, as well as to language over speech, since language can supposedly become the object of scientific inquiry due to its being a closed system. He concludes that “the statement that everything in language is negative is true only if the signified and the signifier are considered separately; when we consider the sign in its totality, we have something that is positive in its own class” (120). This view provided a vital backbone of semiotic structuralist theory, which balanced the potentially upsetting acceptance of the instability of meaning with the retroversion toward an essential center in the nature of the sign itself, after signifier and signified had been matched.

Using these ideas introduced by the so-called founding fathers of semiotics, Hodge and Kress managed to come up with what they considered a more enabling deployment of semiotic principles, first in “Functional Semiotics” and then in *Social Semiotics*. These applications, however, have as few things in common with poststructuralism as much as they do with structuralism, so it might be more appropriate to look into Hodge and Kress’s ideas after a consideration of deconstruction. Norris traces the roots of the latter practice also to structuralism, as well as New Criticism (v-vi), mentioning such philosophers as Saussure, Immanuel Kant, and Roland Barthes during the latter’s poststructuralist phase. The main proponent of deconstruction is Jacques Derrida, who first gained prominence as a critic of structuralism, and specifically of Saussure’s book. Derrida centered his critique on Saussure’s hierarchization of speech/writing as reflecting a “metaphysics of presence” (*Writing and Difference* 279), bearing no difference with the relegation of writing to a secondary position relative to spoken forms as observed by philosophers from Plato onward. The word phonocentrism was what Derrida used to refer to the supposition permeating Western philosophy premised on an illusion of the hierarchy “hearing/understanding-oneself-speak,” although he also conceded the usefulness of Saussure’s formulation of the language/speech hierarchy (279). Derrida, however, argued that the very practice of writing itself abides by Saussure’s assertion—i.e., that the written mark differs only in being inscribed in more durable substance:

If writing signifies inscription and especially the durable institution of a sign ... [then] writing in general covers the entire field of linguistic signs. In that field a certain sort of instituted signifier may then appear, “graphic” in the narrow and derivative sense of the word, ordered by a certain relationship with other instituted—hence “written,” even if they are “phonic”—signifiers. (*Of Grammatology* 44).

After reversing Saussure’s original hierarchy, Derrida advances to the next, wherein he expounds on the nature of the semiotic sign:

whether in the order of spoken or written discourse, no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present. This interweaving results in each element, whether phoneme [spoken] or grapheme [written]—being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system. (*Positions* 26).

This, per Derrida, is *différance*, “a structure and a movement no longer conceivable on the basis of the opposition presence/absence” (27), which is ignored by phonocentric thought in its insistence upon the self-presence of the spoken word. *Différance* in effect exposes the continual drive to privilege presence and therefore conceive of meaning as positively present within language—a tendency which Derrida labeled logocentrism, which may be simplified as the desire, perpetrated by Western philosophy, for a structuralist center (Anderson 141).

Although he also critiqued the structuralist position of another theorist, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Derrida acknowledges that the latter was “working toward deconstruction” (*Writing and Difference* 286) because of his reliance on inherited conceptual oppositions and his prescription of a so-called hermeneutic aimed at decentering such oppositions. In this respect he cites Lévi-Strauss’s discontent (which he shared, of course) with the concept of the structuralist center, premised on its delimitation and arrest of “play,” which operates prior to the presence/absence opposition as well as the possibility of center or structure (Barthes 144). Derrida’s dissatisfaction with logocentrism takes shape in his formulation of a violent hierarchy, differentiated from the binary opposition utilized by the structuralists in that it involves the coupling of two concepts, one (“a”) supposedly the origin of or superior to the related other (“b”), expressed in the relation “a/b.” In a strictly schematical manner, the process or method of deconstruction proceeds by first reversing violent-hierarchical terms; the new relation in turn should be seen as begetting its own instability, thereby rendering futile the hierarchization project and leading to an inspection of further hierarchies as provoked or implied by the negation. Derrida himself cautions that “to remain in this phase [of the reversal of the violent hierarchy as expressed in its original formulation] is still to operate on the terrain of and from within the deconstructed system,” necessitating an interminable process of deconstructing whatever new relations may develop, since “the hierarchy of dual oppositions always establishes itself” (*Positions* 42).

In relating deconstruction to the structuralist project, however, Eagleton points out that the former

has grasped the point that the binary oppositions with which classical structuralism tends to work represent a way of seeing typical of ideologies.... The tactic of deconstructive criticism ... is to show how texts come to embarrass their own ruling systems of logic; and deconstruction shows this by fastening on the “symptomatic” points, the aporia or impasses of meaning, where texts get into trouble, come unstuck, offer to contradict themselves. (133–34)

Eagleton provides a striking historical background for poststructuralism in general in his tracing of its emergence to the short-lived euphoria and long-term disillusionment that attended the momentary triumph and eventual collapse in 1968 of the student movement in Europe. Using France as his locus of inspection, he reports that,

Unable to provide a coherent political leadership, plunged into a confused *mêlée* of socialism, anarchism and infantile behind-baring, the student movement was rolled back and dissipated; betrayed by their supine Stalinist leaders, the working-class movement was unable to assume power.... Unable to break the structures of state power, poststructuralism found it possible instead to subvert the structures of language. (141–42)

As in the case of semiotics, several other authors discovered, partly from examples provided by Derrida himself, that the principles of deconstruction (actually poststructuralism in a larger sense) had been propounded by a number of estimable forerunners. These include Nietzsche, who in his theory of rhetoric had stated that language, in a categorical rupture, is first consciously conceived of as always, at once, and originally figural or rhetorical, rather than referential or representational—in short, no primordial or unrhetorical language exists. Rhetoricity, which is language's most distinctive feature, necessarily undermines truth and “opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential aberration,” thus turning the linguistic sign into the site of ambivalent and problematic relations between referential and figural meaning (De Man 10). This antedates the Saussurean principle of the instability of the relations between the elements of the sign, and in fact prefigures Derrida's idea of a floating signifier (as against structuralism's sliding signifieds), wherein meaning can never ever really be established. Another philosopher, Heidegger, was supposedly more inclined toward a related activity, destructive hermeneutics, wherein a critic opens the text, inquires into it through time, disarticulates its spatial point of view, and brings into the open the indefinite or vague insights into being that lie hidden in tradition—or the reenactment of the truth of being in an activity of retrieval or repetition, called *Wiederholen* (Leitch 69–83 *passim*); a distinction in this regard can and needs to be made between the destructive Heidegger and the deconstructive one upheld by Derrida. American practitioners, especially de Man, have avoided issues of ontology and metaphysics, restricting themselves to close textual analysis; by this means they also manage to avoid claims of situating grammar and rhetoric at the site of the beginning of being and presence. As far as they can make out, only implication persists, resulting in the articulation of ideas *while* (not before or after) texts are being read (Eagleton 145). Although the Yale-based deconstructionists started out by reacting to their own practice of New Criticism, Derrida has complained that their usage promotes an institutional closure which serves the dominant political and economic interests of the US (Eagleton 148). As Eagleton further qualifies,

Derrida is clearly out to do more than develop new techniques of reading: deconstruction is for him an ultimately political practice, an attempt to dismantle the logic by which a particular system of thought, and behind that a whole system of political structures and social institutions, maintains its force.... The widespread

opinion that deconstruction denies the existence of anything but discourse, or affirms a realm of pure difference in which all meaning and identity dissolves, is a travesty of Derrida's own work and of the most productive work which has followed from it. (148)

In problematizing the activity of deconstruction, various writers have admitted to further problematics. Norris banks on the view of Ludwig Wittgenstein that "such skeptical philosophies of language rest at bottom on a false epistemology, one that seeks (and inevitably fails) to discover some logical correspondence between language and the world" (Norris 126). He also points to objections "from within," in Harold Bloom's response to skepticism by insisting on a persuasive will, and in Murray Krieger and Gerald Graff's allegation of the similarity between the methods of deconstruction and New Criticism—objections that Norris himself admits were "ephemeral and fruitless," echoing as they did the initial resistance to structuralism in America (127–31). Yet whether one opts to search for a further alternative to deconstruction, or to remain within the framework of the theory, accepting the (entirely unsatisfactory) alternatives it generates from within the text, one must agree with Norris that

deconstructionist theory can only be as useful and enlightening as the mind that puts it to work.... Deconstruction has marked out a new domain of argument for the age-old quarrel between "literature" and "philosophy." The claims of analysis have never been pressed so far.... Nor has criticism ever taken on such courage, intellectual and stylistic, in asserting its claim as a self-respecting discipline of thought. To ignore that claim is to close one's mind to something other, and more, than a short-lived swing of critical fashion. (132)

In terms of application to popular culture, it may be useful to consider Eagleton's qualifications about the appropriateness of poststructuralism within primarily its originaive context. The total negation of a structuralist center may prove appropriate to a national situation wherein political structures, including progressive ones, may have attained a degree of stability strong enough to withstand thoroughgoing critical revaluation. No matter how shot through with cynicism the deconstructionist approach regards such fixed loci of ideologies and organizations, the fact remains that such institutions may still be in place, imbued with historical experience, and (at least hypothetically) can be seized, reoriented, and mobilized for certain, if possibly always limited, ends of social change. In the Philippines, with its undeniably Third-World economy, the differences between, say, Heideggerian destruction and Derridean deconstruction may still be applicable for superstructural purposes, but may perhaps prove too subtle or sophisticated for materialist realities. In short, a truly deconstructive political methodology may prove useful to a certain extent, but one would wonder what kind of progressive build-up would be possible if new structures—whether of thinking or of action—would be subjected to deconstructive demolition in order to arrive at the next, essentially still deconstructible stage of development.

Perhaps a combination of poststructuralist creativity and structuralist caution might be one logical way out of this quandary. One could apply the basic analytical tools of pinpointing existing binary oppositions as representing violent hierarchies, reversing these relations, negating the hierarchies and seeking or establishing new ones in their stead—then call for a truce, a temporary one of course, for the purpose of allowing the new contradictions to work on whatever historical errors can be rectified as well as permitting as large as possible a sector of the populace to catch up with the “developments,” with as wide a reader-response base as possible serving as the ideal for discursive participation. This ought to tie in with the other problematics of Philippine popular culture, especially the tendency toward a Metro-Manila-based centralism and the limited effectiveness of critical activity. The first problem requires solutions which lately have started to be explored—i.e., regional and international expansions, both of which are generating new problematics of their own. At this point, however, too strong a critical condemnation of as-yet developing outreaches may simply result in a collapse of such efforts and lead back to a possibly even stronger metropolitan hold on cultural consciousness; this is not the same as stating that all expansive efforts should be encouraged regardless of their perceived worthiness, but that the ideal of decentralization should take precedence as a controlling vision, at least for the moment.

The problem of critical effectiveness may be seen in terms of the Filipino public’s selective preference for some media over others, and in their responsiveness toward some forms of evaluation over the rest. To use certain concrete examples, Filipinos it seems would rather pay attention to developments in mainstream cinema and popular music than to occurrences in, say, literature, theater, the visual arts, even alternative music and independent filmmaking; within their preferred media of expression, they would also rather observe press wars and awards nights (which sometimes amount to the same thing) than, say, read books or critical articles, even if these deal with exactly the same products. Hence critical practice has to be organized if it intends to respond to these challenges; it must assume an ethical purpose—provisional at best, subject to continual assessment—that draws on historical precedents and relies on institutional alliances whenever possible, for the purposes of maximizing visibility and assisting marginalized critical and artistic practitioners; it may have to indulge in award-giving as a strategic option, seeking ways and means to nudge the concept toward authentic and recognizable critical expression. All these activities may be regarded as having benefited from deconstructionist principles, but only to the extent of plowing the lessons back into grounds for more fertile political practice. Once all this becomes standardized critical procedure—a pipe dream for any Filipino critic, at this point—then it may be time once more to unsheathe, as it were, the scalpel of deconstruction for further (and, one would hope, radical) critical surgery.

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2. The Multiple-Character Film Format

The study of movement in cinema is fraught with the formalist associations that were originally laid out by critical projects in classical film theory. Signification itself carried over as a primary concern in semiotic structuralism (Williams 37), but the relative recency of poststructuralist thinking tends to induce a defensiveness in this type of undertaking. This essay presumes the possibility of a contemporary conceptual insertion in structuralism, and admits to an intention of valorizing its findings as an exception to the current dehierarchization of film structure as a vital component of understanding the sociopolitical importance of the medium. Michèle Barrett, in “The Place of Aesthetics in Marxist Criticism,” critiqued the stunting of aesthetic discourse brought about by the combination of the concepts of ideology and rejection of the subject (698–702), and argued that distantiation from the mystique of art can actually be facilitated by aesthetic theorizing, as suggested by Max Raphael, through the democratizing effect of emphasizing skills and the process of conceptual reconstitution (702–04).

The aforementioned dismissal of formal, and specifically structural, explorations into cinema can be traced to the failure of efforts to harness film form for purposes of social action. Of special interest, for linguistic reasons that will be explained later, is the account of social realism, which had purported to induce a “movement,” as it were, from film form to social thematics to progressive political action, especially in its institutionalized manifestations (Sklar 169). Perhaps the predicament in the social realist project can be literalized by imagining a trajectory from the material vehicle (film in this case) to materialist results (politics), mediated by an ideological shift from passive acceptance (of both the entertainment and the prevailing political condition) to active resistance. It is this last element that may be seen as the site of deconstructive aporia: it isn’t so much the entertainment that was expected to be rejected, but rather the spectator’s oppressive situation; in this regard, the film in question was expected to function as an abstract equivalent of the catapult—indeed, this was consonant with the machinistic implications of the Soviets’ constructivist manifestos (Christie 4). The emphasis placed on easily apprehensible film texts by the policies of socialist realism made all the more obvious the requisite upward linearity that would facilitate a hurling of the viewer’s sentiments toward a drive for social change.

What matters for purposes of this study is not so much the direction of the social-realist narrative trajectory as the fact that it had to be linear. The complexity of social formations, within the social-realist framework, lay outside the film text itself; the latter was to serve as merely the catalyst toward behavioral change, or perhaps at most the explicator of what would be a supposedly more (complexly) real social situation following the viewing experience. Concomitant with this requisite would be the imperative of viewer identification, which would observe a similar principle of lesser is better: one character could stand by (usually) himself, or could allow the presence of an antagonist or a non-/romantic interest (as in buddy/girlfriend) or both (in the same personage or in different ones), but with the narrative eventually collapsing onto still a primary individual subject.

Such a policy predominated mainstream film practice through the classical Hollywood narrative tradition, even during the modernist phase in theater and literature where such conventions were being challenged. The issue in analyzing how Edmund Goulding's *Grand Hotel*, for example, pares down its initial proliferation of dramatis personae to the question of what effect Baron von Geigern (John Barrymore) would have on Grusinskaya (Greta Garbo) and Flaemmchen (Joan Crawford) is not so much whether such an eventual conventionalization was integral to the original theatrical source but whether the play would have been adapted, and in such a manner, if such a conventionalization were either absent or impossible to expedite. The deemphasis on number of characters actually served to maximize a device drawn from theater and literature—i.e., characterization; in fact, with the rejection of linearity in European avant-garde and New Wave film movements later, one means used by filmmakers to sustain identificatory viewership impulses was the conscious deployment of characterization, whether in the outward objectification exemplified on one extreme by documentary practice, or in the inward subjectivities made possible through the appropriation of literary principles of stream-of-consciousness.

From the foregoing historicizing the problematic can be suggested of whether a social formation, or its equivalent, can be engendered within the film text itself. The distinguishable expository portion of *Grand Hotel* advances a possible model, with its reliance on the synchronic potential (in the Saussurean sense) of the narrative rather than on its diachronic properties. However, with such an appropriation since then of the formula in community-set films (usually serving as teen-idol vehicles), the protagonist-with-romantic interest model or the *Grand Hotel*-type love-triangle model tended to prevail; the 1970s saw an even more patriarchally governable model in the disaster movie, which proffered a cast of characters whose ages averaged beyond teenhood and who usually relied on a similarly middle-aged white male hero for salvation (Ryan and Kellner 52–57).

It was also during the 1970s that Robert Altman initiated a series of investigations into the nature of film sound via his Lion's Gate system, that resulted in an aural equivalent of deep focus—i.e., with several types of sounds recognizable one from the other yet simultaneously presentable to the spectator. With the subvention of the multiple-character exposition throughout the whole film, complemented by the placement of a community, as it were, of characters (rather than characters with objects or just objects alone) in deep focus and their simultaneous delivery of dialogue on the soundtrack, what became a critically heralded culmination was his mid-'70s release, *Nashville*. In this particular instance, movement from film form to theme was facilitated ironically by the inevitable weakening of classical character development: in order to present what the film claimed was twenty-four (possibly even twenty-five, if one were to include the orally ubiquitous Hal Philip Walker) characters within the standard mainstream maximum of two hours, none of the characters was as fully developed as "character" in the classical sense, although most of them were successful as types. Such an absence of "full" dramatic involvement, intensified by the constant shifting of identification from one character to another, makes possible the configuration of a social

formation—in fact, a social character—within the diegesis itself. Movement in this respect could be plotted out as proceeding from a number of dramatic lines of action predicated on individual characters, with the said lines converging in the end not in any of the diegetic characters, but in the abstract character suggested by the geographic designation of the title “Nashville.”

In “Can People Be (Re)Presented in Fiction?,” Darko Suvin enumerates characters, types, and actants as the three kinds of agential levels (679, 686). Characters interrelate dialectically with the historical concepts of types and developed along with capitalist concepts of property, money economy, etc.; they once broke through hierarchies and dogmas but do not suffice anymore in depicting contemporary corporative individualities, and in effect they tend to engender new monopolistic and stereotypical production (688). Stanley Cavell in “Types” goes further by upholding the use of types in cinema on the premise that the medium creates not (real) individuals, but individualities (297–99). Within the concerns of such a film sample as *Nashville*, however, what might be said is not that no room exists for characterization whatsoever, but that such a preoccupation, although possible given lesser major types and/or longer running time, would still be secondary to the conveyance of the social milieu-as-character. As with any structuralist device, there also would be the danger of recuperation, particularly in the manner by which the abstract character “Nashville” can be forced to observe the impositions of not just Aristotelian formalism but ideological containment as well within terms similar to that of capitulation in innovation described by Barbara Klinger in “‘Cinema/Ideology/Criticism’ Revisited” (87–89).

At this point it may be pertinent to the definition of the multiple-character format to ask just how many subjects would define a presentation as multiple. Granting the twin assumptions of each character having separate but equal importance and engendering competing imperatives of spectatorial identification, it would be possible to center on a minimum of three (one being traditional, two possibly dialectical but not literally “social”). In the instance of *Nashville*, however, the mere arrival at the minimum of three major characters reveals a more complex social operation at play. One might triangulate, for example, among Triplett (Michael Murphy), Linnea (Lily Tomlin), and Barbara Jean (Ronee Blakley) by observing how Linnea’s life gets affected by Triplett’s attempt to mount a concert which in turn results in Barbara Jean’s death, but the movie neither presents their interaction according to this formulation nor isolates them in such a way as to make possible this schematization. In fact, a more accurate rendition would be to see how the other characters, even if we grant them a stature minor compared to these three, still manage to mediate among the relations of these major ones: between Linnea and Triplett come Linnea’s husband Delbert (Ned Beatty), who helps Triplett while neglecting his own family; between Triplett and Barbara Jean come her manager Barnett (Allen Garfield), who resists the former’s attempts to include her in his concert but who gets manipulated into acceding by force of circumstance. Between Barbara Jean and Linnea there exists a more complicated link provided by Connie White (Karen Black), Barbara Jean’s rival, and Tom (Keith Carradine), Linnea’s extra-marital fling; although both are recording stars, it is possible to link Connie White with Barnett (who has to both

thank her and appease Barbara Jean in the process) and Tom with Delbert, who provides Triplett with the opening by which to convince him (Tom) to attend Hal Philip Walker's rally by denigrating country-music performers. What this results in is a second order of character interaction that may turn out to be just as self-sufficient as the original threesome—and one can further extend this exercise into a multi-faceted foregrounding and reforegrounding of groups of characters, three at the least in each instance.

Although considerations of compositions and sound-mixings in perspectival depth were crucial to the execution of such a structure, film editing may play a more consequential role beyond the limits of Eisensteinian montage, described by V. F. Perkins as defining rhythm according to shot length rather than visual content (410). For such internal discursive purposes, editing can be linked with the concept of figuration—the moments in a text when the audience itself actively generates meaning (Andrew 158–59). Fredric Jameson in “Cognitive Mapping” identifies figuration with representation, attributing its spatial properties with the stages in the development of capital and proposing that spatial analysis be extrapolated as both imaginary representation and aesthetic necessity (348–51, 353). The multiple-character format as exemplified in *Nashville* enhances this potential with its devaluation of inanimate objects (or plastic subjects) and their replacement with active human figures, thus defining the social environment according to social subjects rather than, say, industrial conditions as in the case of film noir or gothic atmospherics in the case of horror. It therefore becomes possible to further analyze signification by distinguishing between formation of meaning and the generation of discourse, with meaning residing in the individual subject's presentation and discursive potential arising from the simultaneous appearance (and delivery of dialogue) of discrete subjects, as well as in shifts in identification from one subject to another. Since these latter shifts tend to occur much more often as a matter of principle (what with the need to “cover” more characters), the impetus toward abstractification, or moments of figuration, becomes a controlling practice for active viewership. Perhaps one way of illustrating this principle is the means by which still-shot films like Chris Marker's *La jetée*, Nagisa Oshima's *Yunbogi's Diary*, or Michael Snow's *One Second in Montreal* enable the provocation of responses by precisely refusing to encode their meanings in onscreen motion but “move” anyway from one shot to the next: the absence of literalized signification is interrupted by the sudden transitions—sheer jump-cutting, so to speak—that suggest meanings but leave the spectator to fill in the discursive spaces.

David Mickelsen in “Types of Spatial Structure in Narrative” echoes the Saussurean axiom in observing that emphasis on “spatial form minimizes the temporal dimension” (67). He further postulates degrees of spatiality according to the usual deployment of “leitmotifs or extended webs of interrelated images,” the use of the “multiple story.... [to] force the reader to cope with simultaneous actions,” and, in its “true” form, the elimination or at least severe attenuation of chronology (69). The limits of Mickelsen's formulation can be seen in his hierarchization of narrative focus upward from individual to society to style (70–72). His *donnée*, however, can also be separated from the present study by virtue of its formal particularization in the novel rather than in film,

evident in his critique of the “multiple story” as “eroding temporal progress and replacing it with a more static entity” (68)—a property overridden by the constant time-based unfolding of the film text. In “Spatial Form” Joseph Frank notes that “Temporality becomes ... a purely physical limit of apprehension, which conditions but does not determine the work and whose expectations are thwarted and superseded by the space-logic of synchronicity” (207), referring to, apart from Eisensteinian montage, Alain Robbe-Grillet’s assertion of “the present of the indicative” as the only single grammatical modality available to cinema (210).

As critical tool, the multiple-character format may mirror the precepts of semiotic structuralism, as already explained, but it also facilitates an advancement toward poststructural areas via genre discourse. Whether the format in itself is a genre yields ambivalent responses, outside of Andrew Tudor’s empiricist dilemma in “Genre and Critical Methodology” of the need of requiring proof of the existence of certain criteria but with such criteria requiring derivation from already existing samples (121). With *Nashville* as an archetypal sample, one can say both that its structural describability lends itself to generic codification, but that such a formally derived criterion as film structure also tends to diffuse the format’s generic stability: as an actual example, *Nashville* itself has been classified in separate volumes by the National Society of Film Critics as either a comedy (see Byron) or a musical (“Genre Classics” 350). Opposing, say, style to structure, one can also witness differences between films noirs and musicals in the first instance and, more important, how such structure-dependent genres as melodramas and documentaries could be more closely related to *Nashville*. The most obvious conclusion here, one that may be granted for purposes of advancing this essay’s argument further, is that *Nashville*’s exemplification, exceptional though it may be, renders the multiple-character format more of a super- or meta-genre, or perhaps a specific and specialized instance of what Adam Knee in his essay has labeled “The Compound Genre Film.” Knee characterizes the compound genre as one that “concurrently engages multiple distinct and relatively autonomous horizons of generic expectation” (141), but his categorization allows for more postmodern slippages among various generic approaches rather than the underlying structural preconditions typifying the multiple-character film format. One way of conflating the super-generic nature of *Nashville* with Knee’s compound-genre specificities is suggested in the fissures that occur when individual characters appear to depart from the uneasy norm of dominant libertarian values espoused, if one may resort to anthropomorphism, by the social character: Barbara Jean, for example, could be seen as embodying tragedy, Sueleen Gay (the untalented singer) tragicomedy, Opal (the BBC twit) comedy, Kenny Fraiser (the assassin) suspense, and so on. No doubt these internal generic distinctions could be made to surface by stronger stylistic differentiations (thus enabling the association of each character with a generic motif), but this also serves to demonstrate the means by which the format itself could move in the permutational sense.

In closing it might be interesting to consider just how political this type of film format could get. Pier Paolo Pasolini in “The Cinema of Poetry” stressed that the discursive potential of film would be directly metaphorical (549–50), while Christian Metz in “Current Problems of Film Theory” modifies this insight by saying that filmic

metaphors are actually metonymic, each diegetic element symbolizing the whole of its context and playing on forms of contiguity within the same figure (578). Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner push this difference to an extreme by claiming that metaphor and metonymy are related filmic rhetorical strategies, with the former referring to the vertical/idealizing axis of presentation and the latter, the horizontal/materializing (and therefore more politically useful) axis (312–13). Not surprisingly, it is Ryan and Kellner who give critical prominence to *Nashville* for its tendency to materialize (rather than idealize) in its refusal to collapse into the singular hero or binary hero-antihero modes of presentation. In the end, however, their argument falls into the trap of structural fetishism by adding to the multiple-character property such other traits as open-endedness, distantiating, generic playfulness, and demythologization within mainstream film undertakings (269–82)—all this right after clarifying that

the criterion for judging such matters should be pragmatic, one that measures the progressive character of a text according to how well it accomplishes its task in specific contexts of reception. What counts as progressive varies with time and situation, and what works in one era or context might fail in another. Moreover, the notion of progressive is always differentially or relationally determined. (268)

This results in their enforcement of a contrast between two other multiple-character samples (which they label “group” films) that came out during the early 1980s, John Sayles’s *Return of the Secaucus Seven* and Lawrence Kasdan’s *The Big Chill*, as possessing differing progressive values despite their being consciously on the same subject of yuppie-era post-radicalism. Ryan and Kellner’s utilization of formalist criteria to make politicized pronouncements—Sayles’s film is decentralized and open-ended and therefore progressive while Kasdan’s is focused on a single character and resolves in an “extreme narrative closure” and is therefore reactionary (277–79)—not only elicits differences that elide the more striking structural similarities between the two projects, but also demonstrates the limits of investing formal devices with political capabilities—a return to social realism with the violent hierarchy of classicism over modernism reversed rather than eliminated this time around.

The multiple-character format cannot be granted, by itself or in combination with other devices, political valuations; with sufficiently creative usage, it enables the showcasing within the filmic diegesis of a distinctive social milieu, which in itself may or may not be “progressive” in political terms. Altman himself returned to it every so often, most recently with *Short Cuts*, but the reason why *Nashville* remains a cut above the rest (of his oeuvre, at least) has to do with vision, empathy, conviction, and a number of other factors that happened to have had the unique historical advantage of converging within a structural approach that allowed the movement of socially unaware fictive subjects within and in relation to their specific social context with their clarity and strength and passion intact and manifest enough for the spectator to constructively and constructionally draw from.

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3. Genre Pastiche in the Horror Film

Postmodernism, during its early introductory phase, was seen as a means by which marginal groups could enable themselves in deconstructing, at least theoretically, structures oppressive to their existence—inclusive of literary and cultural canons, if not the act of canon-formation itself (Harper 4–5). Only later would the theoretical dilemma emerge of there being no center, where loci of power tend to be invested with the same significance as those of the margins (in a relation of interdependence—Harper 16), and would thereby negate the need not just for scholarly destruction (a notion contrasted with deconstruction) but also for institutional dismantling. Within a life-or-death issue such as AIDS, for example, activist movements, in giving voice and support through government funding to gay men, have largely neglected (presumably lower-class) non-gay drug users and non-white gay men, thus pointing up the nature of American institutional biases (Dada 86).¹

Critical perspectives on postmodernism proceed from the issue of the artificiality of constructed boundaries. Hence the principle of synchronicity, manifested in literary applications through the reiterability of certain forms and practices that just-as-insistently undergo shifts and transformations in their transitions from one sociocultural context to another, has become one of the central concerns in postmodernist controversies. Just as emblem theorizing has recognized that what is depicted means more than it portrays, yet that the originary classical texts function differently for latter-day readers (Daly 38–39), the condition of literariness has maintained the anchoring of generic forms in socio-historical processes; equally important, for purposes of this essay's discussion, is the fact that "a dominant ideology and hegemony ... is the project of the literary performance to unveil and perhaps overflow" (Bolongaro 305).

The coexistence of irresolvable differences has applied to what would once have been opposed to the ideal of literariness itself—i.e., the literary genre. In *The Political Unconscious*, Fredric Jameson characterized genre as consisting further of the irreconcilable properties of modality on the one hand and fixed form on the other, or a tension between the semantic and the structural respectively (108–09). His proposed manner of resolving this binary was to allow structural analysis to open out onto

the semantic raw materials of social life and language, the constraints of determinate social contradictions, the conjunctures of social class, the historicity of structures of feeling and perception and ultimately of bodily experience, the constitution of the psyche or subject, and the dynamics and specific temporal rhythms of historicity. (147)

Elsewhere, in *Signatures of the Visible*, Jameson invokes Pierre Bourdieu in ascribing to a "legitimation crisis" in the Hollywood aesthetic" the cause of what he termed "the end of genre" in film (182), as a result of the twin consequences of rationalizing aesthetic activity and consumption as well as the privileging by classes in power of the prerogative of defining and imposing aesthetic concepts in cinema. This essay, however, is of the view

that, while Jameson's pessimistic viewpoint would be crucial to an understanding of the limits faced by the politicization of genre discourse, it would be even less productive to abandon the politicizing project altogether. A measure of encouragement can in fact be drawn from Simon During's critique of the application of dialectical principles to postmodernity, in that

As soon as one allows the notion of the "positive" or "progressive" to reappear in analysis, the object one has in view is not postmodernity but a stage on the historical journey to the light.... In order to name postmodernity as a cultural dominant expressing itself in postmodern artifacts Jameson has to assume the coming to power of neo-imperialism, and to inflect postmodernity positively he has, for a moment, to become complicit with it. (451)

A different way of expressing this predicament, from the position of the marginalized sectors referred to earlier, would be in the arrival of postmodernism and its message of the inevitable futility of radical action just when the marginalized themselves had managed to acquire the realization and means through and within modernism to effect institutional change (Lovibond 394).

As a US film produced during the 1980s, *Near Dark* can be appreciated in terms of these particular junctures in postmodern discourse. In the volume *From My Guy to Sci-Fi*, Carolyn Brown's essay "Feminist Literary Strategies in the Postmodern Condition" notes that as a result of feminist literary and cultural efforts, a multiplication of histories and narratives has formed part of the postmodern dissolution of history (114). In further particularizing what may be termed postmodern literariness, Leslie Dick in her essay "Feminism, Writing, Postmodernism" in the same volume suggests three indicators of postmodern texts: they challenge the modernist high-low polarity, they use strategies of plunder and purloinment, and they exhibit an anti-purist, mixed media, or hybrid approach (206). In these terms, Dick positions genre products on the lower end of the high-low spectrum (where the higher end would be equivalent to the ideal of literariness) because they discard originality as final measure of value. Moreover, she associates genre appreciation with subcultures and notes that, since genres tie in with institutions, they tend to rigidify, sediment, or collapse onto themselves. The two ways out she proposes are either to revive the generic institution (as Francis Ford Coppola did with the vampire film in *Bram Stoker's Dracula*) or to extract its forms without getting involved in it (207–09).

It is this second option that provides the focus of this essay. The notion I would like to develop is that of *Near Dark* as a sample of not just the extraction of generic forms, but their admixture in two opposite directions: one would be complementary, in that the result (on the bases of both critical and commercial responses) has turned out to be pleasurably cohesive; the other would be collisional, in that detectable in the finished product is a disturbing and urgent ideologically discursive undercurrent. Ostensibly a vampire film, *Near Dark* also exhibits elements that are associated with action films, specifically gangster and Western films, as well as with family and young-love melodrama and with the horror film's slasher/stalker sub-genre. We can also find coming-of-age and

road-film and soft-core situations in it, but most important in terms of this essay is the manner in which the science-fiction premise gets marshalled and subsumed in the interest of a project that can be labeled feminine rather than feminist.

An inspection of the major genres mentioned might be called for at this point. Horror is what may be termed the controlling generic framework of *Near Dark*, since the basic elements of the presence of the monstrous and the incitement of fear and disgust, as per Noel Carroll (37–41), are attendant and identifiable. Yet in order to facilitate a scientifically understandable fictional resolution, the vampires in *Near Dark* are never portrayed as any different from unusual but still conceivable human characters. Their feats of strength are not supernaturally assisted, and we are even invited to doubt whether these same feats are supernaturally derived since, although the vampirical characters deteriorate under sunlight, they can just as well be regarded as suffering from extreme sensitivity to exposure to the sun, the way certain natural or man-made forms of matter could evaporate or explode under the same condition. Most significantly, they are not even depicted as sporting fangs—and what for, really, since humans have been known to inflict serious bites with only their available sets of teeth. In fact, these characters' monstrousness, as noted by Alain Silver and James Ursini in *The Vampire Film* (198–99), is subsequently qualified: it would not be so much their drinking of blood as their propensity to indulge in luring their individual victims and terrorizing entire helpless groups when they go on their feeding spree that defines them as falling outside the pale of current social acceptability in the Western (hemispheric, not just American) context. Barbara Creed in *The Monstrous Feminine* notes the presence of devices in horror films associable with the slasher film (124), but in *Near Dark* the female castrator replaces the male stalker, and the victims who undergo abject terror are mostly men who are away from their families rather than women who had just indulged in illicit sex.²

The positivist rationalization of the traditional supernatural premise of vampirism helps to complement the movie's action-genre properties, and in fact with *Near Dark* Kathryn Bigelow was regarded as worthy of the skills of “the best contemporary action directors—Walter Hill, John Carpenter, you name him,” in the esteem of the *L.A. Reader* critic and National Society of Film Critics member Henry Sheehan (276). The same writer also attributes its success as popular entertainment to its comparability with the lost-generation rebel-without-a-cause tradition in Hollywood social problem films (275). Yvonne Tasker, writing on action films in *Spectacular Bodies*, regards *Near Dark* as a departure in genre but not in approach from the rest of Bigelow's oeuvre. Tasker in fact regards the film as more of an action sample that uses horror primarily to achieve what she calls a doubling, or a displacement of identification (156–57). To illustrate her point, she notes how Caleb's real family is splintered, and how his adoptive monstrous family is actually more whole, with two mothers in the person of the motherly Diamondback and in Mae, who suckles Caleb with her blood (signalling anxiety in Gothic texts—see Copjec 27) while weaning him away from her and toward performing his own killing.

It can be argued that in fact, with the film's resolution, what gets added onto Caleb's family is not so much a mother as a traditionalized woman, Caleb's prospective

wife and Sarah's prospective elder sister. With the draining away of Mae's vampirical fluid, what remains is the wholeness of her femininity; this is something that Caleb and his father would be able to use to counterbalance the boyish confidence of Sarah and her potentially unhealthy identification with her father and brother to the point of decorating her room with men's hats and guns. The reversal of sympathy for characters (in this case, in fact, a family) originally intended to function as villains derives from Susan Rubin Suleiman's description of the "overflow" effect, where the narrative "tells so much and so well that it ends up producing contradictory meanings that blur the limpidity of its own demonstration" (206). Suleiman's qualification that such an effect, especially in authoritarian fiction, may only be momentary, can be situated in Murray Smith's critique of Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" through his assertion that identification in cinema need not necessarily result in or be synonymous with sympathizing, nor do identification and/or sympathizing have to be triggered by point-of-view shots (48–49).

Opposed in this wise to the character of Mae would be the figure of Caleb, the hero of the plot, who may be seen as a character in a Western adventure. Jack Nachbar in his essay "Riding Shotgun" quotes John G. Cawelti on the literary Western in maintaining that the central characteristic of the film formula is the epic moment of confrontation between the pioneer and the wilderness, with the civilized hero caught between the two and forced to employ barbaric codes in order to win (102–03).³ Caleb finds himself in more of a reverse situation, in his being more of an increasingly barbaric hero who resorts to the ultra-civilized principles of modern medicine in order to save the situation for himself and Mae. It would appear from these few genre-oriented readings so far that *Near Dark*'s ideological problematic lies in its happy-ending resolution, one that upholds the traditional family over the rebellious grouping. Anna Powell describes the "good" family in *Near Dark* as romantically represented by Caleb, the male as threatened by evil, in this instance Mae's "bad" family (138–39). The parallel that Powell draws between Caleb and Jonathan Harker in *Dracula*, however, breaks down when we bring in history when and where available—with reference in particular to two verifiable certainties: one, that Vlad Tepes, the historical Dracula, was no different in his resort to cruel practices from the examples of other monarchs during his time (viz., the 15th and 16th centuries); and the other, that the purpose of the visibility of his shocking acts—that of preventing the retaliation of other equally cruel and arguably more traitorous members of the same nobility, who had subjected him to a few severe and possibly traumatizing experiences during his youth—was to consolidate his political gains and enable the stabilization of the Romanian empire (Giurescu 22–23).

In terms then of its status vis-à-vis authoritarian fictions, to use Suleiman's literary categorization of the ideological novel and the title of her study, one can draw from Suleiman's insight that genres may function as ideological configurations coded by narrative (203). Suleiman mentions three means by which authoritarian fictions may be subverted, all of them arguably figurative in *Near Dark*—the use of irrelevant details (as in the intrusion of "outside" or non-horror genres), the overstatement of certain concerns

(as in the violent excesses), and the avoidance of pursuing certain other questions (as in the ambiguities of the ending for feminist political approaches) (206–07).

The question, however, of whether *Near Dark* becomes a progressive sample just because it exhibits some attempts at subverting an authoritarian framework can be answered using Barbara Klinger's definition of the progressive genre in her take on the influential *Cahiers du Cinéma* editorial "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism." Klinger defines progressive genres as possessing three qualities: a pessimistic world view; stylistic self-consciousness and formal excess; and the valuation of "anticlassical" difference (80–86). Of these three criteria, I would say that *Near Dark* conforms unambivalently with an aspect of the second—that of formal excess—especially in its stereotypical depiction of the threat and enigma of female sexuality. There would of course be the danger of reductiveness in Klinger's essay, in that her stipulation of rules for the existence of a genre, even if defined as progressive, could result in subjecting activities, whose political significance is always-already contextual, to formulaic prescriptions. The safest conclusion one may make on *Near Dark*, given the foregoing considerations, is that the film may definitely not be considered an authoritarian fiction because of a number of its subversive gestures, but that it may not necessarily be a progressive genre sample either.

Perhaps a more workable framework can be seen in Adam Knee's essay, "The Compound Genre Film." Knee differentiates this type of work from the genre hybrid, an organically derived entity in which two or more sets of generic conventions have somehow become one; and from the sub-genre, the seemingly natural development within one genre of certain characteristics which happen to be shared by another genre. Knee defines the compound genre film as one that "concurrently engages multiple distinct and relatively autonomous horizons of generic expectation; the extent to which these horizons remain distinct is the extent to which we perceive the text as being compound in its generic nature" (141–42). He mentions an "inescapable level of self-consciousness" as the most important corollary of multiple generic affinities, stating that "when two or more sets of generic expectations are thrust together, each one immediately becomes a marked element, and a new level of discourse is of necessity opened up" (142). Knee's final question, however, appears to be the most significant in our consideration of *Near Dark*—that is, whether a multiplicity of generic voices remains intact or whether discursive tensions are nullified through a final large-scale condensation. Knee equates the latter with a "traditional unified resolution," and my take on *Near Dark* is that it is closer to the condition of exhibiting a multiplicity of generic voices rather than conflating these in the end the way that films like *Robocop* and *Gremlins*, to use Knee's examples, manage to do.

In fact I would venture to argue that, although the film moves into a number of genres which are authorially and spectatorially associated with men such as the horror-slasher, gangster, Western, and even soft-core art film (during its depiction of the flow of bodily fluids as a function of the sex drive), it is finally the feminine romantic love-story boy-gets-girl genre that facilitates the movie's narrative closure. The irony of this ascendancy of the generic feminine is that it permits the male character to apparently triumph over the forces associated with his female object. But then his traditional family,

as mentioned earlier, never really manages to fulfill its maternal lack, just as the “masculine” genres in *Near Dark* had to lend themselves over and in most cases even overturn some of their premises in order to ultimately give way to a non-masculine genre in the end.

To return then to the issue of postmodernism raised at the beginning, it can be seen that *Near Dark* exhibits both subjective fragmentation, as embodied in its pastiche of genres, as well as subjective alienation, which is manifested in its content. Phillip Brian Harper, however, describes postmodernism in “The Postmodern, the Marginal, and the Minor” as valorizing fragmentation over alienation, both in the historical subsequence of postmodernity after modernity and as descriptive of the manner in which postmodernism has both broken away from and continued the aesthetic traditions of modernism (21). In its exhibition of modernist traces within its postmodernizing imperative, the film manages to observe the parody of criticality (problematized as a bourgeois and thereby castrated version of modernist criticality in Kuspit 56–57) on the formal level and vestiges of the alternative of critical modernism (described as a combination of Marxism and critical theory that can meet the postmodernist critique of modernism—see Marsh 95) on the discursive level. One might wonder whether a perfect balance between the two options might be possible, or even desirable, or whether even the nature of this combination is anything new just as the opposite—discursive critical modernism with traces of formal postmodernism—had been around for some time in the film practice of the French New Wave and its influences. One might also take note of a phenomenon that may be tantamount to a return of the repressed, given that the issues that modernism raised were not so much answered as exploded, its fragments made to fit the patterns of the postmodernist mosaic: the comeback of the concerns of modernism, minus the stultifying overpresence of its formal dimensions, perhaps this time enabling its questions to stand out in stark relief.

Notes

- 1 The issue between AIDS-media discourse and the transfusion of blood as either a means of or a measure against vampiric infection in *Near Dark* would be the obvious means of developing this crucial and urgent point. I could not, however, bring in some of the issues and materials I had on the subject of AIDS without taking a detour from the discussion of postmodern aesthetics toward that of queer politics and representation. Another take on the queer content of *Near Dark* appears in the next end note.
- 2 One could raise a few idle questions, in the movie’s barroom massacre sequence, of whether the fact that the first victim, the waitress, was the only woman on the scene prior to the arrival of the vampires, takes the direction of misogyny or of a different kind of perversion; in fact, if the intertextual insight that the victims had been guilty of illicit sex were to be pursued, then who were the male victims carousing with?—since all they had with them at the time was the waitress performing as a servant, not as an equal. The potential queerness of the situation

is further inflected by the uninhibited homoeroticism of Severen, who licks off with his finger the blood on Caleb's mouth and is depicted as the only other adult vampire, apart from Mae, who graphically bites a victim—who, like Mae's, is male; in contrast, Caleb refuses to take the male victim assigned to him, attractive though the latter was, but (we may speculate) because the act, apart from its repulsiveness, required a same-sex physical intimacy.

- 3 Nachbar eventually concludes that, in mirroring "a similar splitting in the American consciousness," the Western story has "[blasted] out ... into new directions and into new forms..." (112). At the same time, however, he acknowledges that what he enumerates as anti-Westerns, (realist) new-Westerns, and personal-Westerns have always constituted recurrent trends in the genre's continuing attempts at revitalization. Toward the end he presages both the breakaway impulses and the problematics embodied in films like *Near Dark* by asking "Without a vision where is purpose? Where is meaning?" (112).

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4. Auteur Criticism: A Non-Recuperative Reappraisal

Auteur criticism arguably straddles the historical distinctions between classical and contemporary theorizing in film, in the sense that it had a totalizing vision behind it (typical of classical theory projects), but that it also lent itself to an immediate and comparatively simple deconstruction of its basic assertions, as befits any self-aware postmodern position. Its premise—that any film is ascribable to an individual creative intelligence—was merely a confirmation of what informed critics and practitioners were already long aware of; its larger implications, however, could be and were marshalled for political agendas by its original French proponents in their bid for industrial supremacy, and it is the view of this essay that such a transgression of the aesthetic boundaries traditionally ascribed to film theory may have contributed to the quick and vocal opposition that followed the formulation and propagation of auteurism. For this same reason it would be most interesting to trace the history of auteurism to its arrival and spread in the US, since one sure way for any issue in cinema to assume global significance is to have it course through Hollywood.

Film authorship underwent a transformation, from the “*politique des auteurs*” to the auteur theory, in its initial transition from France to the US. “A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema,” François Truffaut’s *Cahiers du Cinéma* essay, did not so much define directly a new policy as oppose one already in existence, the French cinema’s tradition of quality, for its supposed failure to provide film directors with genuinely creative options in the practice of their profession (233–35). A measure of the success of Truffaut’s mainly implied proposition can be seen in the reaction of *Cahiers* founder André Bazin, who cautioned that “there can be no definitive criticism of genius or talent which does not first take into consideration the social determinism, the historical combination of circumstances, and the technical background which to a large extent determine it” (251). The *politique des auteurs*, however, proved capable of international dissemination, not the least because it supplied a means of confluence for like-minded critical writers to bond together and make their own films, with the ostensible purpose of demonstrating the possibility of imbuing each body of work with the individual filmmaker’s personality. Yet the *Cahiers* critics were more fortunate (or shrewd) in their appropriation of certain technical innovations, including “fast filmstocks, lightweight cameras, new lighting equipment, and the liberation from the Hollywood set that all this implied” (Monaco 10), that made it possible for their films to be more financially feasible, and therefore potentially more profitable, than the studio-bound projects of which they were critical in the first place.

In heralding the arrival of the “auteur theory” in the US, Andrew Sarris more than mistranslated the *politique des auteurs*; he also, in *The American Cinema*, made no acknowledgment of Bazin’s caution against the excesses of formalism, although at one point he did launch into a diatribe against the French for their auteurist appreciation of Jerry Lewis (240–44). Sarris’s project can be seen as even more retrograde than that of the *Cahiers du Cinéma*, particularly in his hierarchization of mainly American (or US-exhibited) filmmakers topped by a “Pantheon.” Although John Caughie remarks that

Sarris's reconfiguration of industrial interference as constituting the source of creative tension between an auteur and his material had facilitated "the 'auteur-structuralist' shift" ("Andrew Sarris" 61), it would be more accurate to state that Sarris had actually been resistant to objections to his propositions; in a footnote, Cahie enumerates the exchanges among Sarris, Pauline Kael, and the British publication *Movie*. Kael's "Circles and Squares: Joys and Sarris," although rarely paired nowadays with Sarris's "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962" or "Toward a Theory of Film History" (his introduction to *The American Cinema*), manages to provide both a rejection of Sarris's premises as well as a call to be "pluralistic, flexible, relative in our judgments"—in short, eclectic, defined (though unproblematicized) as "the selection of the best standards and principles from various systems of ideas" (Kael 308). A more socially inflected critique was that of John Hess, who responded not to the practice of Sarris but to that of *Cahiers* by historicizing the politicization of French cinema after the Resistance and describing the *Cahiers* group's attempt to remove film from this area of concern as "culturally conservative, politically reactionary" (109).

That the equivalent of a French New Wave, dubbed the New American Cinema in retrospect, was emerging during the late 1960s, the same period of the publication of Sarris's book, may have reinforced this impression of the practical—though not the critical—viability of auteurism. Auteur-structuralism, as already mentioned, represented a rectification of the *politique des auteurs* in terms more useful for politically responsive critical applications. Drawing from the structural anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss, which in turn was based on the studies of linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure and of phonology by Roman Jakobson, auteur-structuralism (alternately called cine-structuralism) was attributed by Charles Eckert to English practitioners (152). Brian Henderson, in "Critique of Cine-Structuralism," echoes Geoffrey Nowell-Smith in defining the approach as the uncovering "behind the superficial contrasts of subject and treatment in a director's work [of] a structural hard core of basic and often recondite motifs" (167), disputes Peter Wollen's conceptualization of the auteur as "not a conscious creator but an unconscious catalyst and even ... that the auteur-structure is only one code among many" (176), and recommends "the principle of intertextuality" to overthrow the empirical and metaphysical tendencies of structuralism itself (179–80).

From this stage, auteurism encountered historical materialism, which in effect resulted in "a decentering of the authorial role" (Lapsley and Westlake 112). A number of European theorists may be credited for laying the groundwork for poststructural analyses in film in particular and culture in general, but the target area of application remained Hollywood. The infusion of Marxist concerns about the workings of social contexts in both the production and reception of films ensured that the earlier formalist slant could now be more easily discarded. David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson's monumental project, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, can be seen as an ironic culmination of Sarris's attempt to valorize Hollywood cinema, in the sense of upholding the historical prominence of Hollywood practice yet rejecting the reducibility advocated by both formalism (including auteurism, in its predilection for artistic genius) and orthodox Marxism (in its prescription of economic determinism). Staiger's contribution,

“The Hollywood Mode of Production to 1930,” started with the structuralist principles of *Cahiers* contributor Jean-Luc Comolli and the poststructuralist critique of John Ellis, maintaining that,

rather than considering Hollywood’s mode only as the historical conditions allowing a group style to exist, we must also see production practices as an *effect* of the group style, as a function permitting those films to look and sound as they did while simultaneously adhering to a particular economic practice. (88)

This historical materialist approach duly observed the shifting emphases in individual contributions to film production through a period of time as the study’s organizing principle, from (as examples) the director system through the director-unit system to the central producer system all before 1930, and from the producer-unit system through the package-unit system to alternative modes afterward. Although agreeing that this approach vastly improved on original auteurist concerns, Robert Lapsley and Michael Westlake also argue that

it falls short of integrating Hollywood into the larger social formation, and in this fails to validate the potential of the notions of structural causality, relative autonomy and overdetermination.... While acknowledging the possible determination in the last instance of the economic, there is no final synthesis relating the various practices within Hollywood either to one another or to those external to Hollywood. (117–18)

Other permutations of auteurism, however, did not distend the original proponents’ premises in vouching for the recognition of contexts of production, as auteur-structuralism did. Instead, these sought to simply extend auteurism’s applicability to areas outside of the romanticist notion of the filmmaker as artist:

1. Comolli, with Jean Narboni, argued in “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism” (originally published in *Cahiers*) for a recategorization of films according to their handling of ideological content and artistic form, expressing a preference for those that combine progressive accomplishments in both areas, but also giving more value to those that deal with regressive ideology in an ambiguous manner rather than those whose explicit political thrusts “do not effectively criticize the ideological system ... because they unquestioningly adopt its language and its imagery” (26–28). This view would have the effect of replacing the as it were “merely” artistic filmmaker with that of the creatively political practitioner, and can also be regarded as a legitimizing factor in the recuperation of artists such as Alfred Hitchcock, whose ambiguities were once regarded as reinforcing the moralist trajectory of his narratives (see Sarris’s appreciation of his technical skill and consequent ability to convey pleasure in *The American Cinema* 57–58) rather than as fissures that indicated potentially subversive attitudes.

2. A number of mostly formalistically inclined critics extracted from the auteur-structuralist position of acknowledging the contribution of other participants in the

filmmaking process by substituting the director as primary creative force with other members of the team—e.g., the scriptwriter (see Corliss), the star (see Dyer), the producer (see Pye), even “the system” (see Schatz). Such studies tend toward either a specialized or a speculative proposition of analyzing a body of work according to an alternative formal origin, rather than proposing a once-and-for-all replacement of the film director with one or the other possible candidates in film production.

3. A return to the consideration of the director’s role has been facilitated by reader-response studies, this time converting the empirically definable filmmaker into the spectator’s formation of the “filmmaker,” a necessarily tentative and changeable entity. One step beyond this has of course led to the rejection of *any* filmmaker, even the spectator’s own, in place of the spectator herself as the source of meaning. Such studies would understandably refuse to grant auteurism any place in their psychoanalytic schematizations, except in the strictly diachronic account as outlined here.

Admittedly these developments, especially the last, can be seen as proceeding from auteurism in mostly chronological fashion; the causal relations presented in this essay (a number of which were drawn from other studies) cannot be taken as definitive, if the present postmodern situation is to be upheld as the culmination so far of film studies in the West. Yet, to return to the concern mentioned at the start of this essay, auteur criticism in the US, even in the now seemingly primitive formalist extreme propounded by Sarris, can be seen as having had an enabling function in other contexts, if only by sheer reactive imperatives. Its effects outside of the US—and the First World that the US represents—can be traced in the emergence of Third-World consciousness and the subsequent development of forms of national resistances to political and cultural colonizations. Even such a study of Third-World filmmaking from a First-World perspective as Roy Armes has conducted includes a discourse on “individual authorship” (73–86) that does not seek to deconstruct auteurist concepts in the manner that, say, Truffaut’s or Sarris’s texts invariably provoked.

An explanation could be constructed from the Foucauldian concept of the “discursive formation—not simply an allegory or imaginative vision, but a gestative political structure which the Third World artist is consciously building or suffering the lack of” (Brennan 46–47). This formation can be and has been traditionally conceived in terms of power relations between the (neo)colonized and the (neo)colonizer, with resistance movements impelled to set up counter-structures of their own in order to challenge the dominant order. Auteurism can therewith be seen as the means by which the formerly politically disenfranchised Third-World cultural artist was invested with an authority that could lend itself to the more immediate purposes of social change. Within this context, the initial dilemma encountered by First-World critics of not finding a progressive political agenda from auteurism’s original aesthetic program was not applicable; the very fact that Third-World film practitioners could now be regarded as authority figures (using the liberal-humanist framework that was even then being derided in the West) was cause enough for the institution of repressive measures in Third-World national experiences by governments that were often in (neo)colonial collusion with First-

World powers. The Brazilian Cinema Novo movement, as a case in point, adhered to the model of critically articulate filmmakers that the *Cahiers* critics-turned-filmmakers represented, even as they criticized their New-Wave counterparts for the latter's alleged political insensitivities (Solanas et al. 11).

To some extent the problematics of Third-World auteurism can be formulated alongside the American, or actually Hollywoodian, account, in so far as most national film industries hold up Hollywood as both commercial ideal and primary competitor. Thus issues of representation, for example, can be enriched by intertextual analyses of both local and Hollywood samples. The larger challenge for what may be termed Hollywood's outside Other, however, lies in the globalization of Hollywood itself, concomitant with the call by scholars in Western countries for the erasure of national boundaries. In cinema this had long ago been realized in the incursion of American film products in most parts of the world, a tendency exacerbated by the so-called video revolution; but a reversal of direction is also emerging, with still exploitative relations in place. This can be seen in how the US perception of Chinese cinema, for example, has not only collapsed the still-existing national differences among Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the People's Republic of China, but has also expected "China" to supply the ideologically and stylistically regressive epics that would prove too costly for US and even European joint ventures to produce.

Certain possible solutions are being explored in the post-developmental scenarios that would modify the priorities of market development that have served to expropriate the gains of social movements in the past. Cinema would still be capable of inserting itself in the prospect of "new spaces opening up in the vacuum left by the colonizing mechanisms of development, either through innovation or the survival and resistance of popular practices" (Escobar 27). Discourses that concentrate on "the fulfillment of the democratic imaginary," on "cultural difference, alterity, autonomy and the right of each society to self-determination," and on "radical transformations of the modern capitalist order and the search for alternative ways of organizing societies and economies" (Escobar 47–48) can be posited against the teleology of modernity, of which cinema had been an important tool in the West. How Third-World entities in the post-developmental era will utilize concepts of film authorship, if not cinema itself, will perhaps be the next stage in the narrative of the US's heritage of auteurism.

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5. A Cultural Policy Experience in Philippine Cinema

The autobiographical voice can be used to upset stable notions of the subject. That voice can tell not only of the past but of the difficulties that fragment and unsettle the narrative flow. And against [a] rather generalized account of the problems inherent in speaking, the autobiographical voice may yield specific instances of struggle against the ideological centering of the subject. (Probyn 115)

The final account of an object says as much about the observer as it does about the object itself. Accounts can be read “backwards” to uncover and explicate the consciousness, culture and theoretical organization of the observer. (Willis 90)

Overquotation can bore your readers and might lead them to conclude that you are neither an original thinker nor a skillful writer. (Gibaldi and Achtert 56)

In 1982, at the age of 23, I was designated Head of the Writers Section of the Public Relations Division of the Experimental Cinema of the Philippines. Barely three years earlier I was in semi-hiding while finishing my bachelor’s degree in journalism at the University of the Philippines, on account of my aboveground involvement as managing editor of the student paper, which had run exposés on, among other things, the identity of the thrill-killer (a nephew of Ferdinand Marcos) of a UP student, as well as Imelda Marcos’s plan to raze down slum shanties (blamed in the Marcos-controlled press on arsonists) in order to construct recreation and commercial centers in their stead. I was also in charge of a propaganda unit of the student underground, and it was always ironically safer to assume that the military intelligence was aware of the fact, given the ease with which activist circles could be infiltrated. Upon getting my degree I was invited, along with a select few, to observe a newly opened guerrilla zone in the Cordillera mountains north of Manila; we had to carry arms, move along steep trails and cross the Chico River (whose proposed dam the Igorot and Kalinga tribes were opposing) by night, partake of the tribes’ viands consisting of insects, dog meat, and carabeef, and hide in rice granaries when the local militia raided the villages.

I backed out of my underground commitments after that experience, partly because I decided (as might be expected of a petit-bourgeois intellectual, as per classical Marxist prescriptions) that I much preferred to write, but also because the whole cause of our difficulties in the student movement—sudden shifts in assignments, reversals in criteria for evaluation, special projects without follow-up instructions—was laid bare for us by the New People’s Army officials who were our guides: the Communist Party of the Philippines was undergoing one of its most serious political upheavals ever, one which would result in a split between those who advocated the implementation of Mao Zhedong’s policy of encirclement of urban centers from the countryside and those who believed in carrying guerrilla warfare into the cities via assassinations of selected enemy targets (Abinales 40–43). I was too young to be overwhelmed by the implications of such challenges, but I also was not old enough to overcome my feeling of betrayal over the fact that such vital (and, I felt, life-threatening) information was withheld from me and my

comrades, ostensibly to ensure our complicity with whoever happened to be in charge of our cell systems.

I therefore proceeded to undertake legit media freelance assignments, though I also had to avoid my earlier specialization in political and economic issues. Culture it had to be, then, which in Philippine terms is virtually synonymous with movies. True to my orthodox Marxist orientation, I preferred film reviewing to society-page reporting, and by 1980 I was invited to join the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino, which was then the only other award-giving body for local cinema, as opposed to the corruption-ridden Filipino Academy of Movie Arts and Sciences or Famas. About this time the eldest Marcos child, Imee, was negotiating with the MPP and the Concerned Artists of the Philippines, headed by such Marcos oppositionists in culture as Cannes Film Festival mainstay Lino Brocka, in order to get their cooperation in setting up the institutional support system that would become the Experimental Cinema of the Philippines. I got in through the recommendations of contacts in both the MPP and the CAP.

Of course the fact that this was an activity that could fall under the rumpled rubric of cultural policy could not have occurred to me then. By the standards of the still-in-place Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zhedong Thought that I was coming from, I had compromised my ideals the moment I severed my links with the underground; anything I did aboveground, even in conjunction with people who might still have been in touch with subterranean personalities, was my own Cross to bear or nut to crack, mixed idioms notwithstanding. About a decade later, halfway around the world, I might have taken heart from Tony Bennett's suggestion that

Cultural studies might envisage its role as consisting of the training of cultural technicians: that is, of intellectual workers less committed to cultural critique as an instrument for changing consciousness than to modifying the functioning of culture by means of technical adjustments to its governmental deployment. (Bennett, "Useful Culture" 83)

Bennett of course was drawing from a number of assumptions that had transformed certain principles that may have been originally attributable to Marx. In terms of my field of involvement, for example, Stuart Hall was already then writing that popular culture may be formulated in terms of "the people versus the power-bloc: this, rather than 'class-against-class,' is the central line of contradiction around which the terrain of culture is polarized" (238). Bennett's take on this formulation of the field of contestation for the cultural activist would have sounded strange to any Marxist engaged in political tasks then: cultural policy, he declared, would entail cooperating with ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) "rather than writing them off from the outset and then ... criticizing them again when they seem to affirm one's direct functionalist predictions" ("Putting Policy into Cultural Studies" 32).

Philippine politics under martial law would have been reconcilable with this perspective, but only through a roundabout process. Genuine opposition then (as

contrasted with the state's series of official opposition parties) was divided between the so-called national democrats or natdems (an alliance comprising the CPP, NPA, and the National Democratic Front, a coalition of aboveground left-leaning organizations) and the considerably smaller circle of social democrats or socdems, identified with the also-then-outlawed Social Democratic Party. It would be possible to relate the agitation within the natdems to defy Maoist dogma by taking the revolution into the cities with the socdems' better-funded and more visible Light-a-Fire Movement—i.e., first attempts at what the Marcos regime declared was urban terrorist bombings. Natdem support was Third-World-based, if China were to be taken on its claim to being part of the Third World, while the socdems, whom the establishment press branded as steak commandos, were living (it up?) in exile in the US. The natdem line on Marcos was that he was a US-supported fascist, while that of the socdem—in order to whip up US support—was that he was a Communist. In retrospect, and with a little stretching, both were technically correct: Marcos was as much a reactionary authoritarian who sanctioned the brutal oppression of disenfranchised groups (though this was minor compared with his other abuses), while his apparently pathological quest for affluence and system of crony capitalism led him to using fail-safe legal justifications for the takeover by government of the most profitable economic institutions in the country, converting these into monopolies.

Hence, if the Marcos regime were not Communist, as the socdems charged, but pseudo-socialist in terms of state control of capital, then would it not be possible to work out ways and means of furthering leftist ideals within, say, a receptive government institution such as the ECP? As I had already related, this way of thinking could never have occurred to me, and my guess is that it might have sounded, to use Fredric Jameson's term in his reaction to Bennett, obscene to Bennett himself, had he found himself in such a context. This is not to dismiss however Bennett's inquisition into the thorny/muddy (the Philippines is tropical) realm of cultural policy. Closer to what most of us then were sensing, and managed to confirm by our participation, was Bennett's oral response to a conference question thus:

Even where the government—in the sense of the party in power—is conservative, it does not follow that the bureaucracies that they [sic] superintend function like seamless webs and that there are no contradictions within them.... One of the most instructive aspects of the experience of working with government cultural agencies is to realize that—whilst Althusser says they function via the category of the subject—some of them just don't seem to function at all! There's a real lack of coordination between different branches of government and this makes many openings that can be utilized. ("Putting Policy" 36)

Again, though, it would not be entirely accurate to say that Marcos's martial-law machinery was as inefficient as all that—after all, the man had held onto the presidency for over two decades during which he (in a manner of speaking) singlehandedly made himself one of the richest men—and his wife the richest woman, per a 1980s *Fortune* edition—in the world at one point, while reversing an entire country's status from the fastest-developing to the least developed in Southeast Asia. More to the point is the

personalistic nature of Philippine social relations, traceable to the communal values of the country's rural and tribal communities; among the first things about Filipinos that foreigners notice, for example, are (traditionalist) Filipinos' unabashed tactility as well as embarrassment over the handling of wealth and private property—hence, to indulge the issue further, Marcos's renown for having or forcing his way with women and his infamous concealment of his financial and real holdings.

As far as the ECP went, people were participating with ears attuned to the goings-on in Malacañang Palace, the presidential residence. It was consistently observable that Imee Marcos was as contemptuous of her mother as she was attached to her father. Imelda in turn was vocal about her desire to get some genuine European royalty interested in Imee; when the latter had an affair with a sportsman from an oppositionist family, who (to make matters worse) was married to a beauty queen who was widely speculated to have been one of Marcos's conquests, things started falling into place. In a way, this foreshadowed the succession of hubris and stop-gap measures that characterized the assassination of socdem figure Benigno Aquino jr. (hubris) and the call, under international pressure, for snap presidential elections (stop-gap) which resulted in the so-called people-power revolution of February 1986.

What happened in 1982 was the kidnapping of Imee's lover, Tommy Manotoc, by the NPA, according to the military, though of course this was already getting recognized as a knee-jerk reaction on the part of the government (Aquino's assassin, also assassinated, was to be identified as a Communist gunman). Mysteriously, Imee got back both her man, in a crudely staged rescue mission, and the position of Director-General of the ECP—which everyone expected to be headed by Imelda or John J. Litton, her (and Jack Valenti's) subordinate. Imee's fulfillment in her role as wife and mother-to-be was something which both cultural activists (aligned in Imee's camp) and Imelda's loyalists sought to take advantage of; so long as Imee held the top position, however, it was "our" camp that mostly won out in the end.

On two levels, then, we at the ECP had to contend with Hall's observation that

If the forms of provided commercial popular culture are not purely manipulative, then it is because, alongside the false appeals, the foreshortenings, the trivialization and short-circuits, there are also elements of recognition and identification, something approaching a recreation of recognizable experiences and attitudes, to which people are responding. (233)

Our admittedly not-conscious application of this principle had to do with both working within, through, or out of the range and breadth afforded by palace intrigues, at the same time providing at least a semblance of actual support for the ECP's constituencies whenever possible. The degrees of successful possibilities also varied between mother and daughter: in Imelda's case I could only hope to put in a few words of universal encouragement to artists' struggles in her Manila International Film Festival speech welcoming Xie Jin, then recently "rehabilitated" by the People's Republic of China; in the

case of Imee (who asked for material on extremely short notice), I could sneak in, for example, a promise that she would provide subsidies for independent film projects, then derived secret satisfaction in learning that some filmmakers called on her next day to seek fulfillment of her pledge. This was not to denigrate the symbolic achievement in marshaling Imelda's MIFF, however. Despite Bennett's claim that "the programmatic, institutional, and governmental conditions in which cultural practices are inscribed ... have a substantive priority over the semiotic properties of such practices" ("Putting Policy" 28), it might be possible to re-assess the expulsion by Imee of the MIFF from the ECP as resulting in comparable status for both institutions, and providing the ECP with less of the goodwill (along with the notoriety of the Manila Film Center's scaffolding collapsing on about 200 workers, many of whom had to be buried or killed in order for the construction to be completed on time) that the first MIFF had engendered.

In terms of the ECP's camp (pun incidental) positions, then, the MIFF, as already mentioned, was Imelda territory, as were the Film Archives of the Philippines and the Film Fund, which provided subsidies for mainstream film projects. The service groups—public relations, where I functioned, and theater management—were in good hands, as far as we were concerned—meaning these were controlled and staffed by people from Imee's circles in theater or the UP (where she and I were non-acquainted classmates before my activist years); more significant in terms of industry impact were the Film Ratings Board, which rebated the taxes of quality (measured according to plastic aesthetic worth) productions, and the Alternative Cinema Department, which produced full-length works by new directors and screened heretofore unavailable, censored, or banned foreign and local productions. One consideration in evaluating the efforts expended in attempting to implement progressivity in these areas is Hall's admonition to avoid thinking "of cultural forms as whole and coherent: either wholly corrupt or wholly authentic. Whereas,... [in actual practice,] they play on contradictions" (233). Accordingly, it would be possible to say that, for example, the trend in sex films initiated by the MIFF, while denounced by both the censors and the left (including the MPP and the CAP), also made it possible for a number of filmmakers to come up with critiques of contemporary Philippine society using frameworks of social decadence (*Scorpio Nights*, 1985), protofeminist consciousness (*Company of Women*, 1985), or neocolonialist intrusions (*Boatman*, 1984); moreover, in order to prove that the libertarian spirit applied to more than just sexual themes, previously suppressed films (notably *Manila by Night*, 1980 and *Sakada*, 1976) were granted permission to be exhibited at the Manila Film Center. On the other hand, the breaks provided new talents by the Alternative Cinema Department also proved to be a mixed blessing, but in the opposite direction; the newcomers turned out to be either political reactionaries or incapable of surviving in the industry at large. A more rewarding activity was the same department's unofficial mobilization, along with the CAP, of film artists in a series of mass actions against censorship. The irony of one government institution agitating against another was not lost on the chief censor, the late Maria Kalaw-Katigbak, who promptly invoked the fact of her being a presidential appointee and therefore on the same bureaucratic level as Imee Marcos.

The Aquino assassination led to a number of responses: the abandonment by Imee of her ECP responsibilities (supposedly to concentrate on her legislative assignments, although it became clear eventually that she was preparing to emigrate with her new family); the defection of a number of key personnel—some to opposition media, others (including myself) to the government’s less high-profile media center; and, finally, the dissolution of ECP, to be reconstituted as the Film Development Foundation of the Philippines under Litton—an entity which set about screening quickie sex films without regard to their sources, and sending its officials to trips abroad to solicit support for an MIFF that was already announced as not forthcoming in the foreseeable future. One way—perhaps the easiest—of accounting for this ultimate instability in what has turned out to be the only largely positive contribution of the Filipino government to its film industry is to maintain that bigger political considerations overrode such smaller cultural concerns. This leads us to Jameson’s dissent with Bennett’s call for participation in ISAs, stemming from the former’s view that culture

is not a “substance” or a phenomenon in its own right, it is an objective mirage that arises out of the relationship between at least two groups. This is to say that no group “has” a culture all by itself: culture is the nimbus perceived by one group when it comes into contact with and observes another one. It is the objectification of everything alien and strange about the contact group. (Jameson 33)

From the preceding account we can discern that the “two groups” in Jameson’s stipulation did not, perhaps even could not, remain consistent over time: first were the us-and-them formation of the Imee-vs.-Imelda camps, which almost instinctively coalesced into the ECP vis-à-vis the higher government organ (constructible in this sense as the Office of the President of the republic) as a response to the Aquino assassination, leading in the end—of the Marcos dictatorship, that is—to a still-to-be-problematized government-vs.-the people/the opposition binary. This fluidity, in the delimited sense used here, somehow serves to confirm Ian Hunter’s critique of the implications of Hall’s concept of articulation:

The notion of a general struggle between contending classes or “rival hegemonic principles” over ideologies or cultural meanings becomes unintelligible. Instead of appealing to the ideological articulation (in either sense) of class interests, we must look to the differentiated array of organizational forms in which cultural interests and capacities are formulated, if we are to engage with the forms in which they are assessed and argued over. (Hunter 118)

Hunter poses an even more difficult challenge in cultural practice, especially when such practice is ongoing, when he opines that “It is necessary to abandon the ethical posture and forms of cultural judgment invested in the concept of culture as complete development and true reflection” (115); in the ECP experience, this became manifest in the concurrence between the MPP and CAP on the one hand and the Board of Censors for Motion Pictures, which in turn called on a then-oppositionist Catholic Church to denounce the proliferation of sex-genre films at the Manila Film Center. The puritanism of the left has continued to play into the hands of media-control advocates consisting of

both commercialist producers and always-interested conservative politicians, including members of the clergy. The absence of any form of support (apart from box-office responses) for sex films resulted in the marginalization of both their production and distribution after the February 1986 “revolution”—i.e., they continued to be produced, but only as B-items for exhibition in provincial circuits that could not be restrained by the censors (who wield police powers) because, as Corazon Aquino’s censors chief alleged, these circuits were military-operated. What may be necessary here is therefore an appreciation, on the part of responders, especially those in academe, of the “play on contradictions” mentioned by Hall (233) in the continuing popularity of the sex-film genre, beyond its strictly pornographic dimensions.

A further direction—that of the spectator—is implied by Meaghan Morris in her consideration of colonialist interventions:

When the voice of that which academic discourses—including cultural studies—constitute *as* popular begins in turn to theorize its speech, then ... that theorization may well go round by way of the procedures that Homi Bhabha has theorized as “colonial mimicry,” for example, but may also come around eventually in a different, and as yet utopian, mode of enunciative practice. However, I think that this can happen only if the complexity of social experience investing our “place” as intellectuals today—including the proliferation of different places in and between which we may learn and teach and write—becomes a presupposition of, and not an anecdotal adjunct to, our practice. (Morris 41)

What this in effect suggests is the creation of a divide, if necessary, between what Philippine academicians and the media (which is heavily influenced by representatives from academia) hold onto as moral even in their most radical political agenda, and what “the people,” properly problematized, believe anyway, as manifest in their insistence on such supposedly disreputable film fare as escapist fantasies, blood-and-guts violence, stops-out melodrama, and graphic sex outings. Simon Frith’s recuperatory reformulation of the high-low dichotomy might prove to be a more workable starting point, rather than the poststructural extreme of discarding all measures for excellence as implicated by their formulators:

If one strand of the mass cultural critique was an indictment of low culture from the perspective of high art (as was obviously the case for Adorno, for example), then to assert the value of the popular is also, certainly, to query the superiority of high culture. Most populist writers, though, draw the wrong conclusion; what needs challenging is not the notion of the superior, but the claim that it is the exclusive property of the “high.” (105)

Of relevance here might be the concept of subcultures, so as not to fall into the trap of homogenizing the movie-going masses:

The study of subcultural style which seemed at the outset to draw us back towards the real world, to reunite us with “the people,” ends by merely confirming the distance between the reader and the “text,” between everyday life and the “mythologist” whom it surrounds, fascinates and finally excludes. It would seem that we are still, like Barthes, “condemned for some time yet to speak *excessively* about reality.” (Hebdige 140)

While therefore it may be necessary to accept Jameson’s description of the intellectual’s necessary and constitutive distance from classes of origin and chosen affiliation, and from social groups as well (40), it would also be useful to consider the principles, rather than the prescriptions, that underlie Bennett’s pronouncements on cultural policy:

If we are to write an adequate history of culture in the modern period, it is to the changing contours of its instrumental refashioning in the context of new and developing cultural and governmental technologies that we must look. This is not to say that the changing coordinates of “culture’s” semantic destinies are unimportant. However, it is to suggest that these derive their significance from their relations to culture’s governmental and technological refashioning. (“Useful Culture” 77)

How these tensions apply to a Third-World context characterized by a triple form of neocolonial (US) political, (Japanese) economic, and (Vatican-State) religious dependence is the question that Filipino cultural activists will have to seek answers to. I could, to be flippant about it, complete my tour of these colonizing influences by visiting the Vatican; or, more seriously, I could return to the Philippines and assume once more a role in cultural policy, or remain in academe and provide critical responses to developments in local culture. Where I come from, I can only productively engage in one activity at a time. Like those of the Philippines, my (mis)adventures still have to be played out.

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SPECIFICITIES

1. Viable Lessons from another Third-World Model

A project of making comparisons between the Philippines and Brazil may not appear too productive at first, considering the geographic separations—i.e., continental (the Philippines in Asia, Brazil in America), oceanic (the Philippines by the Pacific, Brazil by the Atlantic), and hemispheric (the Philippines north of the equator, Brazil south). The two countries, however, may have more in common between them than what, say, the Philippines (where I come from) may have with any other non-Asian nation. Both had Latinate colonizers—Spain in the Philippines, Portugal in Brazil—and were subsequently subject to US neocolonial interventions; the Philippines, in fact, was the US's first and only colony allowed to nominally retain a measure of national sovereignty, with Viet Nam unsuccessfully targeted as a second prospect. Although Cinema Novo leader-practitioner Glauber Rocha could write that Brazil was “the only Latin American country that never had a bloody revolution like Mexico, or the baroque fascism of Argentina, or a real political revolution like Cuba, or guerrillas like those found in Bolivia, Colombia, or Venezuela” (“Tricontinental Filmmaker” 78), all of which were common to Philippine historical experience, it would still be possible to point out that the earlier mentioned factors resulted in mixed European and American influences in the national cultures of both countries, as well as systems of economic dependency and political vulnerability, most clearly manifested in their common experiences of military dictatorships supported, if not instigated, by the US.

Another basic problem in undertaking this type of comparative study is the fact that most poststructuralist frameworks, while allowing for the syntagmatic juxtapositioning of cultural elements regardless of categories of origin, stop short of allowing definitive prescriptions in the realm of cultural policymaking—a cautionary measure understandably suitable to the First-World contexts where such ideas evolved. Third-World existences, however, do not allow for too much interplay between critical analyses and cultural implementation, beyond what available institutions allow; such limitations may be ascribed to both the countries' inevitable concern with and prioritizing of economic development and the consequently underdeveloped state of their cultural institutions. One poststructural framework, however, was formulated in similarly indigent circumstances in the USSR; not surprisingly, it appears to hold a potential applicability for the drawing out of lessons from the Philippine and Brazilian cultural experiences.

Although utilized primarily for literary analysis, M. M. Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, by its very formulation, allows for a resistance to the marginalization of the Other that characterizes monologism (292–93). His assertion—that “the single adequate form for verbally expressing authentic human life is the open-ended dialogue. Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue” (293)—allows for a wider interpretation of what constitutes a cultural unit for analysis, as well as a more comprehensive purview of both source and destination of analytical insights. A more

direct formulation of this principle would be to state that, “while dialogism at its root is interpersonal, it applies by extension to the relation between languages, literatures, genres, styles, and even entire cultures...” (Stam, *Subversive Pleasures* 14).

A historically viable model, however, would not allow for the Philippines and Brazil relating explicitly with each other, since the level of direct cultural exchange between the two never progressed beyond the minor instance of a Filipino production company shooting Gil Portes’s *Carnival Queen*, a take-off on Marcel Camus’s *Black Orpheus* (1959), during the samba festival in 1981, with Filipino soft-core actress Alma Moreno and teen idol William Martinez delineating an incestuous dimension to Ricardo Lee’s adaptation. What actually makes possible the act of relating the Philippines and Brazil to each other is both countries’ position as Third-World nations interacting with, or rather (from a different perspective) struggling against, the First World. In this regard it becomes imperative to further define the First World as encompassing both Europe and the US, with all the attendant cultural differences obtaining between the two entities—e.g., in a filmic context, European art cinema vis-à-vis classical Hollywood narrative respectively. Such a fragmentation of an entity traditionally regarded as monolithic can be seen as merely a reverse application of the “monolith’s” fragmentation of its Other: i.e., since the First World had treated the Third World as comprising discrete national units, a conception initially acceded to by the Third World in formulating its oppositional response, the problematics of Third-World relations (not only in relating to the First and then-Second Worlds but also in Third-World countries interacting among themselves) may be traced to the underdeveloped nations’ naturalization of the overdeveloped nations’ essentially self-serving contrivance. One objection that may be raised to this approach is that it requires essentializing certain properties not only of the First-World entities, but those of the Third-World countries under discussion as well. On the other hand, the need to arrive at more-than-provisional political prescriptions justifies a reformulation of the postmodernist view

that there is only one correct way to discourse on race and culture.... To proclaim pluralism, relativism, oppositionality or anything else instead is just to promote the newest form of essentialism. This is a conjuring trick which signals a pretense to moving away from essentialist thinking while actually moving back toward it. (Blythe 211)

Such a suspension of anti-essentialist principles can be regarded as the start of an understanding of colonialist discourse “through an analysis that maps its ideological function in relation to actual imperialist practices. Such an examination reveals that any evident ‘ambivalence’ is in fact a product of deliberate, if at times subconscious, imperialist duplicity...” (JanMohamed 80).

To begin with originative instances, film was first presented in Brazil on July 8, 1896 (Johnson and Stam, “The Shape of Brazilian Film History” 19), nearly eight decades after political independence but within the period of “British free-trade imperialism” (17); Filipinos were able to account for an experience of film as early as 1897, during the eve of

the Filipino-Spanish War, which was to transmute during the turn of the century into the Fil-American War. As a result, the American government, worried about the growing tide of anti-imperialist sentiment among US citizens, declared the end of the war (with the US winning, as per the prescriptions of Manifest Destiny) only four years after, in 1902, while still sending troops to the Philippines for the next twenty years to supposedly handle isolated instances of banditry; about two decades before V. I. Lenin declared film as the official medium for revolutionary propaganda in the USSR, the private and public American colonial sectors enacted the same thing, though not for the same purpose, in the Philippines. In the opposite direction, the essay “Towards a Third Cinema,” which proposes the “Development of a Cinema of Liberation in the Third World,” has been regarded as an attempt at reversing this relation of cultural domination, specifically against neocolonialism (Solanas and Getino 19). It could also can be situated within a struggle against the premises and terms set by a cultural machinery that was expressly utilized during its still-developing stages for First-World (though not always anti-Third World) purposes. Even the Third Cinema essay attests as much, in the contradiction of its call to resist the “fully rounded film structured according to the metrics imposed by bourgeois culture” right after having succumbed to the aesthetic boundaries imposed by presumably the same repressive (Western) cultural source in the essay’s valorization of realist values (23).

The handling of a medium that combined intensive capitalist contributions with an extensive mass outreach resulted in an appreciation, and subsequent accommodation (though rarely an appropriation), of critical Third-World film products by First-World entities which may be interpreted as indicative of internal discursive dissension within mutual liberal democratic spaces. Philippine filmmakers critical of Ferdinand Marcos (and his consequent representation by the Left as a US “puppet”), for example, preferred to make their marks in the European festival circuits—the late Lino Brocka and Mike De Leon in Cannes and Ishmael Bernal and Kidlat Tahimik in Berlin in the 1980s, following the lead of Manuel Conde in Venice in the 1950s—rather than in the country’s neo-/colonizer, the US. The situation, however, led to Brocka and De Leon for a time (and Kidlat and a current wave of independent practitioners ever since) making movies that catered more to the tastes of European cineastes rather than of the Hollywood-influenced star- and genre-oriented Filipino moviegoers. Rocha himself interpellated the Third Cinema discourse by warning that “The fact that Cinema Novo is well received abroad in no way justifies the difficulty it has in getting accepted in Brazil” although he problematically maintained that “the fundamental problem ... lies with the public” (“History of Cinema Novo” 25). One may grant that Rocha is privileged by his having gone farther in attempting to reach his local market, since he had earlier enumerated an ambitious agenda for Cinema Novo, namely

a production and distribution organization independent of established points of view or ideas, and the freedom to make films which provide a cinematic expression of Brazilian politics and culture. We all have the same political and economic objectives but a great diversity of styles because we are against the principles of academism. (Crowdus and Starr 5)

He had also believed that Italian neorealism and the French New Wave were “practically destroyed by American distribution which [had] bought off all the cineastes except Godard and a few others,” thus making all the more necessary the founding of institutions to counter the collusion between “big Brazilian commercial film production syndicates” and foreign, specifically American and European, film distributors (6).

To further understand such an overriding concern for what may be called institutional safeguards, it would be necessary to delve into the systemic and historical experiences of Brazilian cinema—an inspection that would yield even more startling parallels between it and that of the Philippines. Vera Cruz, described as “the most complete realization Brazil has known of the film industry myth” (Galvão 271), was founded in 1949 to produce “a cinema ‘just like foreign’ cinema, which could be shown with pride to audiences throughout the world” (273–74). At first glance this could be tied in with the establishment of the Philippine studio system during roughly the same period (after the Japanese occupation and during the American reoccupation), which led to the cartel-like control of production and distribution during the 1950s disturbingly designated as the first Golden Age of Philippine cinema (Garcia 39); this monopoly, however, was busted by the Philippine Supreme Court using—a then-common practice—the US Supreme Court decision on the Paramount case as model.

A likelier Filipino counterpart to Vera Cruz was the founding of still-existing Viva Films, as a response to both the control by Chinese Filipinos of the major production companies, as well as the call by then First Lady Imelda Marcos for local films to depict her version of the “true, good, and beautiful.” Viva Films launched the daughter of urban warlord Pablo Cuneta, forty-plus-year-long mayor of once-prosperous Pasay City in Metro Manila, as its signature star in glossy vehicles that featured rich families troubled but not overwhelmed by lower-class villains. After the February 1986 uprising that toppled the Marcos dictatorship, Viva Films was sequestered by the ad-hoc Presidential Commission on Good Government but cleared after no proof could be determined of its having been funded by government money siphoned through the Cultural Center of the Philippines. Ironically, the post-’86 Viva Films contracted the services of Lino Brocka, who directed Sharon Cuneta in rags-to-riches and antihero roles, as well as other stars in hit projects that openly castigated the Marcoses; moreover, the studio itself linked up with one of the two major Chinese Filipino-controlled distribution circuits (the others consist of shopping malls, also owned by Chinese Filipinos, and countryside sex-film circuits, alleged by Corazon Aquino’s censors chief Manuel Morato as military-operated).

From this narrativizing can be seen the feasibility of a major studio—three in fact, similar to the 1950s system—thriving within a non-monopolistic system, rather than the Philippine ’50s studio system (and Vera Cruz) representing monopolistic setups that demanded to be challenged. Another factor, that of government involvement, has already been mentioned in passing but actually is indispensable to the film history of both countries. Brazilian state intervention in the local film industry was initiated by the relatively democratic regime of Getulio Vargas in the 1930s and proceeded through

periods of military oppression to the present (Johnson 11); Philippine film institutional support, on the other hand, was facilitated by Marcos in impressively variegated forms—including international-festival sponsorship, subsidies for feature and short subjects, production of scriptwriting-contest winners, censorship-exempted exhibitions, archival research and preservation, and tax rebates for aesthetic achievements—*after* he had implemented martial law. The difference points to how subsequent political generations in both national instances have tended to prefer, or perhaps be less suspicious of, a form of state support which can be associated with democratic processes. This can be seen in how post-Marcos dispensations have so far refused participation in the Filipino movie industry beyond the traditionally restrictive institutions of censorship and taxation. State support, of course, need not always be an end in itself for culture-policy activism. Despite a practically uninterrupted presence in the Brazilian filmmaking scene, for example, the state, as per Randal Johnson’s finding in his study of the industry, “has failed to reconcile its cultural and industrial responsibilities” (15).

Outside of the Brazilian government’s concerns certain film-production sectors have still managed to thrive. Johnson mentioned as owing nothing to state support Brazil’s Golden Age (1908–11) and the *chanchada* genre’s heyday between 1940 and 1960, plus the *pornochanchadas* produced by exhibitors to satisfy the quota for national films (14). The Philippines could point to a significant pre-Marcos era of practice that has not been ultimately tainted with the stigma of institutional support: the free-enterprise emergence of one-man (rarely one-woman) auteurs from the 1910s until the Japanese occupation, the “Golden-Age” studio system during the 1950s and the independent producers who replaced the major studios in the 1960s, plus the current uneasy balance between big studios and occasional independents. Regional cinema (based in Metro Cebu rather than Metro Manila), however, has depended on tax exemptions to make a feasible comeback in the 1990s after its latest fadeout during the ’70s, while uncommercial art films are in effect controlled by European financiers. Hard-core sex films, which made an appearance twice—first during the build-up toward the declaration of martial rule and again during the impending deposition of the dictatorship—can now be ascribed to the Marcos machinery’s attempts at cultural engineering, whether to incite public outrage at the breakdown in morality during a period of intensified labor and student activism in the first instance, or to deflect the public’s attention from the growing anti-fascist movement in the second.

Although this emphasis paid to governmental activities in the cultural production of film may appear too deterministic in a developed society, it should be seen that, perhaps most especially in the Third World,

Modern forms of cultural politics often have their origins and *raison d’être* in the governmentalization of culture: that is, the objectives to which they are committed are a by-product of the governmental uses to which specific forms of culture have been put just as those objectives can only be met via modifications to existing governmental programs or the development of new ones. (Bennett, “Useful Culture” 71)

More important for the purposes of this essay, the consideration of cultural-policy contexts will not so much enrich a critical project as suggest what form such a project could take if it is to be envisioned as feasible. To put it another way,

It is only by using the kinds of correctives that would come from putting “policy” into cultural studies that cultural studies may be deflected from precisely those forms of banality which, in some quarters, have already claimed it while also resisting the lure of those debates whose contrived appearance of ineffable complexity makes them a death trap for practical thinking. (Bennett, “Putting Policy into Cultural Studies” 33)

The need, however, to particularize in terms of which national cinema is being discussed and how the critical construction of this cinema and its problems relates to the other arises from the insight that,

in identifying conformities and uniformities, we are seeking and foregrounding likenesses and then projecting those likenesses onto “reality” or history or culture as all there can be and all there is. We need to understand that in so doing, we too are playing a part in suppressing difference and in making singularity invisible and unspeakable. (Bannet 49)

In the face then of the mainstream-vs.-independent opposition, with its ambivalent institutional interventions, that characterizes (with the expected specificities) the cinemas of both countries, the singular aspect of the Brazilian historical experience that can still be counted as a genuine contribution to Philippine film history would be what has been comprehensively described as “alternative aesthetic traditions both inside and outside of Europe” (Stam, “Symposium” 34). This connects with Bakhtin’s writings, this time on the carnivalesque, as well as with modernist cannibalistic or anthropophagic art, plus several other heretofore unrecognized principles that “have in common [the] notion of turning tactical weakness into strategic strength” (34). Three of these traditions may be held up for closer inspection in the Philippine context:

1. The carnivalesque, particularly in its extremist emphasis on bodily functions, can be seen as challenging the overriding Vatican-determined Catholic morality in the Philippines, virtually a form of cultural colonization which has resulted in the dubious spectacle of progressive forces occasionally uniting with reactionaries in condemning instances of toilet humor, graphic sex, or gross-out special effects-reliant violence.
2. Cannibalism as a conceptual approach forces the reconsideration of what has been termed “originality as vengeance,” wherein cultural resistance to the effects of Western colonialism was (mis)construed in terms of the purist pursuit of themes, treatments, and stylistics in art and literature that were unimplicated by any form of precedent, especially from the West. The notion of “eliminating the foreign and

recuperating the national” is particularly difficult, if not impossible, not only because it is again shared by both left and right in conflicting terms (Stam and Xavier 281), but also because it presumes the requisite of industrial advancement in a medium as technology-dependent as film.

3. Rocha’s hunger aesthetics, which he opposed to films that were “artistically pretentious, politically innocuous, and commercially disastrous” (“Hunger Aesthetics” 9), can be positioned against the sensibilities of the currently emerging independent filmmakers in Manila, who consistently seek to prove their worth to producers, critics, and audiences by out-Hollywooding, so to speak, established practitioners in the hope of beating the latter at their own game. Rocha’s stipulation that “a precise ‘political’ line from a cultural and an economic point of view” be held as a key to the success of Cinema Novo’s hunger-aesthetics experiment (9) need not be taken in conjunction with his call for the development of more effective means of reaching a local audience through culture-specific means; furthermore, the fissures in traditional and alternative modes of practice suggested by the practice of cannibalist and carnivalesque filmmaking do not allow for the apparently orthodox Marxist conception of political correctness implied by the imposition of political lines, precise or otherwise.

What Rocha has pointed out in terms of audience studies can actually be reconfigured in terms of market expansion beyond historically unsuccessful or limited/-ing boundaries. For the Philippines, this means a reconsideration of the worth of any potential outlet, starting with European art circuits (including festivals and German television), in terms of the response of a primarily Filipino mass audience. To reformulate the problem, Philippine filmmakers have been viewing themselves as part, or worthy, of the West, refining their oppositional discourse in terms of which First-World centers are more responsive to the country’s progressive political aspirations. What has been missed out in the leap from a national identity to a foreign audience is the more immediate audience, that of the Asian community; perhaps the notion of what is Asian in relation to the Philippines may be even more difficult to resolve than the First-World question, but at the moment all the possible geographic subformations except for Central and South Asias, Indochina, and the Three Chinas (Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the mainland, currently construed in the US as *the* Asian cinema) have the advantage of including the Philippines in them: the Far East, Southeast Asia, Australasia, Indo-Malaya and Indo-Polynesia, and Asia-Pacific.

The postcolonial inquiry into issues beyond national boundaries need not negate other Philippine issues overridden during and by neo-/colonialism. Apart from radical audience studies in popular culture, the study of racial representation is another aspect that can be paralleled with both Brazil and the US (Stam, “Slow Fade to Afro”). By virtue of their country’s condition as the most colonized in the region (apart from Spain and the US, Britain, the Netherlands, and Japan had had short and sometimes geographically delimited periods of occupation), Filipinos have come to associate racism with Western values; in fact, a counter-racist attitude directed against caucasians may be sensed in

current popular-culture products, while the anti-Japanese sentiment resulting from World War II (encouraged by the Americans, as was the anti-Spanish sentiment after the Filipino-Spanish War) has combined with racism against the Chinese, originally induced by the Spaniards purportedly to discourage the “indio” populace from engaging in entrepreneurship. Moreover, the pre-Hispanic myth of the Malayan baker-god preferring the brown man over the undercooked white and overcooked black men feeds into the emergent critical attitude toward caucasians, aggravates the dominant chauvinism against white Asians (Indo-/Chinese, Japanese, Koreans) and Africans (specifically Arabs, compounded by the non- or anti-Christian nature of their religious politics), and does nothing for the residual contempt held for blacks, including the native-Filipino aetas, forced to live as nomadic highlanders (most famously on the recently erupted Mt. Pinatubo) because of lowland encroachments on their tribal properties. The issue of modern-day Filipino racism can be raised by tracing its origins to the various Christian catechisms which are controlled by the conservative segments of both the Vatican and the US Protestant groups, its immediate result being the multi-levelled discrimination practiced against those perceived as non- or anti-Christian—the Chinese and Indians in the metropolitan centers, Muslims in the rural south, and ethnic minorities throughout the archipelago.

In fact the issue of race can prove crucial in forging a new dimension to Filipino identity in terms of regional as well as Asian cinema, which may consider as starting point the example of the New Latin American Cinema as supposedly “a social practice that revels in the diversity and multiplicity of its efforts to create an ‘other’ cinema with ‘other’ social effects as a prerequisite of its principal goal to reveal and analyze the ‘reality,’ the underdevelopment and national characteristics, that decades of dependency have concealed” (Lopez 311). One further area of outward exploration would be the equivalent of diaspora literature, after the fact that the Philippines’s primary export since its economic slippage from the fastest developing to the least-developed Southeast Asian nation has been human labor. In New Latin American Cinema terms, “Geographic and cultural displacement has fostered decentered views on identity and nationality, stressed the dialectics of historical and personal circumstance, and validated autobiography as a reflexive site” (Pick 195)—advantages that benefited not just films produced in exile, but those done in local industries as well. The implication of this enrichment and modification of discourses on Philippine national identity is a renewal of critical efforts away from the currently fashionable deconstructive revaluation of progressive artists toward a truly concerted effort on the part of both critics and practitioners. Texts in this sense can still serve deconstructive purposes, but not for the manner in which they expose the limits of their authors inasmuch as the resultant observation validates the opposition to both works and their authors by the forces of reaction; rather, as propounded by Scott Nygren, “Once recognized, the doubleness inhabiting texts cannot be ‘gone beyond’ in the sense of reestablishing a new syncretic universal transparency of meaning, but idiosyncratic sites can be explored which foreground the displacements of meaning engendered by double contexts” (174). One possible methodology, apart from the available outmoded formalist approach and the unproductive deconstructive strategy, would be Nygren’s recommendation to

somewhat arbitrarily identify ... relatively stable areas of activity that function to orient (to use a deliberately loaded term) current work. First, applying the techniques of literary and textual analysis to the domain of cultural studies is now long established but still remarkable.... Second (or as a variation on or partial split within the first), the reorientation of political and ideological analysis toward the domain of cultural forms remains pivotal. (174)

No doubt such a project will engender its own resistance, possibly even from the same sectors that staked claims to radicalism during their time, just as, say, the “cinema of garbage” practitioners were dismissed by Cinema Novo filmmakers after the former viewed the latter as a new establishment force (Xavier 35–36). What remains to be seen is how cinema, which had proved to be vital in discourses on the Marcos dictatorship, will still be able to find a role in the future of Philippine culture.

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2. Race as Discourse in Southeast Asia Film Ethnographies

The discourse of race is arguably the core of the controversy over film ethnography in the West, particularly in the aspect, unresolvable as it is, of the definition of the term ethnographic film that pertains to the activities of Others, i.e. “non-western people doing non-western things” (Banks 120). The spread of this kind of blanket category could include film samples from the “non-western” continents of Africa, South America, and Asia, particularly the Southeastern areas comprising ethnic groups in Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. This essay focuses on the Southeast Asian coverage by ethnographic film practitioners, for two reasons: first, that a development or progression, to use unsatisfactory euphemisms, can be drawn for productive lessons in the area of both race and film ethnography; and second, these cultures are where my geographic affinities lie.

Significantly, a number of film ethnographers who engaged in the more frontal and pressing racial issues pertaining to African and South American cultures also made works set in Southeast Asia. By “also” I do not mean to say that issues of race where I come from are not as important as anywhere else, but that these issues are informed by an ambivalence derived from an exoticizing of the Orient. Henry Louis Gates jr. provides the means by which this could be further explained:

Race has become a trope of ultimate, irreducible difference between cultures, linguistic groups, or adherents of specific belief systems which—more often than not—also have fundamentally opposed economic interests. Race is the ultimate trope of difference because it is so very arbitrary in its application. The biological criteria used to determine “difference” in sex simply do not hold when applied to “race.” Yet we carelessly use language in such a way as to *will* this sense of *natural* difference into our formulations. (“Writing ‘Race’” 5)

Where European and American colonial and neocolonial interests became more widespread, then, the practice of racism has been marked with less ambivalence—in Africa, because of the slave trade and direct appropriation of resources, and in South America, because of direct and then indirect control of economic systems through the use of local elite groups. In Asia, the one instance where Western racism has had an effect on the formation of a national culture was that of the Philippines, which was the only Asian country ever colonized by the US, after an earlier occupation by the Spaniards; one might argue that almost all the other Asian countries were similarly colonized by other Western powers, but the Philippine experience is marked by an absence of a pre-colonial civilization as developed as were those of its neighbors. Another way of looking at this is that prior to the 16th-century arrival from the Pacific West of the Spaniards, the spread of civilizing influence in the region was in the opposite direction, from India and China through Indochina toward the Indo-Malayan peninsula, with the Philippine islands as the prospective point of culmination.

Hence no other Asian country has put up less resistance to the influx of Western culture than the Philippines did—a fact that is acknowledged in Western and other Asian

countries' patronization of popular-culture performers and products from the country. The notion of an ancient civilization providing a form of resistance to Western culture, however, cannot be as simply described as in Abdul R. JanMohamed's contention that "in the hegemonic phase (or neocolonialism) the natives accept a version of the colonizers' entire system of values, attitudes, morality, institutions, and, more important, mode of production. This stage of imperialism does rely on the active and direct 'consent' of the dominated" (81). In the case of the Philippines, the process of reliance on Western culture became increasingly economic in nature as the country's status declined from the fastest-developing to the least-developed in Southeast Asia; ironically, although the populace has managed to equate the country's suffering with the degree of US-conducted intervention (as evidenced in a recent box-office film trend in depicting white characters as movie villains), the dependency on expertise in popular-culture forms, including the use of the English language, has also never been stronger than it is at present. Tzvetan Todorov implies that in analogous cases a cycle may be in place, owing, in the Philippine example, to the country's unique political predicament:

Racism (like sexism) becomes an increasingly influential social phenomenon as societies approach the contemporary ideal of democracy. A possible explanation of this fact might be that in traditional, hierarchical societies, social differences are acknowledged by the common ideology; hence, physical differences play a less crucial role. (371)

The "contemporary ideal of democracy" is something that other Asian leaders, notably former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore, maintain as inapplicable for the Oriental temperament of the Philippines. On the other hand, right-wing and militaristic tendencies alike have been incapable of prospering in electoral exercises since the restoration of democratic institutions after the so-called revolution of February 1986; in this instance, the voters' preference for candidates who, regardless of their political or economic competence, present themselves as democratic alternatives may be attributed to the social trauma brought about by what the Philippine Left termed the "US-Marcos dictatorship."

This consideration of the Philippine experience can be taken as one possible springboard for approaching certain ethnographic films on Southeast Asia. Undeniably, the ones set in Bali, Indonesia work within the framework of a possibly resisting, or at least intervening, ancient culture, while *Cannibal Tours*, for example, set in Papua New Guinea, assumes that the native culture would give way to the West were it not for the West's interest in maintaining it. Margaret Mead, perhaps unwittingly, set up an oppositional relation between the two cultures, particularly in certain installments of her *Character Formation in Culture* series. Not only did she have films on one or the other—"Trance and Dance in Bali" and "First Days in the Life of a New Guinea Baby," with the settings defined in the titles—she also used other footage or combined some from existing titles in a work intended for comparative study: "Childhood Rivalry in Bali and New Guinea," where such disputably irrelevant differences as sibling rivalry and mothers teasing their babies are set against the anthropologist's own observation that such acts

are “rarely seen in America.” Mead’s contextual bias gets foregrounded with an even more problematic presentation called “Bathing Babies in Three Cultures,” where the Bali and New Guinea segments are not only made to sandwich those of the US, but also suffer in comparison to a then-and-now demonstration of how American practice inevitably improved over the course of a decade.

James Clifford may have made the generalization in “On Ethnographic Allegory” that allegory, in the instance of ethnographic film, serves a narrativizing function (100), but JanMohamed goes further in the direction of race discourse:

The imperialist is not fixated on specific images or stereotypes of the Other but rather on the affective benefits proffered by the manichean allegory, which generates the various stereotypes.... The manichean allegory, with its highly efficient exchange mechanism, permits various kinds of rapid transformations, for example, metonymic displacement ... and metaphoric condensation.... (87)

The Mead films in this respect come close to a manichean perspective in the verbal juxtapositioning of a culture with that of the West; the literal centering of the US in “Bathing Babies” then sets forth Mead’s agenda as straightforwardly as it could possibly get, although its value for the cultures under both political and filmic subjugation is just as diminished by this confirmation. From a different direction, however, Mead can also be seen as functioning in response to the limits delineated by the practice of the likes of Robert J. Flaherty and even Dziga Vertov. Although Vertov’s practice made no claims for realist documentation, *Man with a Movie Camera* could be seen as an advancement of certain principles that could be derived from *Nanook of the North*; obviously, since these principles could impressively further the aesthetic projects of constructivism, their usefulness for ethnographic filmmaking remained all the more doubtful. By in effect reining in Flaherty’s tendency toward narrative aestheticism, Mead may have been hoping to find a more credible approach to ethnographic filmmaking in the opposite direction.

Timothy and Patsy Asch, occasionally with Linda Connor, concentrated on Bali for their part, as Dennis O’Rourke dealt with New Guinea for *Cannibal Tours*. Thus what may be called the Asch films can be seen vis-à-vis O’Rourke’s, although further and differing concepts in race discourse inform either side. JanMohamed provides a useful typology in his study of colonialist literature that makes a distinction between the “imaginary” and the “symbolic” (84). By way of definition, he states that “The emotive as well as the cognitive intentionalities of the ‘imaginary’ text are structured by objectification and aggression. In such works the native functions as an image of the imperialist self in such a manner that it reveals the latter’s self-alienation” (84). Almost as if describing Mead’s films, he clarifies further that the power of the “imaginary” field binding the narcissistic colonialist text “is nowhere better illustrated than in its fetishization of the Other ... by substituting natural or generic categories for those that are socially or ideologically determined” (86). “Symbolic” text writers, “on the other hand, are more aware of the inevitable necessity of using the native as a mediator of [Western] desires. Grounded more firmly and securely in the egalitarian imperatives of Western societies, these authors

tend to be more open to a modifying dialectic of self and Other” (85). It might be readily apparent from this definition that the Asch and O’Rourke films under consideration both conform to a Western egalitarianism in a manner overridden by Mead’s projects. In fact, prior to interrogating the limits of the practice, it would be instructive to see just how it constitutes a form of progress over “imaginary” texts:

The “symbolic” text’s openness toward the Other is based on a greater awareness of *potential* identity and a heightened sense of the *concrete* socio-politico-cultural differences between self and Other. Although the “symbolic” writer’s understanding of the Other proceeds through self-understanding, he is freer from the codes and motifs of the deeper, collective classification system of his culture. In the final analysis, his success in comprehending or appreciating alterity will depend on his ability to bracket the values and bases of his culture. (93)

Between the Asch films and that of O’Rourke, though, a further distinction can be drawn through the same framework being propounded by JanMohamed in his enumeration of two types of “symbolic” texts: the first type “attempts to find syncretic solutions to the manichean opposition of the colonizer and the colonized” (85). The “syncretic solutions” in the Asch films on Jero consist of conscious deployments of image and text against the grain, so to speak, of the complicities of Western filmmaking style enumerated by David MacDougall. The problem, however, is that a wholesale analysis of how Western filmmaking has played into the hands of dominant ideological interests actually leaves no space for creative (as in manipulative) intervention, since the history of filmmaking, in terms of its technological developments at least, is virtually inseparable from what may now be amorphous but still politically salient 20th-century Western culture. This echoes Clifford’s critique, in “On *Orientalism*,” of the totalizing effect of Edward Said’s (anti-)Orientalist vision, specifically in his (Clifford’s) conclusion that “There is no need to discard theoretically all conceptions of ‘cultural’ difference, especially once this is seen as not simply received from tradition, language, or environment but also as *made* in new political-cultural conditions of global relationality” (274). The Jero films abide by the avoidance of complicit stylistics in the use of long takes which situate the center of reflexivity in the filmmaker—in this case the male cameraperson—with the soundtrack taking extra care to assure viewers of the subject’s credibility within her own cultural context. Such displacement of creative prerogatives results, on the one hand, in an increased understanding of the dynamics of the culture under observation; it also, on the other hand, leads to a cul-de-sac in responding to the next order of questions: how, for example, could such an otherwise Western-exposed culture still believe in trance healing, and more important, what do the filmmakers themselves think of such challenges to scientific logic?

Cannibal Tours approaches a culture closer to that of the Philippines, in the sense that both it and New Guinea share about the same distance from the generalizable Indochinese and Indo-Malayan source of the original Eastern cultural spread, thereby resulting in an openness toward, or helplessness against, Western imperialist influences.

In implementing (unawares?) JanMohamed's second type of "symbolic" text, O'Rourke appears to have realized

that syncretism is impossible within the power relations of colonial society because such a context traps the writer in the libidinal economy of the "imaginary." Hence, becoming reflexive about its context, by confining itself to a rigorous examination of the "imaginary" mechanism of colonialist mentality, this type of [literature] manages to free itself from the manichean allegory. (JanMohamed 85)

O'Rourke's original contribution to race discourse is twofold in this regard. First, his reflexivity draws not from Asch (who in turn had appropriated Jean Rouch's practice), but from fictional cinema, wherein the reflexive subject is rarely the cameraperson and more likely a stand-in for her, usually in the form of an individual or group engaged in artistic, literary, or media activity. Second, his disengagement from the manichean allegory is facilitated in a similar manner, by transposing the struggle between the West and the Other to a conflict between Westerners themselves—i.e., the tacitly enlightened though visually absent filmmaker vs. the visually present unenlightened tourists—that in effect restores a manicheanism reversed in its alignment of the enlightened view with the voice of the Other.

A progressive rupture in *Cannibal Tours* comes to the fore precisely with the filmmaker's distanciation from the reflexive subject—i.e., the tourists—in favor of the film subject, the native ex-cannibals. A poststructural doubleness, explicable in race discourse as a function that repositions "difference from a dialectical or oppositional otherness within a closed system to a plural process of conflict and exchange where the ideological determinants of a system themselves come into question" (Nygren 174), arises from the awareness that the filmmaker, by being racially a member of the same society that constitutes the reflexive subject, may be implicitly criticizing himself as well. I would argue, however, from an admittedly more extreme (and perhaps ultimately futile) position, namely that of the interests of the natives themselves, on the basis of the principle that

any cross-cultural project must be compound and reversible: no universal system or *grand récit* (to use Lyotard's term) exists that transcends cultural difference, but no cultural specificity thereby escapes critical evaluation. Cross-cultural reading is always at least double, and articulates both cultural situations, that of the reader and that of the read, unavoidably and simultaneously. No absolute truth-value can ever inhere in any reading or metareading, but cultural difference can at times be most clear at idiosyncratic junctures that undermine and multiply the imaginary transcendence of unitary approaches. (Nygren 184)

The "idiosyncratic juncture" in *Cannibal Tours* may be seen as embedded in the formal devices the filmmaker has resorted to. Since the cinematic terms utilized by the presentation—irony, alienation, authorial intervention, in short an impressive arsenal of modernist devices—were actually formulated in Western literary practice, it would

require a more advanced Westernization of the native subjects in order for them to fully understand and appreciate the filmmaker's intentions. Moreover, this would not necessarily indicate for them a role as agents of change, since the truly active subjects in the triangulation of the native subject, reflexive subject (the tourist), and filmmaker are the last two. To make things worse, the kind of change being advocated is implicated by the nature of the critique: that is, since these devices connote an intellectual receptivity and bourgeois genteelism, the immediate solution appears to be tied in with becoming better, more sensitive, not to mention more generous, tourists. The nature of the idiosyncratic avers as much, since it is regarded as

the illuminating or captivating detail where desire comes into play, where psychoanalytic configurations inform the text, and the unconscious of the text emerges.... Power, desire, and knowledge are inextricably interwoven in the intertextual fabric that constitutes social process. The result of such a project may risk subordination within the tropes of an unreflexive postmodern or poststructural analysis, but we should be wary of any moves in cross-cultural work, especially those projecting themselves as "new," which do not go so far even as this. The risk instead would be a lapse back to empiricist, logocentric, humanist assumptions already irretrievably problematized by contemporary critical methodology. (Nygren 184)

One could say for the sake of both subjects caught up in the reverse manicheanism that both sides would have benefited from an awakening to the nature of the economic and political dependency that has typified colonialism's legacies; this may have lessened the excitement of witnessing the natives complain about never getting enough money from their trade, or the tourists patronize the natives too readily, but it may also have generated certain more feasible and fundamental courses of action on both sides.

The racial issues raised by *Cannibal Tours* similarly feed into a postmodern ambivalence—not in the form of a postracism, but rather Etienne Balibar's concept of neoracism, which

fits into a framework of "racism without races" ... whose dominant theme is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences, a racism which, at first sight, does not postulate the superiority of certain groups or peoples in relation to others but "only" the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of lifestyles and traditions; in short ... a *differentialist racism*. (21)

One logical extreme of such a situation is the erasure of the old meaning of race, as opposed to a still-current operability of racism as

the name given to a type of behavior which consists in the display of contempt or aggressiveness toward other people on account of physical differences (other than those of sex) between them and oneself. It should be noted that this definition does not contain the word "race," and this observation leads us to the first surprise in

this area which contains many: whereas racism is a well-attested social phenomenon, “race” itself does not exist! Or, to put it more clearly: there are a great number of physical differences among human groups but these differences cannot be superimposed; we obtain completely divergent subdivisions of the human species according to whether we base our description of the “races” on an analysis of their epiderms or their blood types, their genetic heritages or their bone structures. For contemporary biology, the concept of “race” is therefore useless. This fact has no influence, however, on racist behavior: to justify their contempt or aggressiveness, racists invoke not scientific analyses but the most superficial and striking of physical characteristics (which, unlike “races,” do exist)—namely, differences in skin color, pilosity, and body structure. (Todorov 370–71)

The difficulty in facing up to this challenge of newer though no less insidious forms of social injustice appears overwhelming only if the perceived solution were to be arrogated unto one kind of agency—the same social group that promotes this injustice in the first place. The call on the part of contemporary ethnographic filmmakers to provide prospective subjects with the means to film themselves, and perhaps even train the camera on their providers’ social group, becomes even more urgent in this regard:

When the voice of that which academic discourses—including cultural studies—constitute *as* popular begins in turn to theorize its speech, then ... that theorization may well go round by way of the procedures that Homi Bhabha has theorized as “colonial mimicry,” for example, but may also come around eventually in a different, and as yet utopian, mode of enunciative practice. (Morris 41)

Whether or not political movements based on such principles lead racism out of its neoracial modality toward a still-seemingly utopian condition of postracism, the only way to find out is by constantly finding ways out.

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3. Ideas on Philippine Film: A Critical Survey

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 in order 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 during the 1960s. 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,¹ 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 techniques...) 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).

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*²).

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).³ 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 (“Problems in Philippine Film History”), 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 Manunuring Pelikulang Pilipino, of which he was a member, 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 deliberation 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. (“MPP Criteria” 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. 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 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).

One last critical practitioner, though a non-MPP member, falls within this locus of left-leaning contemporary Philippine film praxis: short filmmaker Nick Deocampo, who has been the director-general of the Movie Workers Welfare Fund (Mowelfund) Film Institute, or MFI, since his completion of a Fulbright grant at New York University during the mid-’80s. In *Short Film*, his primer for what he appropriated as his version of the new Philippine cinema, Deocampo once more replaced the known canons formalized by first the Famas and then the MPP, with one that played up the contributions of short-film or alternative filmmakers: “Due to [the] brevity and independent set-up [of short-film productions], a filmmaker can express his [*sic*] visions in an undiluted way, untroubled by commercial demands. Only in an independent set-up can this new cinema be created” (104). Deocampo’s consistent self-valorization of his documentary output as the best in its class, coupled with his disparagement of his perceived institutional competitors, has tended to diminish his reliability as a disinterested participant in film politics. Moreover, his positioning of the MFI against the movie industry raises issues in itself, since the Mowelfund was founded and is still led by movie actor-producer and current Philippine Vice President Joseph Estrada, with funds drawn from mainstream industry taxes; also, the MFI’s productions all observe a progression from technical crudeness to Western state-of-the-art sophistication complemented with obscurantist political or psychoanalytic attitudinizings.

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 represent the MPP member who conducts 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 dialogue, and the centrality of the star rather than her or his performance (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. In that order. Such a methodology has become the routine framework of a number of other MPP members now profitably reviewing films on television, where they give 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.

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 dialogues. 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.

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 No confirmation of a decision by martial-law strategists to capitalize on pornographically induced moral panic actually appears in de Vega's book. Instead, readers have had to read between the lines, where the proliferation of bomba movies is configured as a problem that the New Society resolves. The same pattern of libertarian censorship policy resulting in explicit sex films, in order to make a crackdown on social behavior appear preferable, occurred during the mid-1970s buildup toward the militarization of media-control agencies (including the board of censors) as well as during the series of protests over the assassination of Benigno S. Aquino Jr.—in which the anticipated crackdown was preempted by the people-power revolt.
- 3 I would like to acknowledge Patrick D. Flores, for drawing my 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 Philippine film criticism also takes off from the structure of the aforementioned paper. This bit of information must now be qualified by an alert I received from Nestor de Guzman, who pointed out an unusual addendum to a footnote in Renato Constantino's *Insight & Foresight*: after using the figure of the most successful star in Philippine film history, Nora Aunor, to affirm his conviction that the industry aspired to Hollywood-style conservatism and profitability, he acknowledged that Aunor herself had come out with progressive film productions, both in the year prior to the book's publication: Mario O'Hara's *Tatlong Taóng Walang Diyos* and Lupita Kashiwahara's *Minsa'y Isang Gamu-gamu* (Constantino, *Insight & Foresight* 130n3*).

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4. Practice Makes Perfect: Alternative Philippine Cinema

Independent film practice in the Philippines can be productively regarded as an emerging site of contention in film discourse. The reason for this is more a matter of the assertions and actuations of the independent film practitioners themselves rather than the acknowledgment—so far withheld—of Filipino movie-going audiences. In fact it would be historically inaccurate to state that independent film practice had never existed before, even if one were to set aside the still-implicated categories of industrial filmmaking and government propaganda. During the so-called first Golden Age of Philippine Cinema in the 1950s, full-length features by the likes of Lamberto V. Avellana and Gerardo de Leon were regular prizewinners in Asian film-festival competitions, but film shorts by the same directors were what Filipinos were known for in Europe; moreover, outstanding directors even then, notably Manuel Silos, also underwent the equivalent of apprenticeships via the making of film shorts for commercial exhibitions alongside main features.

Nevertheless it was only with the arrival of the 1980s that short-film practitioners, through a select number of governmental training institutions, started calling attention to their activities by situating themselves in opposition to commercial cinema. This coincided with two other developments that would later confirm the preferential treatment accorded cinema provided by an otherwise culturally repressive fascist dictatorship, in sharp contrast with the indifference toward the medium exhibited by leaders under the current so-called democratic dispensation. The first development was the setting up of an umbrella state institution, the Experimental Cinema of the Philippines, that provided support activities to the extent of, among other things, exempting films from censorship and taxation, funding projects deemed worthwhile by the organization, and holding an annual international film festival. The other was the recognition acquired by Filipino filmmakers once more in Europe, and this time for full-length features. Both forms of practice came to a head when two of the Filipinos celebrated in the Cannes Film Festival, Mike De Leon and the late Lino Brocka, criticized the government's Manila International Film Festival for its financial excesses and criminal treatment of workers injured or killed during the construction of its film-palace venue.

These two instances also figured significantly in short-film practice in the Philippines, both since the practice, as already mentioned, was sponsored and subsidized by government institutions, and also since the practitioners themselves were to aspire for international recognition via the same European route. The question *Why Europe?* was never raised at any time before or during this period, but certain speculative replies can be ventured in retrospect. In discussing the three-way debate among Edward W. Said, Fredric Jameson, and Aijaz Ahmad, Michael Sprinker concludes that "The national question, in literature as in politics, cannot be resolved except by situating it within the context of international determinations that exceed the limits imposed by the nation and national culture" (28). Sprinker however describes commitment to nationalism as "a murderous ideology" (28) in the context of the education of transnational citizens; whether this implies the reverse for postcolonial subjects—i.e., that for them a rejection of nationalism can be just as murderous—is out of the coverage of this essay. All that can

be maintained is the recognition of the country under consideration, in this case the Philippines, vis-à-vis a colonial past that has resulted in its alienation from Asian culture, especially in its Oriental aspects.

The backgrounding that this framework entails is that of the suppression of native historical consciousness by the Spanish colonizers during their three-century occupation, then of the suppression in turn of the ensuing Filipino consciousness of European influences by the American colonizers who supplanted the Spaniards during the turn of the current century. “Consciousness” in this specific instance refers to the traces that enable the naturalization of a politically imposed social ideology, as opposed to the demonizing prescriptions of, for example, the Spaniards in describing pre-Hispanic Philippine society as barbaric, or the Americans in describing the Spaniards (and later the Japanese) as abusive and exploitative. In short, when the imperative of seeking legitimacy for their practice in film presented itself, Filipinos, even progressive artists, tended to think not of their own, but of the West; but in terms of the West, the US, as the country’s former colonizer and then neocolonizer, could not be considered an acceptable context for recognition, due to the guilt, described by Homi K. Bhabha, “that sonorously resists the symbolic organization of the paternal metaphor” (65).

One interesting example would be the chronology in the international advancement of the career of Lino Brocka—that is, how he proceeded from France to Spain, where one of his minor works, *Angela Markado* (1980), won a prize at the San Sebastian Film Festival, and then to other European countries before his first American retrospective in New York City, occasioned by a *Time* magazine rave over *Orapronobis* (1989) at the Cannes Film Festival. Apart from bringing to public light his falling out with his Cannes promoter Pierre Rissient, the event also demonstrated a trajectory of avoidance by the colonial subject, in this case Brocka, of the colonial center/present (the US) ironically by accepting a colonial margin/past (Spain in particular but also Europe in general) as an alternative, however provisional. In another and paradoxical sense, this may also have been the crucial factor in facilitating the acceptance by the same subject (Brocka) of the inevitability of his momentum as a rising international film figure in the direction of the very geographical center (the US) accepted as the foremost cultural capital by the country whose presumably progressive interests he was fighting for. The logic of Brocka’s chosen course can be rationalized in retrospect in the realization of how his credibility in the colonial center would (and did) ironically give him leverage in his struggle against its ruling-class agents in his own national context.

Filipino short-film practitioners were encouraged by the fact that even before Brocka was invited to the Directors Fortnight at Cannes, Kidlat Tahimik had won the critics’ prize at the Berlin Film Festival a few years earlier for his first film, *Mababangong Bangungot* (1977), which he had shot in 16mm. non-sync format. Unlike Brocka, Mike De Leon, Ishmael Bernal, Peque Gallaga, the late Gerardo de Leon, and the other Filipinos who followed suit in various European venues, Tahimik managed to acquire a distribution arrangement in the US through Francis Ford Coppola’s Zoetrope company,¹ and has remained the only such case of a Filipino filmmaker getting such a treatment, to the

contestable point where Marxist American critic Fredric Jameson would valorize his piece as a structuralist model for Third-World cinema (186–213). By the mid-to-late '80s, a historical cycle had been circumscribed with Filipino short-film practitioners once more getting recognized in Europe, first with Nick Deocampo for his *Trilogy on the Theme of Poverty and Prostitution* (1986) at the Brussels Super-8 Film Festival, then with Raymond Red for his super-8mm. program, for which he was described by British film critic Tony Rayns as his most impressive discovery in “the richest pool of young talent in Asia” (4). Rayns tellingly provides as his basis for appreciation the observation that

there is none of the imaginative constraint that generally brackets such films as “worthy.” And many of the films whose prime concerns are not social or political succeed in blending a distinctly Filipino cultural identity with a larger awareness of issues that gives them a real cosmopolitan edge. Filipino independent cinema has as wide a range as any other independent film culture in the world.... (4)

With Tahimik virtually unknown in the Philippines, Deocampo and Red constitute the two most prominent figures in local short-film practice. Red has managed to cross over into full-length filmmaking, with his products exhibited at commercial venues, although again it is more his preceding foreign recognition that distinguishes him rather than his apprenticeship in short films, his shooting in 16mm. for subsequent expansion to 35mm., or his choice of select venues.² Deocampo's significance is altogether different, since he first gained recognition for documentary film practice and has persisted in both articulating and appropriating short film practice as *the* alternative to commercial filmmaking. Before commencing graduate studies at New York University, Deocampo published his book *Short Film*³ and edited *Movement*, a film journal; upon his return, he assumed the directorship of the Film Institute of the Movie Workers Welfare Fund, founded and still headed by current Philippine Vice President Joseph Estrada, and initiated a number of short-film festivals, workshops, and production projects.

Consistent in Deocampo's agenda is his positioning of himself as the primary exponent of alternative film practice in the Philippines, as well as the more semantically disturbing designation of this practice as independent, despite the fact that mainstream Philippine film dynamics have been traditionally premised on a conflict between major studios and non-major outfits also called independents. His latest international-scale writing, for the *Queer Looks* anthology, merely reprises this egotistic slant in appropriating gay filmmaking as a revolutionary challenge to the long-deposed fascist regime, and of himself as the frontliner in Filipino gay-film practice. Deocampo's claim that his “awakening to [his] sexuality coincided with the unfolding of a social upheaval” (“Homosexuality as Dissent/Cinema as Subversion” 401) may be stretching the truth to its limit, since by his own admission “Oliver,” the first installment in his super-8mm. *Trilogy*, was done a full four years before the February 1986 uprising which he (as does Estrada) valorizes as revolution. Even more problematic is Deocampo's schematization of Philippine film history as observing a teleology of parallel progressions after the introduction of the medium by both colonizing nations and the groundwork done by Filipino pioneers: on the one hand are “Master Film Directors” who presumably pass on

their mantle of authority to “Contemporary Film Directors” in commercial cinema, while on the other are those of the “Early Short Film Movement” (contemporaneous with the “Masters”) followed by “Filipino Avant-garde Filmmakers” (alongside the contemporary directors), leading to the “Contemporary Short Film Movement,” which has no counterpart in the other camp (*Short Film* 94). To further drive home his point, Deocampo constructs a Filipino filmography which inevitably begins with temporally short works produced during the 1890s onward, continuing throughout history while eliminating the full-length samples, and culminating with the proliferation of affordable amateur-format works during the ’70s onward with the popularization of super-8mm. by Kodak Philippines. This recalls Stephen Heath’s objections to technological determinism, which

substitutes for the social, the economic, the ideological, proposes the random autonomy of invention and development, coupled often with the vision of a fulfillment of an abstract human essence—and some of the wildest versions of this latter are to be found in accounts of the (then aptly named) “media”.... (226)

The forced fragmentation of Philippine filmmaking practice suggested by Deocampo’s developmental chart is made possible by an elision of the colonialist nature of the medium, not only in the fact that film and its predecessors were introduced by the Spaniards, but also, and more important, by the exploitation of it by the Americans to propagandize US imperialist ideology in the wake of continued resistance on the part of Filipino revolutionaries against the replacement of the Spaniards by the Americans as the country’s colonial power. Like Tahimik, and like Brocka before the latter broke away from Rissient, the short-film practitioners under the aegis of Deocampo’s Mowelfund Film Institute (MFI) have tended to make works geared toward the preferences of an audience that can be generally constituted as European, rather than American or even Filipino. This assertion assumes even more significance the more ambitious the project involved, since this would entail bigger grants from sources usually based in Germany, with France conceded as the turf of the likes of Brocka. Thus the transition in the Philippines from super-8mm. to 16mm. (or rather Kodak Philippines’s much-protested phasing out of super-8mm. during the mid-’80s), as well as the introduction of video, have both been appropriated by the MFI in experimentalist film terms, with well-known German art-film figures like Christoph Janetzko and Ingo Petzke supervising workshops and the Goethe-Institut Manila facilitating funding and eventually owning the rights to the productions. Marginalized as a result of this exclusive lifeline to both national and international institutional support systems were the genuine degree-granting programs in Philippine academe, as well as the media activities of non-government organizations, whose ethnographic documentations and advocacy projects constitute a fund of underevaluated works.

The problem for Philippine film critical thinking lies in catching up with the standardized classical Hollywood, European art, and Third(-World) cinema divisions (Bordwell 205, Willemsen 4–7), and advancing toward strategies more appropriate to the Philippine situation, rather than the delimiting assignation of Hollywood values to

commercial practice and European art to short filmmaking. The reliance on broad geographical categories may not bode well for long-term and historically specific applications, as can be seen in the reinsertion of the US as a postcolonial system in *The Empire Writes Back* (Ashcroft et al. 15–16).

A realignment with contemporary ideas in Third-World discourse might help point the way for Filipino film scholars caught in this predicament. Perhaps the most promising one for cultural applications lies in the reconfiguration of development alternatives toward alternatives *to* development, describable as “a historical possibility already underway in innovative grassroots movements and experiments” (Escobar 27). Such a concept can be opposed to, for one thing, Deocampo’s historical determinism presumably drawing from the US model in situating alternative film practice against the mainstream with the vision, currently being realized, of eventually supplanting established practitioners. Since the evidence of both Deocampo’s and Red’s ideological and stylistic evolution appears to be approaching those of mainstream practitioners, the questions of whether this comprises a strategic phase, or whether this strategy is necessary or desirable in the first place, have to be raised. Certain characteristics in so-called post-development alternatives, four of them in particular, present themselves: first, a consideration of subaltern political domains rather than, say, the hegemony exercised in both national and international circuits by Mowelfund Film Institute; second, the relation of exteriority of a social movement with the state instead of counting on the latter for institutional assistance—an arrangement that had been generously granted ironically with the least generous administration in Philippine history, then denied by its democratic successors; third, the creation of social phenomenologies through a social movement’s own organizing processes instead of relying on prescriptive models drawn from other areas of practice whether within or outside Philippine film culture; and finally, the politicization of discourses on needs, as initiated in Third-World contexts by non-government organizations in contrast with or even opposition to state responses, thus necessitating continual contact with grassroots culture (Escobar 42–46). The prospect of a further alternative to the mainstream-vs.-alternative dichotomy, actually handed down by Western film history, can be summed up thus:

In the long run, it is a matter of generating new ways of seeing, of renewing social and cultural self-descriptions by displacing the categories with which Third World groups have been constructed by dominant forces, and by producing views of reality which make visible the numerous loci of power of those forces; a matter of “regenerating people’s spaces” or creating new ones, with those who have actually survived the age of modernity and development by resisting it or by insinuating themselves creatively in the circuits of capital and modernization. (Escobar 48–49)

The curtain need not be drawn on film development in the Philippines, although the long and continually posed question of what direction it should take may now have to be superseded by the search for an altogether different form.

Notes

- 1 Contrary to the romanticist and patronizing impression that Zoetrope may have picked up *Mababangong Bangungot* out of appreciation for its intrinsic merits and/or admiration for its Berlinale coup, an institutional connection, the University of the Philippines Film Center, would supply the link missing in this relation: Coppola was shooting *Apocalypse Now* in the Philippines from 1975 to 1978, and was extensively supported by the UPFC, whose circle included Eric de Guia (Kidlat Tahimik); subsequently, UPFC Director Virginia Moreno wrote a reverential and thinly disguised roman à clef, *The God Director*, that alluded to both Coppola and his tropical film-set.
- 2 As earlier mentioned, Manuel Silos typified the early-cinema trend of trying out film shorts before doing full-length works; Mike De Leon and Carlos Siguion-Reyna are examples of movie-business scions who produced 16mm. shorts before embarking on mainstream careers. Dik Trofeo, a cinematographer-turned-director, produced films during the late '70s and early '80s in 16mm. blown up to 35mm. through his 1635 Productions; even earlier, during the mid-'70s, was the instance of a regional-Cebuano sample, Narciso and Domingo Arong's *Ang Manok ni San Pedro*, which was shot in super-8mm. then expanded to 35mm. (Co 20). Kidlat had a poorly attended retrospective at the Manila Film Center, the government's censorship-and-taxation-exempted venue, during the early '80s.
- 3 Deocampo's book's subtitle, *Emergence of a New Philippine Cinema*, arrogated Bienvenido Lumbera's just-as-problematic historical designation "New Forces in Contemporary Cinema," periodized from 1976 to the present, circa '84 (Lumbera 207).

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5. A History of the History of a History-to-Be

The cinema is arguably the United States's most significant cultural legacy in its only successful East-Hemispheric colonial adventure, in the Republic of the Philippines during the first half of the current century; the only other possible American contribution to Philippine (post)colonial culture would be the imposition of the English language, but one might opt to measure influence here in terms of its effects on national unification, for better or worse—and even then, in linguistic terms, Filipinos “speak,” or more actually read, film language better than any of their national languages (currently English and Filipino, previously English, Tagalog, and Spanish). The importance of an expanded definition of language in this instance can be seen in Simon During's depiction in “Postmodernism or Postcolonialism Today” of the search of decolonized communities for identity as both “closely connected to nationalism” and centered around language, “partly because in postmodernity identity is barely available elsewhere” (458); moreover, “The question of language for postcolonialism is political, cultural and literary, not in the transcendental sense that the phrase as *différend* enables politics, but in the material sense that a choice of language is a choice of identity” (458–59). An understanding of film as it pertains to Philippine culture will therefore prove more useful in evaluating Filipino identity, apart from assuring generations of language teachers that whatever flaws the Filipino character supposedly possesses may not necessarily arise from a weak command of language.

The evolution of film as the equivalent of a national language in the Philippines may be unfortunate in certain respects, owing primarily to the inferior status granted the medium in the Western-sourced high-low humanist framework that constitutes the liberal (i.e., secular or Catholic-independent) extreme of local education, as well as to the universalist-language claims made for it in Orientalist discourses in classical film theory. The association of film with colonialism also compounds the situation, in that no language-use alternative could be developed as a counterpart the way that, for example, Filipino is currently being consciously deployed as an alternative to foreign and regional languages despite its technical absences of codification, standardization, etc. Filipino historian Renato Constantino, who was constantly quoted on issues of colonialism and neocolonialism in Roy Armes's *Third World Filmmaking and the West*, has made only one reference to Philippine cinema—and a dated one, at that—out of a voluminous textual output, and then merely to deride it as “reflective of a Westernized society because [Filipino films'] themes are too often copied from foreign successes and because the majority of scriptwriters and directors view Philippine life through the lenses of their Western upbringing” (Constantino 31).

In this regard it may not be surprising to find that no history—in the traditional comprehensive, definitive, and authoritative senses—of Philippine cinema exists, even as the centennial of the near-simultaneous invention of film and its intervention in Philippine history approaches. Available historicizations, however, have proliferated during the past two decades, or roughly since the start of what has been called the second Golden Age of Philippine cinema during the country's period of fascist dictatorship (David

1–17). The more important of these historicizations raise the issue of purposiveness, or what Michel de Certeau has expressed as the dilemma between conditions of understanding and lived experience (35), spelled out by Robert Sklar in “*Oh! Althusser!*” in the following formulation: “Film historians have tended to emphasize institutions and processes, while radical social historians, not necessarily neglecting either of those subjects, have nevertheless placed their emphasis on the lived experiences of people” (28). De Certeau’s carefully circumscribed valorizations of analyzation (8) as well as practicability, historicity, and closure (21) derive from his premise that “The *signified* of historical discourse is made from ideological or imaginary structures; but they are affected by a referent outside of the discourse that is inaccessible in itself” (42). More important for specific instances such as the Philippines’s own, he maintains that

a “historical” text (that is to say, a new interpretation, the application of specific methods, the elaboration of other kinds of relevance, a displacement in the definition and use of documents, a characteristic mode of organization, etc.) expresses an operation which is situated within a totality of practices.... A particular study will be defined by the relation that it upholds with others that are contemporaneous with it, with a “state of the question,” with the problematic issues exploited by the group and the strategic points that they constitute, and with the outposts and divergences thus determined or given pertinence in relation to a work in progress. (64)

To activate a more historiographic accounting of history, which De Certeau understandably idealizes over historicization, it might be helpful to engage in tandem the still currently appreciated principle of conjecture and the more controversial one of functionalism, along with their respective qualifications. The former may be seen in Carlo Ginzburg’s accentuation of the “imponderable elements” of instinct, insight, and intuition (including its sense-based “low” form) as the strengths of the conjectural paradigm (124–25), while the latter has recently been reconsidered by Dick Eitzen as inadequate for deterministic purposes but still useful for long-term critical applications in film (83). Thus, for purposes of this study, what may be opposed to conjecture would be standard prescriptions for interpretations of historical data on film, while the functional may be constituted within the problematic of Philippine cinema as an originally colonial tool that calls for a reconfiguration, if ever possible, toward its subjects’ postcolonial interests.

Such a framework, although “safe” within certain contexts of Western academia, surprisingly turns out to be more radical than what have been attempted in Philippine film history so far. Apart from the usual and expected narrativizations of Philippine cinema made for contextualizing narrow institutional purposes (mostly festival brochures and commemorative volumes published by now-defunct studios), there are also a number of personal accountings of the story of Philippine cinema; among these could be counted, in fact, the very first Filipino film book, published in 1952 by silent-film auteur Vicente Salumbides, described by Santiago A. Pilar in “The Early Movies” as “a former extra of Lasky Studio’s Famous Players, Hollywood” who returned to the Philippines during the

mid-1920s (15). Mostly these texts, generically categorizable as expanded memoirs, wind up pointing up their respective authors' aggrandizements.

More useful, although outside the prescriptive realm of this essay's framework, would be the comprehensive filmographies claimed as ongoing projects by a number of institutions but with only one actually available, a two-volume library-science masteral thesis by Maria Carmencita A. Momblanco, that covers the period 1908–58; *The Urian Anthology 1970–1979* (see Tiongson) contains an appendix that covers the 1970s. Limited filmographies are presumably maintained by the major production houses, two—both active during the first Golden Age mostly covering the 1950s—of which may be sourced, also as appendices, one in a book (see Mercado on LVN Studios) and the other in a film undergraduate thesis (see Manuel on Premiere Productions).

The most significant historicization projects, however, are those being undertaken by Bienvenido Lumbera and Agustin Sotto, both of whom are members and former chairs of the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino (MPP) or Filipino Film Critics Circle. Both have had their texts published by the Sentrong Pangkultura ng Pilipinas (SPP) or Cultural Center of the Philippines, and have worked on an introductory video documentary on Philippine cinema with Sotto as director and Lumbera as scriptwriter.¹ Lumbera's textual version, titled "Pelikula: An Essay on Philippine Cinema," appears in the *Tuklas Sining* volume, but the two have written more detailed historicizations in simultaneously published monographs both also titled *Pelikula*, Sotto covering the period 1897–1960 and Lumbera 1961–92. Common to these attempts are two tendencies that are inescapably part of the positivist heritage of liberal-humanist discourse: that of pinpointing an originary moment and that of supplying a periodization that facilitates the discussion of historical issues according to temporal segments that provide narratable openings and closures. The "zero-point" for Philippine cinema has shifted considerably from Salumbides's celebration of the first film produced and directed by a Filipino, Jose Nepomuceno's *Dalagang Bukid* (Country Lass) in 1919, to 1897, when former Film Archives of the Philippines Director Ernie A. de Pedro set the date at January 1 (26) and Sotto, dismissing this (after changing the date to January 8) as "merely a presentation of stills and chronophotographs," setting instead September 18 as the introduction of "the Lumiere cinematograph along with several Lumiere films" (*Pelikula 1897–1960* 4).

Elided in this contestation over what Janet Staiger, in another historical context, labeled "first-itis" (155) is what she also described, in her essay "Mass-Produced Photoplays," as

historical representation [being] more complex, mediated and non-linear. Locating single causes also becomes impossible. This means that, in an individual instance, specific historical inquiry will be necessary to understand the impact of the particular practices operating at that time and place on the formation of specific films or groups of films. (153)

Sotto in his *Pelikula* attempted to move beyond his zero point by mentioning 1895 as the year when “Manila had its first electric plant installed with the help of Japanese electricians” (4), but this is obviously a literal and linear gesture. In fact the complexity of defining a zero point itself within this context can be expressed by starting with the foreign nature of the medium and problematizing each and every step at Filipinization: even with Salumbides’s appreciation of Filipino capital, talent, and audience, on one possible level, there remained then (and mainly still does) the foreignness of the apparatus. The difficulty of zero-point discourses thus stems from the deflection of agential prerogatives away from the supposed beneficiaries of any progressive history; in the Philippine context, the latter could be constituted as not merely spectators of film, but subjects and resisters of American colonization as well.

For this same reason periodizing also poses dangers in its premise that historical processes observe discrete linear progressions. Even in Fredric Jameson’s suggestion that period theory be applied to film discourse—i.e., a teleological transition from realism to modernism to postmodernism—his qualifications are so insistent and effusive that virtually any attempt at periodization based on his schema is rendered suspect (*Signatures of the Visible* 155–56). Within Sotto’s and Lumbera’s respective historicizations, positional problems present themselves in differing ways: those of Sotto call for a radical reorientation on the author’s part while those of Lumbera suggest specific reorientations within the texts themselves. This may be traced on the one hand to Lumbera’s longer experience in cultural politics and former involvement in organized-left radicalism, with a triangulated trajectory from US graduate studies in the 1950s through political detention during Ferdinand Marcos’s martial-law regime in the 1970s to the winning of the Ramon Magsaysay Award, the Asian equivalent of the Nobel Prize, in 1992; Sotto, on the other hand, was involved in the introduction of Lino Brocka and Mike De Leon to international attention via the Cannes Film Festival while holding a favored position in Imelda Marcos’s Manila International Film Festival, then took charge, after the Marcoses’ downfall, of the SPP’s Coordinating Center for Film, under the patronage of another MPP colleague, Nicanor G. Tiongson. Not surprisingly, it is Sotto who is most often mentioned in foreign writings on Philippine cinema (Armes 152 and Stein 55, on which more later) and who maintains international visibility as official Philippine correspondent of the *International Film Guide*.

The arbitrariness of Sotto’s periodization becomes evident in his other published historicization, “History of Philippine Cinema,” apparently a slight revision of his *Pelikula* monograph, wherein he simply numbers his periods, nine in all, from first to last. His choices are determined by a primarily technical definition of Philippine cinema, thus resulting in the isolation of the foreign-dominated periods and in a sense conflating World War II Japanese-occupation cinema with those of the Spanish and Americans during the turn of the century, but also controversially claiming that the Japanese introduced “a new role for film—propaganda” (*Pelikula 1897–1960* 33). The 1992 donation to the Philippines by the Japanese of a new print of Abe Yutaka’s long-unseen *Dawn of Freedom* (1944) can be seen as overturning both the quality and level of pre- and post-World War II Philippine-set pro-/American propaganda in terms of budgetary amplitude, technical

excellence, and the surprising reconfigurations of ideology (Filipinos as their colonizers' equals) and gender (Asian men openly physicalizing their mutual solidarity, rather than American men saving the lives of Filipino males and winning the sexual attention of Filipina characters). Sotto also characterizes early American producers as riding on Filipino nationalist sentiments to the extent of "unfortunately ... [meeting] with resistance from the censors" (8) and early Filipino filmmakers as "still [having] a lot of learning to do" (13); his ideological motive emerges when he relates how Filipinos had to leave for Hollywood and "returned years later to make their mark in Philippine cinema" (14) after which "films with a nationalist slant [could once more find] favor with the moviegoing public" (32). This attitude is reinforced by his description of "film [weaving] its magic on the masses" (14) and his brief discourse on the *bakya* or wooden-shoe syndrome as

[encapsulating] the sensibility of those living below the poverty line. It expresses the deep-seated aspirations of the unschooled in very unique ways.... While there are doubtless genuine expressions in the *bakya*, it, however, tends to excuse illogicalities and anachronisms in plots and favors toilet humor and the mockery of the physically disabled. ("History of Philippine Cinema" under "Eighth Period")

Sotto's genteelisms, shared in one respect by Lumbera in his admonition against the use of toilet humor in comedy, actually diverge in origin from Lumbera's implicit self-criticism in the latter's attribution of this particular device as "traceable to an unimaginative dependence on a popular stage tradition best abandoned in film" (*Pelikula 1961–1992* 27). Granting that Sotto's pro-European career moves preclude accusations of pro-US colonial mentality, what may be raised instead is a classical cinema-inflected case of technophilia as a source of solutions "for problems which ultimately are political, economic, cultural, and moral in kind" (Smart 63), relatable to Stephen Heath's objections to technological determinism, which "substitutes for the social, the economic, the ideological, proposes the random autonomy of invention and development, coupled often with the vision of a fulfillment of an abstract human essence..." (226). Lumbera in this respect commands a more recuperable outlining of what he once titled in separate essays the "Problems" (in *Revaluation*) and "Prospects" (in Tiongson, *Urian Anthology*) of Philippine cinema. A standardized though still essentially problematic history may yet be constructed from his propositions, with three of his well-known shifts serving as cautionary examples: from an acknowledgment of the influence of Philippine theatrical traditions ("Problems in Philippine Film History" 197–98) to the abovementioned repudiation; from a valorization of the role of martial-law censors "with a membership that was generally sympathetic to the artistic problems of filmmaking" ("Problems" 207) to a more activated role allowed local scriptwriters in their exploitation of the censors' "stipulated submission of a finished script prior to the start of filming" ("Pelikula: An Essay on Philippine Cinema" 217); and from a denunciation of pre-martial law sex films ("Problems" 203) to the declaration that "one may now make a case for the *bomba*² film as a subversive genre in which the narrative pretends to uphold establishment values when it is actually intent on undermining audience support for corrupt and outmoded institutions" ("Pelikula" 216). Lumbera's limits are apparent in his appreciation of the monopolistic studio system of Philippine cinema's first Golden Age, which was patterned

after Hollywood's pre-Paramount-decision era of production outfits owning their own moviehouses—effectively enforcing a cartel against new competitors and rebellious employees and providing a sympathetic platform for right-wing agitators within the industry itself. Even Sotto, while echoing Lumbera's lamentation on the rise of independent producers following the collapse of the studio system during the 1960s, qualifies that “this was also the period when the top directors shot their best works” (“History of Philippine Cinema” under “Ninth Period”).

Lumbera's more political orientation is also proscribed, like Sotto's, by his construction of Filipino audiences as passive spectators. Such an actuation may be attributable to the need for positioning Philippine film history vis-à-vis the largely great-men approaches of US and world film writing—or, perhaps more accurately, to the perception of US and world film history as consisting significantly of great-men approaches. In writing on Italian cinema, Jameson noted that auteurism can still be utilized as a form of historicist methodology by using it to project backwards “over a body of texts originally produced and received ... within the [then] new historical episteme of high modernism” (*Signatures of the Visible* 199)—thereby situating auteurist discourse within “the art-film or foreign-movie period (the early 1950s to the early 1960s)” (200) which is replicated in the Philippines's second Golden Age of the mid-'70s to the mid-'80s. The filmmaker, even in the expanded sense of including the producer, need not be opposed in this wise to the spectator, as Angela Dalle-Vacche, also writing on Italian cinema, suggests, on the basis of a spiritual factor common to Latinate countries:

the human figure [can be used] to explore this tension between culture and nature, abstract ideals and material pressures. This is not surprising in a culture where, over the centuries, the unchallenged hegemony of Catholicism has encouraged the cherishing of transcendent values, in contrast to a reality of poverty and struggles. (206)

An operative rejection of the binary between filmmakers and spectators is carried out in another study of Italian cinema, that of Giuliana Bruno; more important, the latter's project deals with historical interpretation on the basis of traces rather than the existence of primary filmic samples, a condition akin to virtually the pre-World War II situation as well as the entire Cebu-based regional cinema in the Philippines (see Co).

Another film context that might be studied productively in relation to that of the Philippines is Quebecois cinema, which, though First World-situated, counts itself, as per Paul Warren in “The French-Canadian Cinema,” as being Catholicized and Hollywoodized and struggling under the larger formation of Canadian cinema (3–4); for its part the latter, at least as of the late 1970s, was in need of its own comprehensive historical account within a culturally emergent-nation context (Harcourt 2–3). Writing on French cinema during the Vichy government, Evelyn Ehrlich describes how a cultural blossoming could occur during a period of subjugation (x), a notion further developed by William Pietz in an essay on Cold-War discourse that noted how the demonizing by Americans of the Russians took the form of Orientalizing the latter (59):

When the will to power (to power for the sheer sake of power) is embodied in the political state, ideology is at last revealed as the sheer will ... to control at will all that is most private and personal.... And yet it was this ultimate revelation of the essence of ideology that made it possible for intellectuals for the first time to stand beyond ideology. By recognizing the truth of totalitarianism and embracing an enlightened anti-communism, the intellectual arrived at the end of ideology as such, there by [sic] perfecting [her or] his vocation as an intellectual, that is, as a critic of the ideological corruption of the intellect. (56)

The precise placement of contemporary Philippine political history is itself fraught with contradictions and could benefit from an awareness of available categorizations of marginalized national conditions and a marshalling of their respective agendas (a summation of which is provided in Shohat and Stam 25–27). Madhava Prasad, in asserting a nationalist frame of reference as a preferred basis for “subaltern” or localized analyses (64), critiques Gayatri Spivak’s conceptualization of essentialism as subtheoretical in its strategic mode and thereby (mistakenly regarded as) unworthy of direct discursive practice (66–67). With a fuller recuperation of essentialist imperatives, Prasad manages to frame certain Third-World nationalisms as actually counter-nationalisms (78)—an observation that can be applied constructively to certain periods and phases of Philippine history. The resultant resemblance with Western models of nationalism enables the comparative evaluation of Third- and First-World experiences without necessarily falling into the trap of sharing the same goals. A far more difficult implication would be the corollary of First-World or First-World-based authors undertaking pro-Third World discourse: certainly Aijaz Ahmad, whom Prasad cited in her formulation of Third-World counter-nationalisms (from, it must be noted, First-World perspectives), would not allow the appropriation by Fredric Jameson of the prerogative of essentializing the Third World in opposition to the First. Certainly too, and more tellingly, nothing has prevented Jameson from pursuing this prerogative beyond literature to cinema, upholding, of all things, a locally little-seen Filipino movie, Kidlat Tahimik’s *Mababangong Bangungot*, as a worthy structural sample (*Geopolitical Aesthetic* 186–213). Felicidad C. Lim, a Filipina, has responded to Jameson’s celebration of the “third term” in Marxist interpretation (i.e., the “history of the modes of production” or the economic over the political and the social—Jameson 213) by stating that

Such a framework leads to crucial elisions and misrepresentations of the conditions of Third-World production, ironically engendering another scholarly colonization of the fictions produced by the Third World under the rubrics of “cognitive mapping” or of “a new political culture” in the desperate effort to decolonize and resist oppressive forces that refuse to be simply and necessarily discovered and positioned. (7)

Ironically Jameson’s disquisition on *Mababangong Bangungot* represents a radical departure, ideologically speaking, from the typical run of foreign-written commentary on Philippine cinema. Armes’s and the Brocka-film analyses of *Cahiers du*

Cinéma critic Charles Tesson (rpt. in Guerrero and in Hernando) and *Positif's* Alain Garsault (rpt. in Hernando) appear heavily reliant on Sotto, with Garsault quoting a universalist passage from Filipino literary critic Lucila Hosillos; John D. H. Downing's anthology on Third-World cinema, for its part, solicited from an entirely alienated and outdated former-Filipino source, in effect reproducing the prevalent foreign perspective that valorized a Filipino filmmaking community idiosyncratically centered on Brocka. In contrast, Elliott Stein's report on the Philippine-cinema module of the 1983 Manila International Film Festival surprised Filipino film observers when it came out because its reading strategies turned out similar to what may be regarded as representative of then-prevalent local sentiment. Pending a closer inspection of these foreign authors' respective circumstances, one may be able to posit for the meantime a reverse exemplification of Prasad's prescription—i.e., that it may also be the postcolonizing country's representative who has the potential of understanding her or his country's former colony, but that going the distance in making the trip—literally in this case—could spell the difference between an inapposite though highly developed argument (e.g. Jameson's) and an accurate though unscholarly critical reportage (Stein's). These special instances of what Henk Wesseling has titled "Overseas History" open into two approaches—one a historical macrosociology which "singles out a specific social phenomenon or topic ... and analyzes this in various historical contexts" (88) and the other a more traditional attempt

to distinguish a certain pattern in the development of modern history and [consider] the writing of history as the description of concrete historical processes and events. History is also studied in a comparative way but within the framework of chronological developments. There is more interest in the differences between various developments and the uniqueness of certain events than in their similarities. (88)

Between then the necessary production of a Philippine film history among Filipinos and the always-historical intervention by non-Filipinos in Philippine film discourse, what remains to be seen is how the inevitably forthcoming shape(s) of the history of Philippine cinema will respond to the forces that aim to influence its emergence.

Notes

- 1 The *CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art's* eighth volume, titled *Philippine Film*, opens with revised versions of Lumbera's introductory monograph on Philippine cinema, Sotto's historical account of the first half and Lumbera's of the second half of Philippine cinema (Tiongson 18–49).
- 2 Literally pump or bomb (from the Spanish), intertextually associable with pre-martial law political *bombast* arising from intensified social conflicts; among the many possible references, two specific ones would be the bombing of the anti-Marcos opposition's electoral rally as well as the flourishing of a hard-hitting radio commentator, Roger Arrienda, who adopted the moniker "Bomba," was incarcerated during martial law, underwent a fundamentalist religious conversion, and ran for President against Marcos, in which the latter (and Arrienda) lost to Corazon Aquino.

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SEXUALITIES

1. Gender as Masquerade in the Viet Nam War Film

The existence of a Viet Nam-movie genre has been traced to the official withdrawal of the United States from the war of colonization in that country. Film historian Robert Sklar observed that in earlier film-era wars (World Wars I and II and the Korean conflict), “[American] motion picture companies cooperated with the government in producing a variety of films ... that explained, dramatized, and aided war aims” (335). Rare prowar films (such as *The Green Berets*), antiwar documentaries, and “echoes and shadows” of the conflict reflected in genre and exploitation movies were the only possible means for the Viet Nam issue to be tackled in American films, but “after the Communist victory [in 1975], it became possible to look back” (337). It is the manner of this looking back that occasions this essay’s consideration of the French production of *Indochine*, as well as its insertion into a matrix of ideologically problematic US film practice, that makes the Régis Wargnier film appear innovative, at least initially, in comparison.

The Viet Nam film genre, to begin with, is itself a matter of careful periodizing and qualifying, as the above account demonstrates. Writing from the perspective of the present, Michael Selig enumerates that, although the so-called Viet Nam movies share an “appropriation of the language and iconography of a particular historical moment (usually from the ’60s and early ’70s) and the subordination of that moment to ‘traditional paradigms’ which are decidedly not exclusive to the so-called Viet Nam film genre...,” the use of such a type of imagery “merely masks the attempts to reestablish a traditional cultural and political identity” to the way in which the American defeat “created a cultural crisis among the American people” (2). Wargnier himself declared as much when he maintained that his objective was to undertake a more responsible retelling of the nature of the colonial conflict (“*au milieu de l’Histoire et de voir comment l’Histoire infléchit ces destins*”) with his recollection “*des grands films romanesques, américains pour la plupart*” (*Indochine* 82).¹

The film’s narrative raises not only the issue of the compatibility of such an approach, but more important, the question of how gender has been configured on separate levels—that of cultural texts, cinema in particular, and that of historical practice, from both sides of the conflict; there is of course the danger, in the latter category, of on the one hand using Viet Nam as a synecdoche of the Other; and of on the other hand conflating the US and France into the West. One way of resolving this predicament would be to further qualify the Viet Nam-as-Other approach as the East, which was the manner in which the war was consistently regarded in cultural texts, and delineating whenever possible which “West” between the two colonial adventurers is being referred to, whether France or the US.

Indochine’s initial distinction from the Hollywood Viet Nam project is its farther periodization, the ’50s era of French colonial administration being challenged by the southward advance of Communist liberation fighters. Eliane Davries, a single middle-

aged woman, adopts Camille, a “princess of Annam,” after the latter’s parents die in a plane crash; along with Camille, Eliane agrees to oversee Camille’s parents’ plantation. Eliane conducts herself according to strict rules of civil and secular propriety, raising Camille as she would a European child (Camille never speaks Vietnamese even toward the end of the narrative) but also arranging to eventually turn over the plantation to her as well as marry her off to a similarly wealthy native merchant family. Discreetly, Eliane carries on a passionate affair with a French naval officer, Jean-Baptiste, but lets go of the dalliance when the latter insists on his freedom. Unaware of the affair, Camille also falls in love with Jean-Baptiste, prompting Eliane to forbid him from seeing her and rushing Camille’s wedding arrangements with Than, who has also been rebelling against his parents’ (and his country’s) excessive authoritarianism. Camille and Than decide to break up and run away from their respective families, and Camille treks all the way to the far-flung destination that Eliane had arranged for Jean-Baptiste. To get near him she agrees to be sold to slavery, but in his rescuing her she shoots and kills his naval superior, and the two become fugitives who take advantage of the disguises worn by roving theatrical troupes. The couple are separately caught and Jean-Baptiste commits suicide on a day-pass at Eliane’s house to see his and Camille’s son Etienne, while Camille suffers six years in prison where she emerges as a hard-line Vietminh cadre. The war ends with the Geneva negotiations which Camille attends and to which Eliane brings Etienne, but the two never get to see Camille.

The use of female protagonists to represent the two warring countries may be the film’s most significant contribution to Viet Nam-film generic tradition. Even by standard “positive images” feminist requisites, the figures of Camille and Eliane hold up admirably, particularly in relation to the male characters in the film. Paradoxically, the larger generic framework, that of (European) art-epic production, also ensures that the men do not suffer from lack of sympathy either. Than gallantly agrees to allow Camille to seek her true love and later assists the two of them by recommending them to a Communist-sympathetic theater troupe; expelled from a Paris university for protesting the Binh Bien Phu massacre, he declares to his mother, “The French have taught me freedom and equality; I’ll fight them with those.” Jean-Baptiste is of course the fiery and desirable object of passion shared by mother and daughter, who undergoes a domesticizing transformation when he renounces his freedom for the sake of Camille. The most extreme instance of the movie’s insistent humanism is that of the character of Eliane’s unrequited suitor Guy Asselin, a ruthless counter-insurgency expert who resorts to torture and employs mercenary rebel-hunters, but who offsets such damaging traits by a keen wit, his devotion to Eliane and his job, and his fall from grace with the authorities where he remarks, with consciously ironic self-reference, “The innocents are kicked out, the guilty will go free.”

The problematics of this narrative strategy are twofold in nature, one building up from the other. To begin with, it would be difficult to accept as historical fact that women were the major political players in the Viet Nam conflict, whether involving the French or the Americans. In giving prominence to the participation of its women characters, however, *Indochine* manages to extend viewership identification and sympathy with the

real-life power players, the men. The role of women in political life derives from the concept of difference, and the nature of their participation originates with the function of their bodies. Monique Canto relates that, to the questions of how the city can maintain itself and ensure that it satisfies its citizens' desires,

woman-as-political-animal provides an answer. With woman, a place can be found in political theory for both procreation and the representation of desire—and hence also the satisfaction of desire. Procreation and representation are related questions, moreover; taken together, they indicate the difficulty of conceptualizing, within a given political framework, the possibility of reproduction: reproduction of the real in order to satisfy desire, and reproduction of human life so that the city may endure. (340)

At first glance, this assignation of political value to women on the basis of their bodily difference may seem at odds with the “narrative and visual reconstitution of a heroic male subject, a prerequisite for which is the devaluation and abuse of the feminine” in Viet Nam-film texts (Selig 3). Furthermore, it may not necessarily be possible, though Selig makes the positive assertion,

to account for the films' consistent effacements of the issues of race, class, nationalism, and gender (their historical misrepresentations, we might say) by focusing on their all too conventional concern with the narrative and visual reconstitution of the male subject and their almost always violent repression of the feminine. (3)

If one were to pursue this line of inspecting the physical valuation of women's bodies in *Indochine*, there would appear to be the rupturing of its benevolent-because-motherly colonialist capitulation: although it is Eliane who gets depicted as a repressed yet ultimately passionate matriarch, it is Camille who is undressed twice, without her even being sexualized in both scenes the way that Eliane charges her scenes with Jean-Baptiste with her desire for him. What this implies, using standard Orientalist lines of reason, is that the body of the Other can be gazed at with more clinical regard; within the terms of the film, the seemingly indulgent undressing of Camille may also perhaps have been intended to balance her character's eventual domination of the political narrative, in which it is Eliane's (and Guy's and Jean-Baptiste's) people who are forced to negotiate with hers.

Some degree of reductionist danger might also be present herein, though, in that this reading might be too close for a text that operates both as a self-contained attempt at providing high-cultural pleasure *and* as an insertion into a highly difficult mode of film practice. On the one hand, Hollywood and even mainstream American literary texts on the Viet Nam war can hardly defend themselves from charges of feminizing the enemy in “reducing the Vietnamese to mere ‘gooks’—something between a woman and an animal” (Lawson 23; also see Selig 7–8) and in exploiting “the fear of becoming a woman (of losing one's ‘balls’) [as] one of the indoctrinational weapons used by the military in preparing

young men for battle” (22). On the other hand, the configuration of Eliane and Camille’s sameness, overshadowed by their difference from men, is inflected not merely by the obvious category of gender but the even more crucially political one of class. To use an outmoded application of body discourse, Eliane and Camille can be seen to constitute the head or rational element in fictional interventions on the Viet Nam war, in contrast with the hysterical young males of the standard Hollywood fare who may in this context be seen as obsessed with masculinity precisely because of their feminized function within the dramaturgy in their losing to (and thereby being symbolically “fucked over” by) the enemy.

This opens up a more troubling possibility on the use of gender in *Indochine*: are Eliane and Camille, in their both being privileged members of their respective national bourgeoisies, masculinized in terms of their respective historical agencies? There would be ways of carefully contextualizing the question and advancing answers for each character—i.e., in their portrayal in formal terms (where they function as both mother and lover and are considered in those same terms by the male characters), in their narrative insertions (where class privilege renders them superior to the men around them), in their intertextual contributions (where they serve to “rectify” the feminization of the political players in Viet Nam-film discourse yet function as a rationalizing alternative to the same tradition), and in their significations within historical accounts of the war. This last category may not necessarily encompass certain areas of the previous ones, but the nature of the discursive complications it presents makes it ideal for further pursuing the issues already raised thus far.

Indochine in this respect can be seen as falling within a development in ’90s global film practice of the internationalization of the Viet Nam-film genre—i.e., it can be situated within a spate of works unified by their geographic specificity in the Vietnamese nation (including Hong Kong and Australian “boat people” texts and the French *L’Amant*, released the same year as *Indochine*) (Devine 357–58), not to mention the phenomenon of films on Viet Nam, notably Tran Anh Hung’s *The Scent of Green Papayas* and *Cyclo*, making an impact in American and European arthouse circuits along with other so-called Asian (actually Chinese) productions. Within such a globalized awareness, the roles that Camille and Eliane perform work not merely as *dramatis personae*, but as allegorical figures. In this respect, Camille’s sexuality is distinguished by its racialization through a “strategic, rather than merely tactical, deployment of a peculiar ‘silence’” described by Abdul JanMohamed (103) as crucial to the construction of a manichean allegory “which functions as the currency, the medium of exchange, for the entire colonialist discursive system. The exchange function of the allegory remains constant, while the generic attributes themselves can be substituted indefinitely (and even contradictorily) for one another” (106). The question not only of how manichean *Indochine* as an allegory is, but whether manichean applies in the first place, should not preempt the consideration at least of the two women characters as representations of their respective nations. Within this framework, the danger of appreciating them first of all as bodily entities within the body politic can be expressed in these terms: “When a society or political order speaks generically about ‘the body,’ it can deny the needs of bodies which do not fit the master plan” (Sennett 23).

In fact this can be seen in how standard definitions of what constitutes a nation have sought to elide categories of race, language, and religion, relying on the significantly less-political category of geography though ultimately falling back on an even more charged requisite of “a soul, a spiritual principle” (Renan 19). The underside—in fact, a consequence as well—of this desire for understanding one’s own nation and that of others is manifested in the fact that, in terms of Asian scholarship at least,

the negative image of the people subjugated by Western colonial powers, which dominated the colonial ideology, was drawn on the basis of cursory observations, sometimes with strong built-in prejudices, or misunderstandings and faulty methodologies.... Those who proclaimed the people of the area indolent, dull, treacherous, and childish, were generally not scholars. They were monks, civil servants, planters, sailors, soldiers, popular travel writers, and tourists. (Alatas 112)

In the formation of resistance to such gross misrepresentation, what has been described as the Janus-faced nature of nationalism has resulted in a quandary for the female subject: the emancipation of women has been represented in and from the West as one of the many promised benefits of modernity; on the other hand, resistance to the West has entailed with it a resistance to the project of modernity as well, and along with it the vaunted emancipation of women:

Wherever women continue to serve as boundary markers between different national, ethnic and religious collectivities, their emergence as full-fledged citizens will be jeopardized, and whatever rights they may have achieved during one stage of nation-building may be sacrificed on the altar of identity politics during another. (Kandiyoti 382)

The collapse of the French colonial system in Indochina bisected not just France’s colonial malaise, particularly in the build-up of Algerian resistance, but also the larger trend of a decline in Western supremacy in Asia (Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars 3), except for the US and its stronghold, the Philippines. Predictably, the right-wing version of the story listed the following differences between, on the left, the sources of French defeat and, on the right, the causes of the Vietminh’s success:

Poor intelligence	Communist mass-indoctrination
Underestimating the enemy	Singleness of purpose
Lack of a positive political programme	United and continuous leadership
Vacillating politicians	Ruthlessness
Left-wing propaganda and sabotage	Good intelligence
Defensive-minded attitude	Good planning
Reluctance to get into the jungle	Support from Red [<i>sic</i>] China
Undue reliance on air support	Undue reliance on air support

(O’Ballance 255)

The list evinces not just a willingness to provide more positive (and quantifiably greater) rationalization for the “our” side, but also lays blame on the solidarity of Others—a fact that calls for eventual qualification in the wake of the now-known differences within the then-seemingly stable alliance comprising the USSR, People’s Republic of China, and North Viet Nam. In fact, the French pullout from Viet Nam can be more usefully expressed as “a welcome escape from an impossible situation” (Jenkins 163) wherein “in this proxy confrontation between the superpowers France’s colonial sovereignty was of secondary concern” (162).

Moreover, as Benedict Anderson has commented, whatever transnational solidarity was practiced occurred primarily as “an understanding that linked colonial rulers from different national metropolises, whatever their internal rivalries and conflicts” (152–53). More significantly, Anderson maintains that the phenomenon of reverse racist discourse was never expressed in the literature of colonial resistance, proving his point by quoting the Constitution drawn up by Macario Sakay for his rebel Philippine republic—a text that starts by declaring that no citizen “shall exalt any person above the rest because of his race or the colour of his skin; fair, dark, rich, poor, educated and ignorant—all are completely equal” (153–54). Applying this principle to Camille helps to delimit the character’s actual political progression from wealthy and Westernized native to unwavering freedom fighter who retains enough measure of affection for her adoptive mother in breaking down and telling her to leave, since “Your Indochine is no more.” The difference in spectatorship response to the film somehow betokens this less-than-radical desire for the Other to perform within the codes of Western honor and loyalty, notwithstanding the fact that even in the film, it is the Western figure of Guy Asselin who spearheads, consciously and remorselessly, the violation of all the rules of conduct that he claims to stand for. Thus just as much as the film was appreciated in the US for its acceptable, politically (though definitely not historically) correct re-gendering of the Viet Nam narrative, the movie was also known to have turned its Camille performer into an international star in what is perhaps officially the most openly anti-Communist Asian country, South Korea. Here it becomes possible to see, in a strictly delimited sense, how conflicts arising from ethnicity (in this case the potential rejection of a pro-Viet Nam text by a presumably anti-Communist viewership) are resolved through the creation of a separate but related internal conflict (Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry 116–17); in particular terms, these would involve the affinities between *Indochine*’s liberal politics and the aspiration to handle the threat of Communist North Korea in a manner that would be of mutual benefit to the two states and that would hopefully result in their reunification.

Central to the trajectory of the film’s marketing strategy, however, is the figure of France in the film. Undoubtedly the casting of Catherine Deneuve as Eliane Davies was intended to proceed from the play on her renown as the model of Marianne, the symbol of France. Similarly as relevant to the narrative would be her persona as a woman whose cool exterior conceals simmering, even dark, passions (notably in Luis Buñuel’s 1966 film *Belle du jour*, reissued in 1995). In *Indochine* the burden of her representational function is demonstrated not so much in the relative respect accorded her body (as opposed to the

“humanizing” of her emotions) but in the astounding narrative curve Eliane undergoes, all the while retaining the very same function—that of mothering—with which she first appears in the film and proceeds to render the tale of the triangulated relations with her and her daughter’s lover. At the point where Camille rejects her vision of a happy-ever-after existence in the plantation and where she retrospectively realizes that Camille had planned to abandon her marital commitments, the plot flash-forwards to a now aged Eliane telling the story to a young man, about the age of her lover Jean-Baptiste, but distinctly Vietnamese in features. It is Etienne, her grandson, Camille and Jean-Baptiste’s son, who at one point became entwined in her parents’ legendary exploits when Jean-Baptiste, captured and separated from Camille, had asked villagers to suckle his infant son; so, the legend goes, did the tale of how all Vietnamese women, even those who no longer lactated or who were too young to do so at the time or who had not even seen Jean-Baptiste and Etienne, claimed to have nursed the child.

At the point where we first see Eliane and Etienne, however, their intimacy, the low-light situation, and the still-recent memory of her story of Jean-Baptiste (before even he and Camille became lovers) drive home the impression that Etienne is Jean-Baptiste’s latter-day substitute. The second flash-forward, after Eliane relates how Jean-Baptiste was captured and had to enlist, as it were, the women of Viet Nam to nourish his son, distinctly identifies the relation between Eliane and Etienne as grandmother and grandson respectively; the scene is succeeded by Eliane’s acquisition of Etienne from Jean-Baptiste through local colonial and religious authorities, and how she insists on the Oriental practice of slandering an attractive child, in the presence of the bewildered white soldier and nun, in order not to arouse the jealousy of evil spirits. When she explains, “The evil spirits are listening,” however, she casts a glance at them that suggests how she might not hesitate to include them in the category. The last appearance of Eliane and Etienne (whose names at this point suggest sibling, if not twinborn, relations) is at the Geneva convention where Camille, unseen since her rejection of her mother and her mother’s country, and destined never to be seen by either Eliane and Etienne or the film viewers, is negotiating for the Vietminh side. Eliane, who could not bring herself to see Camille, instructs Etienne to look for his mother; Etienne realizes the absurdity of his difference and alienation from his biological mother, and rejoins Eliane outdoors. When Eliane expresses regret that mother and son did not find each other, Etienne replies, “*Ma mère, c’est toi*,” upon which Eliane feigns an accident with the heel of her shoe and turns away so Etienne would not see her expression. The fact that in doing so she turns her back on the audience as well makes it impossible to see her face, and at the same time facilitates the speculation of what she was feeling—grief? happiness? both or neither?—while the official loss of the French colony is being negotiated.

That Eliane and Etienne’s dramatic high point should be made synchronous with the 1954 convention brings in the added reading of how the French had retained a bitterness toward their expected ally, the US, along with a respect for the Vietminh, for a succession of reasons:

for Roosevelt's initial opposition to the reassertion of French control in Indochina after World War II, for [the US's] subsequent grudging admission that the area lay in the French domain, for its lukewarm diplomatic support during the 1954 Geneva conference, and for its readiness to assume France's place in Viet Nam immediately after Geneva. (Sullivan 56–57)

Thus the textual production of *Indochine* itself can be read as a nationalist rebuke to the gung-ho representations of the Viet Nam conflict from Hollywood, but whether at the expense of what may be considered a reverse gung-ho presentation may be an issue that could only be settled in historical retrospect, once, say, other participants in the conflict come up with their sobering reassessments of what they believed had actually transpired.

The act of making public what in Western culture is gendered as private (Canto 349–50)—the story of Eliane and Camille—might perhaps provisionally explain why Eliane-as-France should be overvalorized in the multiplicity of her functions—as lover, sister, grandmother; yet it is as mother, first to Camille (Viet Nam) and then to Etienne (the part of Viet Nam that France brought home), that her character serves to modify two related points that have been raised about mothering in feminist discourse. First is the claim that mothers identify more with their female infants than with their male ones, but nurture female infants less because of their ambivalence about growing up in a patriarchy (Hirsch 182–83). Such a typology gets glossed over in *Indochine* because of the aforementioned agglomeration of other feminine functions ascribed to the Eliane character; further, if we concede that in Catherine Deneuve-as-France the fuller representation would include French men, then her inability to identify with Camille's cause is in danger of being conflated with her effectiveness as plantation manager. Her relationship to Etienne would seem to be less qualifiedly ambivalent, but it is the Etienne figure that is in question here, particularly in Jessica Benjamin's suggestion that the son's rejection of the mother would not necessarily constitute a refusal of her omnipotence as it would entail an attempt by the son to claim the phallus (140). What Etienne rejects would be the omnipotence of his biological mother, Camille; what he claims as the phallus would be, ironically, his refusal to reject his spiritual mother, Eliane.

Hence in employing gender as a masquerade in much the same way that femininity operates in its phase of performing the masquerade even without being aware of it, *Indochine* conducts its critique of the imagining of Viet Nam by the US without acknowledging the radical potential of the Vietnamese's anti-colonialist project, much less admitting the masculinist nature and cause of the French involvement. The narrative thread of the representation of Viet Nam in the Western imaginary awaits a further and far more unsettling unspooling.

Note

- 1 The French passages may be translated as follows: “within the course of History, to see how History determines [human] destiny” for the parenthetical remark, followed by [Régis Wargnier’s recollection] “of the great film romances, especially the American ones.” I am not in a position to determine whether the irony in each of these statements was deliberate or not.

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2. Film in the Light of the “History” of Sexuality

Whether sexuality has had an unhistoricizable “history” or, more likely, a number of overlapping, sometimes contradictory histories, the project of attempting any history of sexuality has been fraught with so much basic contentions that to even state that such a history were possible might seem a desperate speculation. Nevertheless, as an endeavor that can be easily situated in the postmodern era, the writing of the history of sexuality, whether as comprehensive argumentation or as localized narrative, cannot be set aside in the meanwhile that its larger kinks still have to be worked out, or, phrased another way, “whether poststructuralism itself is in danger of becoming as normalizing as the discourses that it criticizes” (Sawicki 7). Indeed, it is the position of this essay that such kinks work themselves out best within an applicative mode—and that, more important, the emergence of such a history is not just long overdue but is also the only truly viable guarantee for marginal groups against the strictures of oppression levelled at them in the past.

In working out the logical supposition that a history of sexuality would be indispensable to film history, this essay intends to commence by looking at the various affirmations and critiques made in its name so far, then proceed to reconsider the very bases by which such a topic as sexuality had been configured as historicizable, before shortly (and, it must be said, provisionally) appraising these ideas’ potential(s) for film history. The need for new approaches to film, or for that matter, political, history was first articulated among cultural feminists, in their cautionary observations, as restated by Linda Alcoff, that the bases of feminism itself might be contaminated, as it were, with the dominant culture’s misogynist and sexist (and, we might add, homophobic) frameworks (97). Alcoff herself acknowledges two available theoretical possibilities out of this bind, the first in Teresa de Lauretis’s reformulation of subjectivity as “constituted with a historical process of consciousness” and thereby invested with political agency (110), and the second in Denise Riley’s conceptualization of woman “as gendered subject ... to avoid both the denial ... and an essentializing of sexual difference” (111); to these two Alcoff adds her own: “a conception of human subjectivity as an emergent property of a historicized experience [that allows us to] say ‘feminine subjectivity is construed here and now in such and such a way’ without this ever entailing a universalizable maxim about the ‘feminine’” (115). The limits of such discourses, as earlier emphasized, lay not so much in how a deconstructive project could continually overturn their propositions, if not their premises, but more important, in the question of whether such frameworks would lend themselves to historical applications without unnecessarily complicating the presentation and discussion of documentable data.

By way of further elaborating on the question of subjectivity, the issue of psychosexual development can be productively raised. Ellen Ross and Rayna Rapp critique the fact that “the most popular perspective on the social shaping of sexuality focuses on individuals in family contexts, almost to the detriment of larger social connections” (52) by way of reinvoking the concept of the social contract within capitalism (68). In much the same way this resembles the view that heterosex can be seen to fall

under state control via marriage while homosex more easily falls under state policing (Goldberg 13–15). In fact these perspectives on psychoanalysis acknowledge the contribution of Michel Foucault, whose own views, as per John E. Toews, regard psychoanalysis as both the “culminating synoptic articulation of a regime of truth” and as a therapeutic practice inserted “within a network of technologies for the reconstruction and redefinition of the body and its pleasures” (129).

The boundaries of Foucauldian applications have been apparent to feminists from the start: though Foucault’s emphasis on the body has led to much significant historicizing and revising, Lynn Hunt has pointed out that his own studies consistently assumed a male subject (80–81); moreover, though his refusal to theorize power stemmed from a recognition that doing so would essentialize it, this also resulted in a misrecognition that power was not a gendered phenomenon (84–85). Hunt proposes, as part of a preliminary effort to lay the groundwork for a history of sexuality, “that the terms of Foucault’s argument might be reversed. It is not the deployment of sexuality that solicits a new subject but rather a new version of subjectivity that solicits the deployment of sexuality” (86). Robert A. Padgug in turn suggests three areas wherein discourses on the history of sexuality could be set: first, ideology, with the awareness that sexuality has traditionally been relegated to the private sphere (and therefore disparaged as feminine and queer) and “opposed to the allegedly ‘public’ spheres of work, production, and politics ... conceived of as male and heterosexual” (16–17); second, biology, which “as a set of potentialities and insuperable necessities provides the material of social interpretations and extensions; it does not *cause* human behavior, but conditions and limits it” (19–20); and third, praxis, on both the sexual and nonsexual levels, respectively characterized as relational and social/subjective (21–28).

As has already become explicit at this stage, the theorizing of a history of sexuality could be traced back, if an individual source were to be required, to the works of Foucault, primarily his eponymously titled series. The biggest difficulty that presents itself early on is not merely Hunt’s complaint of the texts’ gender bias being both skewed and lying in the wrong place, but in the cultural assumptions underlying the studies themselves. Ironically, the success of *The History of Sexuality* rests on its critique of European sexual culture, to the point where this same specific culture assumes a uniqueness unavailable to non-European and un-Europeanized contexts; although it might be argued that the global community has hardly been able to immunize itself from polyvalent cultural influences, it would be possible to counter that the insidiousness of Eurocentrism presumes the possibility of marginality even within Europe and among Europeans themselves. Foucault himself ensures this exclusionary outcome by drawing a distinction between the *scientia sexualis* of Western civilization and the *ars erotica* of all the Other major civilizations (57–58), even though the broad outline of his study—that sexual repression served heterosexual imperatives in effectively promoting sexual discourse—can be seen to apply in non-“scientific” cultures, including (as Foucault himself demonstrated in tracing the genealogy of sexual practice) religious cultures in the West itself.

In fact, if one were to seek to recuperate the works of Foucault for their radical potentials, it might be necessary to observe his call in his essay “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” to “search for descent”—as “not the erecting of foundations: on the contrary, it disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself” (147)—and apply this principle to the study of Foucault as theorist; although one might protest that this would violate Foucault’s remark in “What Is an Author?” that discourse should ideally circulate “without any need for an author” (138), it would also be necessary to keep in mind that Foucault himself effectively justified a form of authorial existence through his elaboration of the concept of the “author-function.” Within the terms of this essay, such a genealogical project would be twofold in nature: an inspection of earlier related Foucault texts, and a consideration of pertinent biographical information.

Foucault’s intention to write a history of sexuality was first explicated in his volume *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, in which he described a discourse on sexuality as revealing, “not of course as the ultimate truth..., a certain ‘way of speaking’; and one would show how this way of speaking is invested not in scientific discourses, but in a system of prohibitions and values” (193). Curiously, his projected latter-volume studies after his introductory volume indicated a different teleological intention: in chronological order, these subsequent books were to be titled *The Body and the Flesh*, *Perverts*, and *Population and Races* (Macey 354).¹ One way, perhaps the only way at the moment, of understanding why Foucault should be so intensely engaged with politics during the period of his writing *The Archaeology of Knowledge* may be the known factors of the tension between his disillusionment with the French Communist Party (articulated in his interviews—see “Clarifications on the Question of Power” 262) and the May 1968 uprising of students and workers in France. Ironically, he was in Tunisia when the May 1968 events were transpiring, and it was his involvement in the simultaneous unrest among students in this Third-World setting that Foucault’s acquaintances mark as the start of the philosopher’s politicization (Macey 191). His involvement in fact extended to his initiation in France of a prison-watch system so effective that it resulted in a spate of hunger strikes, mutinies, and suicides (262 et seq.), as well as to his participation in protest actions, directly experiencing in the process instances of police brutality (271, 280, 312–13).

The crucial concept in tracing Foucault’s ideational progression—one that would lead to the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* and account for his rethinking of the succeeding volumes—would be his articulation of the episteme, both “as a totality of relations that can be discovered, for a given period, between the sciences when one analyzes them at the level of discursive regularities” and as “a questioning that accepts the fact of science only in order to ask the question what it is for that science to be a science” (*Archaeology of Knowledge* 191–92). From this position he effected a shift in conceptual framework from the episteme to the *dispositif*. Unfortunately Foucault did not have an extensive methodological discourse on the *dispositif*, the way he did with the episteme in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*; instead he presented the *dispositif* as a theoretical innovation in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, leaving it up to other writers to expound further on it.

Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow describe the *dispositif* as “a grid of intelligibility constructed by the historian. But it is also the practices themselves, acting as an apparatus, a tool, constituting subjects and organizing them” (121). Gilles Deleuze further elaborated on the concept in terms of “a tangle, a multilinear ensemble.... composed of lines.... [that] do not outline or surround systems which are each homogeneous in their own right..., but follow directions, trace balances which are always off balance, now drawing together and then distancing themselves from one another” (159). Deleuze attributes to the *dispositif* (translated in his essay as “social apparatus”) four dimensions: curves of visibility, curves of enunciation, lines of force, and lines of subjectification (160)—to which he added “lines of splitting, breakage, fracture, all of which criss-cross and mingle together, some lines reproducing or giving rise to others, by means of variations or even changes in the way they are grouped” (162). The problematics begin when Deleuze ventures to valorize the *dispositif*, mentioning in his text the consequences of its use as “the repudiation of universals” (162) and “a change in orientation ... away from the Eternal and towards the new” (163), which do not only also characterize the episteme (not to mention deconstruction theory), but also contradict his answer to a discussant’s question thus:

Could methods analogous to those of Foucault be used to study oriental social apparatuses [*dispositifs*] or those of the Middle East? Certainly so, since Foucault’s language [*langage*], which sees things in terms of parcels of lines, as entanglements, as multilinear ensembles, does have an oriental feel to it. (168)

While it would be obviously necessary to reject Deleuze’s extramural claims for the *dispositif*, it might still be interesting, at the very least, to speculate how Foucault’s earlier announced sequels would have turned out had he maintained or elaborated his concept of the *dispositif*. Instead, Foucault revised his conceptual framework, calling it the “aesthetics of existence,” and wrote his essay “Technologies of the Self” as a blueprint for the forthcoming second and third *History of Sexuality* volumes. The “aesthetics of existence” appears to be the most problematic concept among the three, premised as it is on themes that recognize and emphasize individual agency (Martin et al. 48–49) but which tend to run up against a larger poststructuralist nihilism when it comes to considering the possibilities of attempting institutional changes (see “Governmentality”).

For purposes of involving politically marginalized groups, the *dispositif* appears to be the most enabling so far among Foucault’s contributions. In fact, where in *Archaeology of Knowledge* he described “generative grammar” as merely secondary to archaeological analysis (207), as might have been the case with applications of the episteme, the *dispositif*, in lending itself to (admittedly reductionist) illustrative purposes in the manner of Deleuze’s lines, curves, tangles, and webs, appears to support strategic outlinings of programs of action.

Feminist politics exhibits an awareness of Foucault’s progression toward the *dispositif*:

[Foucault] did not confine his political interventions to the experiments in playing with language characteristic of the literary avant-garde. His books were intended to serve as interventions in contemporary practices that govern the lives of oppressed groups.... Moreover, his skeptical attitude toward Enlightenment humanism, universalist histories and traditional emancipatory theories coincided with feminist critiques of the limits of liberalism and Marxism. (Sawicki 95)

It might be overvaloring the evidence of history to state that Foucault “wrote from the perspective of a specific intellectual engaged in specific interventions,” but it is certainly undeniable that one of his most important insights “is his insistence that one’s theoretical imperatives and commitments be motivated by specific practical imperatives” (Sawicki 108–09). In this way it becomes possible for feminist criticism to insist that relations of ideology in a text be seen in the contexts of their emergence, with careful attention paid to the interest group’s own private and public spheres (Newton 772–73).

In summarily historicizing feminist film history itself, Patrice Petro describes the initial possibilities as one of either choice “between a *formal* history of filmic conventions and institutions and a *cultural* history of film reception and spectatorship” (66); then, from what she considered a short-lived and unsatisfactory application of reflectionism (68–70), came the next dialectical stage, as

what began as an attempt to *revise* the concept of film authorship by rethinking the place of the female director in the history of the Hollywood cinema ended up in debates about the concept of the subversive text—and in arguments (to borrow from Nancy Miller) for a “(new) male monolith of anonymous textuality” that inhibited further discussion of female authorship in the development of the classical film. (73)

From this stage Petro marks the present as involved with studies on spectatorship, or what she calls consumerism, then calls for an expansionist perspective in regarding other eras and national cinemas, while also advocating a return to earlier debates on film history “to address issues that were too hastily dismissed or prematurely foreclosed” (77).

What a consideration of the genealogical bases of the Foucauldian project on the history of sexuality adds to this enumeration of approaches is the question of Foucault’s “generative grammar,” or what has been recently reformulated in cultural studies as cultural policy. Understandably the first-order formulation of this principle—that theorizing be made to conform to verifiable institutional programs of action and evaluated according to how they succeed—would not be entirely acceptable for most types of critical analyses. On the other hand, what an awareness of the *dispositif* does best to the writing of history—of sexuality, of film—would be to inflect the activity with the troubling notion that all may not be well outside the historian’s chamber, by the mere fact that the raw material with which history serves up its narratives necessarily comprises individuals in social ferment: the historian’s labor thus both contracts to involve the individual

psychoanalytic realm, and expands to question, and perhaps begin to answer, what has been happening to the social order(s).

Note

- 1 As it turned out, only two volumes succeeded the first, both of them published the year of Foucault's death in 1984: Volume 2 was translated *The Use of Pleasure* and Volume 3 *The Care of the Self*.

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3. Pornography & Erotica: Boundaries in Dissolution

The status of pornography within feminist theory can be equated—problematically, of course—with the role that AIDS has played in gay activism:¹ both AIDS and pornography are (or have been perceived as) so much opposed to certain cherished ideals, such as respect for sexual difference in the case of feminism or free exercise of the pursuit of pleasure as a gay-rights touchstone. The very pervasiveness of both issues has in fact led to strategic moves on the part of certain activist organizations premised on the inevitability of, say, AIDS being a biomedical reality that impinges on venereal activity, or pornography being part of the patriarchal power structure that seeks to perpetrate its own interests by naturalizing its own methods of control. In either case there is also the accepted notion that either condition cannot just be wished away, since the requisites for their dismantling lie outside the institutional spheres of influence of these social movements. In their sociological phases, however, the differences between AIDS and pornography are just as crucial: for while AIDS is regarded, at least in official terms, as a disease requiring the search for a cure by both the government and the medical establishment, a certain crucial segment of the entertainment industry (or what may even be categorized as the pleasure sub-industry) actually and aggressively advocates for the persistence of pornographic production.

The implications for the feminist movement of such a contestation are complicated by the relative and near-simultaneous recency of the '60s genealogy of both feminism (as traceable to women's lib) and, say, a concrete manifestation of a pornographically inflected impulse in the editorial "philosophies" of such publications as *Playboy* and *Hustler*. To say that it was once possible to perceive women's lib and the sexual revolution as mutually beneficent might sound too simplistic today, with the historical reality of such an alliance reducible to such still-evocative (and thereby suspiciously nostalgic) imagery such as bra-burning and contraceptive usage. During the mid-'80s, when a succession of Republican presidencies promoted an undercutting of both women's initiatives and the interests of claimants to the right of free expression, an issue of *Jump Cut* opened its forum on the topic of "Sexual Representation" with an article that bemoaned the bid "of the feminist anti-pornography movement ... to seek state censorship" (Kleinhans and Lesage 25), citing as an example the alliance made between women's groups and the Moral Majority in Indianapolis.

The logic that may have led to such an apparent compromise may be understood in the light of how a pro-women polemic on pornography had been formulated. Andrea Dworkin, in writing a new introduction to the paperback edition of *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, foregrounded the issue of power by analogizing the struggle by women against pornographic exploitation with that of African Americans against slavery (xiii-xv). On the other hand, the then-emergent gay movement constituted a throwback to sexual-libertarian principles, commencing with the manner in which the oppression of gays centered on the nature of their desires and practices. The pathologization of homosexuality not only required responses on the level of psychoanalytic resistances and reformulations, but also necessitated the aggressive display of images considered

unnatural and/or offensive. Hence the split within feminism between those who considered pornography “a *meaningful text about* the sexual act it represents” vis-à-vis those who, like Dworkin, regarded it as “the *enabling theory of* the acts it represents: a charter for action, or ... the claim that pornography is the theory and rape the practice” (Clover 1). In articulating further distinctions among the positions taken for or against the issue, Lynne Segal enumerates three “distinct” ones—liberal, moral right, and feminist (6)—but also qualified that the last one could be further divided between feminists allied with the right and those opposed to censorship, since the blanket condemnation of pornography “discourages us all from facing up to women’s own sexual fears and infantile fantasies” (8), and precludes the provision of “more sexually explicit material produced by and for women, more open and honest discussion of all sexual issues, alongside the struggle against women’s general subordinate economic and social status” (9).

From a different perspective—that of the producers and consumers, rather than (notwithstanding a crucial overlap) the promoters and critics, pornography can be seen to have a class inflection wherein it retains the function of being “a medium of sexual exploration and a source of modernization of ideas about sex,” as well as a means of income-earning for women who find it “more acceptable, even liberating, than other forms of labor that may be available to them” (Ross 204). More pertinent to the concerns of this essay would be this consideration of class coupled with lesbian sadomasochism, which “forces the issue of power in relationships into the open, directly challenging the view that all women desire ‘vanilla [or conventional] sex’ and claiming the dominance/submission pattern as a positive feminist possibility and not just a form of male oppression” (Read 289). As may be obvious by now, this essay considers the anti-censorship side of the pornography debate a more enabling though still problematic position, and purports to examine the possible means by which such a proposed resolution (of an as-yet still-unresolved controversy) can be further advanced toward the interests of discursive enrichment; ironically the route by which this strategy can be considered would be from the production, rather than the critical, side of film practice, with the examination of two film texts, Nagisa Oshima’s *In the Realm of the Senses* (1975) and Bruce LaBruce’s *Super 8½*, premiered in 1995, as possible models for exemplification.

One reason why the critical aspect of what may be provisionally termed pornographic anti-censorship feminism may not be enough for progressive critical purposes is that such a position would be vulnerable to connotative charges, just as anti-pornography censorship crusaders have found it difficult to distinguish themselves from moral rightists. Even within the presumably left-leaning circles of American academe, the defense of pornography, as a tradition, might manage to avoid the girlie-magazines’ “philosophies” but inevitably harkens back to the liberal-humanist tracts that revolved on “the two fundamental questions surrounding pornography: what are the psychological *effects* of pornographic works on the normal individual...; and to what extent may pornography be judged as legitimate literature rather than merely ersatz eroticism” (Hughes xiv). The historiographic project of delving into the genealogy of the concept of pornography—in contrast with obscenity—has yet yielded that, as a regulatory category,

its practice “was invented [during the 19th century] in response to the perceived menace of the democratization of culture” (Hunt 12–13), specifically the increased access of the masses to print media. During an even earlier era of “modern Europe, that is, between 1500 and 1800, pornography was most often a vehicle for using the shock of sex to criticize religious and political authorities” (10). In the meanwhile, however, that a historiographic agenda can be formulated and implemented to restore to pornography its Bakhtinian properties (themselves sources of further problematics) of valorizing the carnivalesque, what may be left for anti-censorship feminists to do is to move beyond strictly critical considerations of the nature and functions of the pornographic imperative in contemporary Western society.

In the Realm of the Senses, though historically a beneficiary of the liberal-humanist defense of freedom of expression, has figured in this venture to carve out a more workable *feminist* approach to pro-pornographic anti-censorship ideals. In his essay “The Question Oshima,” Stephen Heath maintains that the movie’s viewership principle is “neither the thematics of voyeurism ... nor the binding structure of a classic narrative disposition” (150); rather, the film draws on

the impossibility of “the seen,” haunted not by a space “off” that must and can be unceasingly caught up into a unity, the position of a view for the viewer, but by a “nothing seen” that drains the images of any full presence, of any adequate view.... The splitting [therefore] of “the seen” turns on the development of a divided inclusion of the spectator. (150–51)

Such an innovative modification of what Heath termed “the look” (150) ushered in not only the question of spectatorial activity. Obviously facilitated by the film’s non-Western originary context, the issue of whether there exists “any clear line between generic pornography and the sophisticated erotic text,” not even within certain traditional distinctions granted by feminists to differentiate erotic works from pornographic ones, can be drawn from its “overall strategy of undercutting the unity and fullness of character” (Turim 86) as a means of advancing its critique of voyeuristic and narrative imperatives.

In a manner that can be regarded as recuperatory, certain other readings of the film express appreciation for its decentering of male dominance (Williams 220–22) as well as its avoidance of such generic porn-film staples as “meat” and “money” shots (Lehman 176, 178). Such valorizing has even gone to the extent of maintaining that the female character Abe Sada’s pleasure in her lover Kichi-san did not rely on his penile dimensions (176), notwithstanding the fact that Sada’s increasing desire to strangle Kichi-san derives from their mutual realization that he may be losing interest in their physical experimentations, coupled with their discovery that he tends to acquire an erection whenever she mounts him while strangling him. Apart from, as it were, ghettoizing certain prerogatives of the porn-film genre as male and thereby un-feminist and vice versa, this critical premise further elides the culture-specific aspects of sexual pleasure. *In the Realm of the Senses* is obviously set during the commencement of what the Japanese refer to as their era of ultra-nationalism, where even the sight of children taunting an old

exposed tramp while waving Imperial Army flags makes understandable the seeking of refuge within the most private possible sanctuaries; as if to literalize this point further, Kichi-san, in his last outdoor shot, is shown headed in the opposite direction as Imperial Army soldiers march by.

Thus any possible impression that Sada and Kichi-san may have been intended as indexical signifiers for the decline in political morality of fascist-era Japan cannot prosper within the context of their refusal to acknowledge any responsibility toward the roles and duties expected of men and women in such a presumably militarized social system. Sada enacts the function of a geisha, even if she started out as a domestic helper, and occasionally visits her husband in order to get some money so as to be able to afford her dalliances with Kichi-san. Moreover, she scandalizes the other geishas by constantly indulging in their presence, not in genital copulation (which even a 68-year-old geisha did not mind witnessing and later participating in), but in, as they put it, “always taking him in [her] mouth”—the first time she does it, in private, she causes him to remark, “You’re a strange girl.” A number of other indicators might help bolster this queer interpretive direction—the opening sequence, wherein Sada’s female roommate admits that “Yesterday I had a strange feeling” about her and starts to feel her up, taking her to witness Kichi-san’s conjugal performance with his wife in order to possibly further arouse her; and Sada’s insistence on wearing Kichi-san’s kimono and on him wearing hers when she goes to visit her husband. Perhaps most tellingly, Sada and Kichi-san hold a mock wedding ceremony with other geishas as their guests, with the latter encouraging the couple to indulge in their honeymooning in their presence and then deflowering their youngest member as well, with the use of what may well be the Oriental equivalent of a dildo.

These two directions suggested by the differences between this reading of the Oshima film and that of other still-feminist texts can be better opened up by taking up more frontal discourses on queer pornography. Certain essays by Richard Dyer and Thomas Waugh have brought up, respectively, the conceivably liberatory potentials of reflexivity (Dyer 54) and opposition to so-called “straight porn” in narrative (Waugh, “Hard to Imagine” 71) as well as structural terms (“Gay vs. Straight” 32–34). Curiously, however, and perhaps appropriately for cinema-studies purposes, a recent release, *Super 8½*, takes up these points within its diegetic framework and provides various deconstructive means, primarily through the use of ironic humor, by which these same instances of applying progressive-genre principles may be inspected without reverting to the limits of what Waugh calls het-porn.

Filmmaker Bruce LaBruce had tread on politically incorrect boundary lines earlier in his comic-ironic portrait of a passionate affair between a queenly character, played by himself, and a skinhead punk he had picked up, in *No Skin Off My Ass* (1990), which itself had encountered censorship problems in Britain and Canada.² Matias Viegner’s appreciation of the film proceeds from “its critique of the puritan seriousness and the denial of pleasure in radical politics” and its celebration “of gays and lesbians whose political engagement is more anarchist than liberal, and whose practices promote

pleasure in the service of dissent" (129). *Super 8½*, for its part, takes to logical extremes both this preoccupation with the reflexive self-insertion of the filmmaker as well as his preference for unresolvable political issues, by dealing with the fictional story of a down-and-out gay-porn filmmaker, played by LaBruce and named "Bruce," and the breakup of his relations with lovers, friends, and associates. Subtitled *A Cautionary Bio-Pic*, the film imposes its credits onto a comic street encounter that may at first be taken for queer-bashing, but which turns out, as confirmed by radio reports of offscreen police observers, to be nothing more than a mere "domestic dispute" between lovers. The campy elements are underscored through the use of the dance-revival hit "Venus"; but on the other hand the reference to the dismissal by the police of gay serial-killer Jeffrey Dahmer's public struggle with one of his victims (a Pakistani, the encounter of which was witnessed by women—a conglomeration of gay, foreign, and female Others) provides a sobering undertone and serves to foreshadow the insistence of the tragic within the movie's viciously funny satirical takes on the pretensions of avant-garde film practice.

The film *Super 8½* itself is constructed as "Bruce's" autobiographical summation, originally titled *The Real Life of a Pornographer*. Within the work, though, are several short segments, announced by titles and filmmakers, done by himself as well as his friendly rival dyke pornographer Googie.³ I have been able to recognize the *No Skin Off My Ass* excerpt as deriving from LaBruce's previous full-length feature, but as to whether this validates the many other excerpts as authentically drawn from his other works, or whether even these had incorporated aspects of his real life (apart from his press statements—see Hannaham 56), may well be beside the point at this stage.

In the midst of "Bruce" admitting to increasingly morbid tendencies ("I feel so Joy Division"), Googie holds for his benefit a press conference—upon which the black-and-white film turns into color. "Bruce" ruins for himself this media opportunity by refusing to play according to the rules of his being a minor participant relative to Googie, and refusing to answer a series of questions on his use of deconstruction, the possibility of his having AIDS, his resemblance to Andy Warhol, his feeling on being a has-been, and what had happened to his lover, with whom he had broken up in the course of (making) the film. The end for "Bruce" is enacted in literally a cross-referential manner, with the death scene of the Elizabeth Taylor character in *BUTterfield 8* serving to introduce the eulogization by his ex-lover; after the entire closing credits, a dedication, "To Judy," appears,⁴ followed by outtakes with "Bruce" coughing/laughing/crying "Where is everybody? Are we gonna finish the movie?" just when most members of the movie audience would have thought it appropriate to leave the auditorium.

The futility of upholding such a sample as *Super 8½* as a literal model for emulation is obvious from the start: how many films can be made about *actual* filmmaking, with the multiple levels of reality made to resonate with one another? Yet there may be a value derivable from the movie's source of and attempt at jouissance, as formulable in this discourse on Roland Barthes's *Le plaisir du texte* and *Le degré zéro de l'écriture*:

A text will be “homosexual” to the extent that it presents itself as both subject and object of desire, a text in the act of beholding itself, often through the mirror of the other, and loving itself. The text will be continually in motion.... Without end, it will perpetually turn back upon itself, thus rendering any dualistic distinction unnecessary. (Martin 293)

A similarly open-ended approach can be realized in feminist film theory, and in fact already commenced when

Critics of the feminist anti-pornography movement ... raised questions of female desire and ... challenged feminism to articulate the relations between gender, race, and class. In so doing they have shifted the terrain of the debates and have moved us out of the problematic of pornography in directions that will, in their turn, generate new contradictions and blind spots. (Read 290)

LaBruce himself enacts a real-life queer parallel with the feminist debate in his *Sight and Sound* testimonial, wherein he scored the likes of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation for wanting “to normalize and homogenize homos, to render us as bland and boring and inoffensive as anyone else” (“Obsession” 31), in reference to the organization’s quest for positive imaging of homosexual characters in Hollywood cinema. The extremity of LaBruce’s positioning requires a fuller sampling of his closing remarks, which effect a deliberate blurring of successive boundaries between Hollywood as center and gay porn as periphery to the already-peripheral practice of independent production:

I’ve seen far more convincing and carefully observed depictions of fags in Hollywood flicks than in any earnest, cautious queer activist film, and you can quote me on that, wildly.... I hate to break it to you, but homosexuality is not normal. That’s what makes it so entertaining. And if you haven’t figured out yet that being a fag is all about show business, you might as well let your membership card expire. Hollywood was built on the backs of fags (and fags on their backs)—from hairdressers and make-up artists to art directors and choreographers to actors and directors. It still is today more or less controlled by the gay mafia. *So we must know what we’re doing.* (31, italics mine)

As still-provisional strategies, the resort to reflexivity, the incorporation of the autobiographical voice, the appropriation of elements from “enemy” porn, the solicitation of spectatorial involvement, and perhaps above all the coupling of artistic intelligence with an overriding sense of the ironic, may yet indicate for us the extent to which pornography, in (what could be one of) its progressive-film phases, has been attempting to renew its historically lost function of serving as a thorn in the side of the powerful, rather than of the oppressed.

Notes

- 1 A temporal link among abortion, pornography, and AIDS as “the three single most powerful issues in the past twenty years” appears in Read 277.
- 2 Both films by this filmmaker mentioned in this essay were brought to my attention by Roger Hallas. The Canadian censorship case of *No Skin Off My Ass* involved its seizure “by the Morality Squad of Toronto” and its being charged “with three violations: bondage, nudity with violence and the sucking of toes” (Murray 422).
- 3 These include, as credited to Googie, a *Screen Test* of the Friday sisters, who prefer to sleep with each other as well as with lesbians and straight men, although they profess to hate the latter; *The Lollipop Revolution*, a straight-porn excerpt where the stud, unable to achieve an erection, uses a strap-on dildo and wears a wig and thereby performs as a dyke lover; and *Submit to My Finger*, a Thelma-and-Louise take-off where the Friday sisters rape and scalp some male victims and ride off, kissing torridly, into the sunset.
- 4 Garland?—LaBruce was born the same day the Stonewall-era icon died (Murray 422).

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4. Womanliness as (Masculine) Masquerade in Psychoanalytic Film-Texts

Among American film practitioners, Brian DePalma has staked one of the strongest claims to the late Alfred Hitchcock's "master-of-suspense" mantle. The manner in which DePalma ensured such a designation for himself might be even more extreme than the case of his French New Wave counterpart Claude Chabrol in that, like Chabrol, DePalma had concentrated on thriller (horror and/or suspense) material, but had also, for roughly the same period of his Hitchcock specialization from the early '70s to the mid-'80s, inserted a pointed and outright *Psycho* (1960) tribute—a suspenseful shower sequence—in all of his films.

The challenge for any filmmaker interested in following Hitchcock's footsteps would only begin with an appreciation of the latter's fluency in audiovisual language. Even more difficult would be duplicating the impact that Hitchcock has had on debates on gender and sexuality, with seemingly every new discursive field having its own appreciators of the radical potential of Hitchcock's film-texts; witness, for example, this recent valorization:

In so far as this psychoanalytic model of identification clarifies the primary mode of address of classical Hollywood cinema and its codes, it suggests that rather than inserting the male spectator into a fixed, stable heterosexual subject position, Hitchcock's films return him to the polymorphous sexuality of the pre-Oedipal phase. (Corber 61)

This essay will seek to delve further into what may be regarded as Hitchcock's legacies, as DePalma has attended to developing them, particularly in the area of psychoanalysis. For this purpose, the essay would rather center on the two DePalma films that deal overtly with psychoanalytic issues, *Dressed to Kill* (1980) and *Raising Cain* (1992), rather than engage in a consideration of DePalma's psychobiography. On this score, Robin Wood, even in his reworking of his study of Hitchcock, has pointed out that Hitchcock's films in themselves offer sufficient material for whatever auteurist purposes one might require, and that "biographical data may confirm or consolidate a reading arrived at from a careful analysis of the film itself. It follows that such a use is minor, incidental, and never necessary, it merely accords the satisfaction of confirmation" (21). Moreover, it is the purpose of this essay to pursue the issues of sexuality and subjectivity as presented in the psychoanalytic discourse of the film-texts themselves; the drawing of relations between these insights extracted from the said texts and that of the life of DePalma (whether with or without the quotation marks around his name) might have to constitute a new and different project altogether.

Dressed to Kill and *Raising Cain* both deal with men who threaten women, with the men in both instances effecting a transvestic self-transformation in certain ways reminiscent of that of Norman Bates in *Psycho*. In *Dressed to Kill*, Dr. Robert Elliott, a psychotherapist, responds to a sexually frustrated female patient, Kate Miller, who tries to seduce him, by turning into Bobbie (whose identity is revealed only at the end), stalking

the patient through the latter's extra-marital encounter, and killing her with a razor. Liz Blake, a hooker, witnesses the crime and is in turn pursued by the as-yet mysterious blonde; Liz is helped along by Kate's son, Peter, who speculates that since Bobbie can be seen exiting Dr. Elliott's office, she must be one of Dr. Elliott's patients (Dr. Elliott makes the same claim to himself—he believes that Bobbie is one of his patients and has taken to criminal acts of violence out of his refusal to grant her a sex-change operation). Liz accedes to the investigating officer's suggestion to get Dr. Elliott's address book, and enters the latter's office using the intent to seduce him as a ploy. This only triggers off Bobbie's impulses once more within Dr. Elliott, and only the intervention of an undercover female police officer saves Liz from being Bobbie's next victim (as well as uncovers Bobbie's real identity); Liz, however, continues to have nightmares of Dr. Elliott escaping from the prison hospital and successfully stalking her as Bobbie.

Crucial to the structural requisites of the Hitchcock and DePalma films mentioned so far (*Psycho*, *Dressed to Kill*, and *Raising Cain*) is, even on a literal level, the emergence of the identity of their respective psychopathic killers. In considering how their identities are constructed, it would be possible to proceed from basic class relations and note how the most bourgeoisified among the three, *Dressed to Kill*'s Dr. Elliott, is also the least sympathetic. However, this would lead the discussion back to a consideration of Hitchcock's and DePalma's political sympathies, which would only be a secondary concern at best, given the nature of their film material in these instances.

A more appropriate starting point would be that of transvestism. One of the most famous usages (perhaps just as famous for detractors who consider it a misuse) of this phenomenon in feminist film theory is that of Laura Mulvey, particularly in her related essays "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" and "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* (1946)." Within the context of this discussion, the problem would not be so much that Mulvey limits, for one thing, the crossing of gender boundaries to female film spectators alone ("Afterthoughts" 37); it would also be possible to raise the possibility, for another thing, that

to hold that there is no such thing as a natural or innate sexuality is not to abjure necessarily the category of the psychic. To jettison psychoanalysis along with essentialism ... is to foreclose not just the category of desire but also the question of how desire comes to be articulated within a particular social formation. (Fuss 109–10)

In fact the potential for male subjects to feel that their previously assured positions of patriarchal superiority had been destabilized had already been raised in cinema by way of Hitchcock himself, at least as expounded in Tania Modleski's formulation, in her discussion of Hitchcock's work, of the "dialectic of identification and dread in the male spectator's response to femininity—the movement between ... 'hysteria' (confusion of sexual boundaries) and 'paranoia' (their reinforcement)" (13).

In *Raising Cain* a more extreme fragmentation of the male subject's psyche is expedited, simply by having Carter Nix suffer from multiple personalities. Carter's father (also named Carter Nix and played by the same actor), this time the psychoanalyst of the story, orders Cain to kidnap children in order to test his findings on multiple personalities; when the job gets too nasty, however, Carter's evil twin, Cain (who is external to Carter only in his mind) takes over. When Carter's wife Jenny, disgruntled by his strange obsessive behavior, resumes an affair with another man, Cain sinks her car, with her inside, in a swamp (the movie's *Psycho* reference, rather than a shower scene). She however survives the attempt, confronts Carter, and demands to know where their daughter Amy is. Cain of course had already taken Amy to Dr. Nix, but this time, with Jenny, the police, and her lover following, Margo, a female personality, takes over Carter, rescues Amy from his own father by killing him, and escapes—never to be seen again, except by Amy in her fantasies.

Lest we get the impression that these men-in-(gender) crisis frameworks are new, the contestation of the notion that it is the female subject who, in the economy of desire, experiences lack in relation to the phallus has been done before, notably by Marjorie Garber in her strategic expansion of the biological foundations of psychoanalysis to include other animal forms; thus, "phallogentrism is *loss of estrus*" (120), the latter defined as a recurrent period of ovulation most mammals use as their primary signifier of sexual readiness rather than the penile erection in the human male. On an even more primal level, granting this circumstance, men would thereby be just as susceptible to feelings of lack and envy.

In psychoanalytic terms, the parallel concept of the mirror stage, described by Jacques Lacan as "a temporal dialectic that decisively projects the formation of the [male] individual into history," can be seen to be operating in the DePalma films not as "a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation" ("The Mirror Stage" 4) but rather as a temporal and traumatic progression from the insufficiency of masculinity toward the plenitude of femininity, requiring as a consequence of phallic loss or surrender the undermining of the system of femininity from within—as observable in the always-unstable balance between the psychopathic characters' weak masculine and strong feminine sides. Hence the differences between the Hitchcock film on the one hand and those of DePalma on the other stem primarily from a shift in the order relations between the sexes. In this instance, Lacan's assertion—that

If, in effect, the man finds satisfaction for his demand for love in the relation with the woman, in as much as the signifier of the phallus constitutes her as giving in love what she does not have—conversely, his own desire for the phallus will make its signifier emerge in its persistent divergence towards "another woman" who may signify this phallus in various ways ("The Signification of the Phallus" 290)

— finds just-as-divergent applications in each temporal instance. In the '60s film, Norman Bates's mother, who desires the phallus, finds it in her son and provokes through him murderously hysterical rampages aggravated by his resistance to her. In contrast, in

the '80s settings, Dr. Robert Elliott's Bobbie, in an instance of reverse erotic transference, seeks to give up the phallus she biologically possesses (although she provokes similarly murderous outbursts) by desiring a change in sex instead; whereas Carter Nix's Margo actually strives to save the children kidnapped by her (and Carter's and Cain's) father, even if it means killing the father himself—a seizure of the phallus in terms that follow the standard Oedipal trajectory but without the component of hysteria attending the other cases.

The shift in social orders between the decades in question should not prove surprising or irrelevant to a discussion of sexualities and subjectivities:

Sex/gender systems are always unstable sociocultural constructions. Their very instability explains the cultural importance of these systems: their purpose is to delimit and contain the threatening absence of boundaries between human bodies and among bodily acts that would otherwise explode the organizational and institutional structures of social ideologies. (Epstein and Straub 2)

The issue of transvestism, in this regard, should also be seen as not necessarily defining the core gender identity of the most “normal” of the three cases (Garber 134), that of Carter/Margo, just as, in contrast, the solidified cross-gendered identities of Norman/mother and Dr. Elliott/Bobbie have rendered them menaces to society in general, and to women in particular.

As a feminine project, the pursuit of a phallus with the object of claiming it for oneself may not have seemed possible, much less desirable, at the start. Sigmund Freud describes women obsessed with “becoming like a man” as partaking of, in so many words, weirdness,¹ if not “‘denial,’ a process which ... in an adult would mean the beginning of a psychosis” (178); he even goes as far as maintaining that little girls would object to phallic masturbation, even after conceding that possession of the phallus could be a notion conceivable to women (180). One way therefore of postulating what happened to phallic women since the time of *Psycho* is that the prescriptive measure remarked upon by Freud—that of their equating the penis with (the bearing of) a child (180–81) and coming to desire domesticity—was rejected by them in favor of not just bearing the phallus, but playing with it as well—masturbating it, if you will. In so doing they may have found that pleasure in this instance could be derived from more than just a singular source (as might be the case in the male)—i.e., from the pleasure of playing with an object that one has won and now possesses, plus the pleasure in the knowledge of the displeasure of the (masculine) owner that the object was expropriated from.

Given a social condition where characters like *Dressed to Kill*'s Kate can articulate her sexual interest in men and her indignation about her husband, where Liz can ply her fleshly trade for the purpose of investing in the stock market, or where *Raising Cain*'s Jenny can decide on her own terms whether to pursue an extra-marital fling and later cut up a husband who (through his evil-twin personality) had been abusive toward her, it becomes understandable, not to mention justifiable, that modern-day males in trouble

should seek psychic solace in femininity, notwithstanding the neuroses that such an option incites in them. The historical lesson that may be backgrounded against this insight is that the reverse option, that of homeovestism (wearing the clothes of the same sex), has its own pathological consequences for men (Tasker 128–29). In fact homeovestism, although still regarded as a signifier of normalcy, can be reevaluated as even more insidious in its capacity for causing psychological damage compared with the transgressive practice of transvestism, in that its designation of increased social and sexual expectations might aggravate the very factors that led to the crisis in the first place.

Moreover, the transvestism of DePalma's male-troubled characters involves more than just the appropriation of women's appurtenances for fetishistic purposes, as discussed by both John Ellis and Laura Mulvey in relation to, as well as a variant of, voyeurism (Neale 17). What Dr. Robert Elliott and Carter Nix's common objective is is not that of diminishing the distance between them and their objects of pleasure, but rather setting some distance between themselves and their patriarchal systems, which they have perceived as too crisis-ridden to provide them with much-needed comfort; the boundary they seek to cross by cross-dressing is not over into pleasure (a prerogative possible only for wielders of the phallus), but rather over into the assurance of power, the phallus that they (along with the social structure of masculinity) have lost.

To further qualify this view, the realization that Dr. Elliott and Carter Nix do not have the phallus can be further extrapolated along Oedipal lines to their awakening that, between their father and their mother, it is not the former who possesses it either. In Dr. Robert Elliott's case this perception is implicit, in that Dr. Elliott, as "father" to Bobbie, behaves as a castrating mother would, refusing Bobbie her request for a sex-change and, as Bobbie, castrating women (like Kate and Liz) who behave as if they were bestowed with relative phallic sufficiency; in Carter Nix, on the other hand, this perception is foregrounded in the narrative, when it eventually dawns on everyone else that the senior Carter Nix was able to arrive at his groundbreaking study of multiple personalities by repeatedly and successfully traumatizing his own son in order to induce schizophrenic responses in him. Although it might be too facile to deduce that, in these fictional instances, the phallus has been presumed to be in the mother's possession, the psychoanalytic framework tends to inscribe a one-or-the-other option. However, if we regard the extreme expectations recognized by feminist studies on the act of mothering (Chodorow with Contratto 88 et seq.) and assume a scenario wherein all these expectations are either met or subverted, then it would be possible to envision a social situation where ownership of the phallus would have passed on from the father to the mother.

One last issue that might prove productive to reconsider would be the three paradigms outlined by Kaja Silverman as models of male homosexuality (362–73)—the negative Oedipus complex, where the subject identifies with the mother and desires the father; the "Greek" model, where the subject identifies with the father and desires what the subject himself once was; and the Leonardo model (based on Freud's analysis of Leonardo da Vinci's homosexuality), where the subject oscillates between identifying with

the mother and desiring what the subject once was, and identifying with what the subject once was and desiring the mother. To this might be speculatively added a fourth paradigm that partakes of Silverman's models but results in nothing like any of them—in that the subject observes a trifurcated resolve (*not* an oscillation) in identifying with the mother (as in the negative Oedipus complex and part of the Leonardo model), desiring what the subject once was (as in the “Greek” and Leonardo models), and destroying the father, as per the classical Oedipal model.

The necessary qualification here of course is that “homosexuality” in this instance assumes a departure from its usual meaning the way that, say, “phallus” differs from “penis.” Once the male subject has abandoned the ramparts of masculinity, as was the case with Dr. Robert Elliott and Carter Nix, any accusation of homosexuality directed at him would be not just expected of his transvestic transformation, but also not as humiliating as the charge of his having turned (into a) woman—the same explanation advanced in *Dressed to Kill* as to why Bobbie has her murderous inclinations. And well should the patriarchal order be threatened: for while in the (DePalma films' fictional) past androgyny would carry linguistic associations with bisexuality and the dilution of masculinity (Pacteau 63), the feminine masquerade as used by these male characters has actually enabled them to acquire an increase in their phallic imperatives—so much so that the most frightened among them (compared to Norman Bates and Dr. Elliott), Carter Nix, manages to stand up to and mortally defy his own father in the end. In concluding her essay on the feminine masquerade, Joan Riviere made a distinction between the woman and the gay man, proceeding however from the similarity that they both desire the father's penis (44); in DePalma's men-in-crisis films, what the straight man desires is something worth suffering, turning “homosexual,” perhaps even killing, for: the mother's phallus.

Note

- 1 I would have some problem including this quote in the body proper of the essay because of what seems to me a determinedly unprofessional, or at least unclinical, tone: “The hope of some day obtaining a penis in spite of everything and so of becoming like a man may persist to an incredibly late age and may become a motive for the strangest and otherwise unaccountable actions” (Freud 178).

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5. Postcolonial Conundrum: Third-World Film in Perverse Perspective

Common sense alone would lead us to expect that progressive policies would have undergone some seachange on their way [from the United States] to the archipelago.... Yes, Americans experimented in the Philippines. No, the colony was not a “laboratory of democracy”; it was, rather, a laboratory for the testing of essentially conservative formulas. (May xix)

The emergence of Philippine national consciousness can actually be dated to the turn of the 20th century, when a mass-based anti-colonial revolution, the first of its kind in Asia, marked the beginning of the end of the three-centuries-old Spanish occupation. The political boundary that had set apart the Philippine archipelago from the rest of Southeast Asia had proved sanguinary for its colonizing powers, since the westward and southward spread of Eastern (including Islamic) civilization ensured that the populace would not have been as politically consolidated during the 16th century as those who were living further eastward and northward. In selling the colony to the US for \$23 million in the Treaty of Paris, the Spaniards agreed to the staging of a mock battle in Manila Bay that would make it appear that it was the Americans who expelled them, rather than the advancing Filipino troops (Constantino 213). The resulting shift in imperialist occupancy promoted a vicious and protracted war (officially declared over after four years by the US but actually waged, supposedly against banditry, for two decades afterward) that foreshadowed the comparatively milder conflicts decades later in Viet Nam (241).

More significantly for this essay’s purpose, the Filipino-American War also introduced a number of language systems to a heretofore linguistically divided country: English, Constitutionally mandated as the sole medium of education and as a national language alongside Spanish and Tagalog, the collaborating region’s tongue; and the cinema, introduced during the start of the revolution against Spain and eventually landing the country in the 1984 *Guinness Book of World Records* edition as the world’s most enthusiastic movie-going nation. A third system of ideas which may be considered a second-order language system in this context would be psychoanalysis, which was progressively gaining headway in Europe and the US even while it was still being further developed by its propounder, Sigmund Freud, well into the 1930s. The manner in which psychoanalysis differs from, say, a Euro-American language (English, in this instance) and art form (cinema) lies not only in the fact that it draws from and contributes to these two systems, but also in the political reality of its cultural specificity.

Hence, while it may be successfully argued that Philippine sentiments have been expressed in texts that were English and/or filmic in origin, the notion of Filipinos conducting themselves according to psychoanalytic principles can only be effectively applied to the most highly Westernized members of the local intelligentsia, as well as to Westerners regarding the country’s citizens from an insistently and unapologetically foreign perspective. The fact that the country has been culturally the most Americanized in Asia further complicates this assertion, in that a counter-argument could be formulated, to the effect that most of the political and social structures still in existence in the

Philippines were drawn from the model of the so-called US democratic form of government, and are thereby inevitably inflected with the philosophies that have lent themselves to Western ideological practice—those based on psychoanalysis included; furthermore, whether or not significant to the preceding discussion, psychoanalytic concepts are themselves introduced to Filipino students, starting at the secondary-education level.

This essay takes the strictly provisional (and obviously pragmatic) view that a psychoanalytic analysis of a Philippine cultural text draws only to a limited extent from the possibility that any adequately schooled Filipino would have been exposed to psychoanalytic ideas and critical practice. More important, whatever general conclusions this study can draw could only be confidently declared as reflecting not so much on the Filipino subject(s) concerned as on the originator of psychoanalytic discourse—i.e., the Western (post-)colonizing subject. My position as a Philippine national utilizing psychoanalysis for the purpose of “reflecting” on Western subjects could itself be subjected to the kind of totalizing deconstruction that would render this very exercise inutile for progressive institutional purposes. What this essay proceeds from, therefore, is a highwire crossing of the expected traversal toward expedient insight without falling into the traps of undue betrayal of the subject on the one hand and abandonment of theoretical exploitation on the other.

Psychoanalysis originally served the then-radical function of overturning the body-over-mind hierarchy that typified premodern scientific precepts, with Freud drawing inspiration and intuition from the then similarly radical challenges of Darwinism (Gay 24 et seq.). Anti-colonial writers sought to appropriate psychoanalytic principles by foregrounding the pathologization of racist attitudes in their critiques of the colonial project. Frantz Fanon proposed the category of cultural racism, a form of practice which, unlike racism for the most part, relied on rational and individualized applications (32), but nevertheless resulted in a combination of exoticization and exploitation on the part of the colonizer (35) and alienation (or “deracialization”) on the part of the colonized (38). For his part, Octave Mannoni drew from the Jungian mechanism of projection, where the colonizing subject’s errors of perception are attributed to the object of colonization (198); he also modified the Oedipus complex in what he called the Prospero complex, which enabled him to create affinities between more than just two participants, as per his schematization of the *dramatis personae* in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*: Prospero, the paternalist colonial; Miranda, his daughter threatened by rape at the hands of an inferior being; Caliban, the disgruntled and demonized Other; Ariel, the favored Other who is led on with the promise of prosperity and eventual liberty; and Gonzalo, an old dotard treated with hypocritical respect by Prospero (105–09).

Although Fanon engaged in an open denunciation of Mannoni, both can be seen as proceeding from the same premise of the racist nature of colonialism (McCulloch 215), thus opening up the possibility, problematized earlier, for the colonized Other to read the Western colonizer without being read in turn in the same way. A weakness of this approach, however, would be the nature of the intersection between radical psychology

and class struggle (210)—a point, to be taken up more fully later, that will yield more fruitful results in the discussion of gender and sexuality. A more basic difficulty lies in the very supposition common to both writers—expressed outright by Fanon in his assertion that “a colonial country is a racist country” (40) and thereby equating racism with normality in racist cultures—vis-à-vis the evidence of how non-colonizing or formerly colonized cultures have since exhibited problems arising from racism practiced against minority groups in the countries in question. More important would be the same insight for which Fanon took Mannoni to task in the latter’s consequential diversion of liberationist efforts toward the psychological and away from the economic: not only would this binary be difficult to maintain, but Mannoni’s observation—that the colonizer may be so caught up in the trappings of power that it is the pleasure of colonial practice, rather than its profitability,¹ that provides him with the motive for persisting in his role (203)—opens up an entirely new possibility which neither writer opted to pursue.

The said possibility derives from the writers’ stigmatization of racism as an ultimately irrational activity, with Mannoni, risking a rationalization of the colonialist imperative, admitting that, true to Freudian form, the colonizer’s yielding to such stirrings of what may be called the cultural id provides its subject with some measure of gratification. A rejection of the prerogative of using a racially inflected resistance to colonialism, however, would deprive the colonized subject of the same pleasure that had effectively driven the colonizer in the first place. It may be too facetious at this point to marshal the evidence of how anti-colonial movements have not met with the same degree of success and profitability that colonizing efforts had by explaining that the counter-racist option may have been too readily discarded on the basis of the twin reasons of its being irrational as well as associable with the colonizing oppressor; a better way of phrasing the argument would be to state that anti-racism is a sentiment that is now officially shared by every Euro-American nation that had once indulged in colonial aggression, and therefore every anti-colonial movement that refuses to racialize the enemy might find itself in agreement on this score with a former colonizing power or two. In a postmodern situation where certain ex-colonies are actually in a neocolonial state of economic dependence even as they enjoy, politically and culturally, a postcolonial status (of which the US and its ex-/neo-/post-colony, the Philippines, remains an outstanding example), any form of resistance, whether by enemies of the postcolonial government or by the postcolonial government itself, meets at best with some amount of liberal tolerance on the part of the colonizing center, but only up to the point where the rationality of the dependency relationship begins to be challenged.

The means by which psychoanalysis and the cinema fell in with the advance of modernism assumed a different register in the non-Western colonized world. As in many a Third-World country, the anti-colonial resistance in the Philippines configured the republican seat of power as no better than a puppet regime and appraised modernization as the means by which the US aspired to consolidate its neocolonialist stranglehold on the country. Modernism therefore impacted on the Philippines to a heretofore exceptional degree during the US-sanctioned (and possibly US-engineered) martial-law dictatorship of Ferdinand E. Marcos, when opposition activities could be

legally suppressed and US intervention became a more open practice. The scenario helps explain the simultaneous occurrence of certain phenomena that may at first seem to be historical aberrations in themselves: an artificial period of further economic growth fueled by the excessive infusion of foreign loans followed by an abnormal decline that distinguished the country as the most highly developed in the region before and during the early years of martial rule and the least developed afterward; and the flowering of Western art forms, especially industrial-based culture, the cinema foremost among them.

Thus the irony of two “Golden Ages” in Philippine cinema occurring during periods when anti-insurgent stability was enforced: the first during the 1950s, when the US refined its psy-war tactics for subsequent application in Viet Nam in its suppression of the Communist peasant-based movement, which had returned to the policy of armed struggle after the US reneged on its promise of remuneration after the Communist movement’s successful participation in anti-Japanese guerrilla warfare during World War II; and the second, as already expounded, during martial law. Central to a consideration of this essay’s psychoanalytic project would be a 1979 product that in many ways has become the most celebrated film event in the Philippines: personally selected for competition in the Berlin Film Festival by festival director Moritz De Hadeln, it was preempted from doing so by a year-long ban imposed by the military censors; upon its release in 1980, its original title, *Manila by Night*, was changed to *City After Dark*, and its permit consisted of a multiple-page single-space listing of visual cuts and aural deletions that mostly specified sex scenes, cusswords, references to political issues and figures, and all mention of the word “Manila” (Office of the President 19937–38). The mangled release won the critics’ best-film prize, and the integral version was subsequently premiered under the censorship-exempt Experimental Cinema of the Philippines, a Marcos-era agency that found itself in the paradoxical position of proving the regime’s libertarian position in the wake of the international outcry following the assassination of oppositionist leader Benigno S. Aquino jr.; it has since consistently topped local best-film surveys (David 135) and was cited as one of four Filipino films in the *Sight and Sound* historical survey of world cinema (December 1994 supplement).

Formally, *Manila by Night* is a multiple-person narrative consisting of major characters separately tallied at nine by the critics’ group in its quarterly citations and at thirteen in the published screenplay’s “Cast In Order of Appearance” (Bernal, “*Manila by Night*” 23). The movie takes after the format of a number of European and later American films,² most notably Robert Altman’s *Nashville*—a source that Ishmael Bernal, the filmmaker, had acknowledged. Robin Wood critiques the format as aiming “to reach and satisfy as wide a youth audience as possible” (216) and associates *Nashville*’s “multi-plot, multi-character structure” with the disaster movies popular during the same decade (29). Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, on the other hand, draw a distinction between disaster films and what they termed group films (including in their definition *Nashville* and *Secaucus Seven* but not *Big Chill*), which, apart from having several characters, would prescriptively display such other traits as open-endedness, distantiation, generic playfulness, and attempts at demythologization (269–82); their valorization, however, reaches its limit in their clarification that “the criterion for judging such matters should

be pragmatic, one that measures the progressive character of a text according to how well it accomplishes its task in specific contexts of reception” (268).

An effective way of commencing an appreciation of the multiple-character format would be the splintering by Mannoni of the basic two-agent system that constitutes the Oedipus complex. Two difficulties that may be raised against the Prospero complex, however, would center on the ultimate collapse of the multiple-player situation onto the centrality of Prospero himself as sole phallus-wielder, as well as the historical record of its inutility in colonial and postcolonial discourse; if, that is, Mannoni had intended his analysis to expose the workings of the colonizing subject’s psyche, then it may be pertinent to raise the issue of how far the other participants in colonialist struggles, whether colonized or colonizer, have seen fit to adopt his diagnosis, the way that Freud’s Oedipus complex has been treated by the very cultures that it was purportedly critiquing.

It may be more practicable then to effect a return not so much to the Oedipus complex as to the other psychoanalytic concepts that derive from it. Primary among these would be Freud’s exposition of group psychology, utilized in the West for primarily therapeutic purposes and thereby understood as referring to small and deliberately formed assemblies. The interesting aspect, for purposes of this discussion, of Freud’s analysis of group psychology is that it delineates a state of affairs that is not only social in nature, but that also calls for political measures—i.e., the condition of a leader imposing restrictions on a group in order to ensure a relation of subordination toward himself, and who aims to legitimize his undue measure of influence ideally through “the illusion that the leader loves all of the individuals equally and justly” (56). The use of the primal father and the horde as originary models indicates that group therapy, much less small groupings, need not be one of the Freud essay’s main discursive priorities; in fact, Homi Bhabha has drawn from Freud’s description of the melancholia that ensues from the excessive criticism by the ego ideal of the ego for the latter’s awareness of its own inferiority (64) as equivalent to the “‘projective disincorporation’ by the marginal of the Master” as an early step in colonial disengagement (Bhabha 65).

What this essay would like to develop, however, is Freud’s qualification of the oppressed group member’s (or Other’s) circumstance as actually oscillating *between* melancholia and another condition—that of mania, wherein “the ego and the ego ideal have fused together, so that the person, in a mood of triumph and self-satisfaction, disturbed by no self-criticism, can enjoy the abolition of his inhibitions, his feelings of consideration for others, and his self-reproaches” (64). A politically inflected analysis that expresses interest in the seemingly less enabling aspect of the Other’s psychological constitution will have to see where Freud had been able to develop his concerns herein earlier; the one area that suggests itself, in line at least with the objective of elucidating the film-text at hand, would be that of perversion, definable in this instance as mania manifested in terms of acts of sexual transgressions.³ In the Philippines, the injunction to observe the reproductive imperative in sexual conduct finds itself suspended between two options that have both been coopted by foreign forces: that of population control, promoted by the US and the World Bank through the Philippine government, and that of

anti-contraception, advocated by the Catholic Church through its hierarchy in the Philippines. The institutional motives can be thus reduced to the following formulation: the economic colonizing power desires a lesser colonized population in order to lessen the impact of destitution attendant to the expropriation of wealth from the colonized country; the cultural (in this case, religious) colonizer, on the other hand, realizes a paradoxical alliance with the anti-colonial (and anti-religious) radical in their common call for reproductive sexuality, but with opposing visions in mind—the former that of institutional stability through an increase in the faithful, the latter that of instability and subsequent discontent.

If we grant, as is consistent with the practice, that population control measures not only do not aim to destabilize the principle of reproductive sexuality but actually promote it by overvaluing the act of reproduction, then what such complex signals induce in the colonized subject would be a sense of alienation from the reproductive imperative arising from the inability of any available institution to ensure a choice that would psychically benefit the said subject more than it would either of the opposing foreign forces. Cornelius Castoriadis describes in this wise, pace Freud, the “impossibility” of psychoanalysis and pedagogy “in creating autonomy for their subjects by using an autonomy which does not yet exist” (Castoriadis 6) being resolved in turn by the similarly “impossible” task of politics—all the more impossible since it must also lean on a not yet existing autonomy in order to bring its own type of autonomy into being” (7). In designating politics as the activity which aims to institute an autonomous society—i.e., “one which not only knows explicitly that it has created its own laws, but has instituted itself so as to free its radical imaginary and enable itself to alter its institutions through a collective, self-reflexive, and deliberate activity” (7)—Castoriadis upholds Freud’s postscriptural remarks (Freud 67–68) in his declaration that the goal of the autonomous society would be the creation of autonomous individuals (Castoriadis 7), though without taking into account Freud’s discussion of the role of myth (Freud 68–69) and its definitionally utopic resonances.

The manner, therefore, by which *Manila by Night* alarmed the martial-law censors may have been expressed in terms of an anxiety regarding how Filipinos may be apprehended in heterocentrist and dimorphic Western culture—a position that was later implicitly modified, in allowing the uncensored version limited exhibition at a government venue, to that of how such immoral characters were merely ruptures in an otherwise intact body politic.⁴ A different way of explicating the movie’s delineation of polymorphous perversities would be to submit that such a state had been induced by colonial excess; this would however lead back to Bhabha’s contention that melancholia, rather than mania, is the route to anti-colonial awakening, as well as bring up the too-apparent difficulty of finding such an awareness in any of the movie’s characters in the first place. The quandary in this case stems from affixing correspondences between political entities and Freudian psychical elements: the colonial subject (equivalent to the fictional characters of *Manila by Night*) as the id, the critical spectator (including the filmmaker) as the ego, and the cultural censor as the ego ideal, necessarily conflated with the colonizing subject—which in turn would also conflate into itself the politico-economic power (the US) and the religious power (the Church). More productive insights may be

yielded if the censor were seen as assuming the function of the ego in relation to the colonizer, and thus be seen as caught between on the one hand providing Freud's "illusion of love" for its subjects and demonstrating its worth to its leaders (in terms of Catholic morality), and on the other hand asserting its supremacy over its subjects and proving its benevolence and consequently its approbation among its subjects to its leaders (in terms of American populism).

This more complex operation of the censorship function allows us to approach the text as more than just an instance of condensation and/or displacement, or rather as dreams that have been converted into symbolic images as a result of repression. Where the critical ego can be made to understand that the ego ideal might be repressive because it is being repressed in turn, the political project, as defined earlier by Castoriadis, focuses on autonomizing the colonized society in the instance of *Manila by Night*, not by reading the film-text as a fiction, but by simply reading it and letting the question of its validity bother not the colonized subject but the colonizing reader. The process would involve the recognition by the colonizer of himself in the Other that would lead to the colonizer's attempt at the destruction of the Other in fantasy (Benjamin 36–39), but only, it is implied, in a fantasy that the colonizer can control.

In combining the Western normative standards of dimorphism and heterocentrism in terms of quantified object relations, the category of unisexuality, as opposed to bisexuality, shapes up as the logical limit: if not heterosexuality, that is, then better homosexuality rather than bisexuality. The masculinist gendering of this line of thinking extends the hierarchization even further by overturning it at one point, thus: for women, if not heterosexuality, then better bisexuality, where reproduction can still be chanced, rather than lesbianism. The resultant descending categories of straight male, straight female, homosexual male, bisexual female, bisexual male, and lesbian may occasionally undergo shifts among the inner terms, but social evidence generally points to the primacy accorded the straight male and the subnormality accorded the gay female.⁵ The necessarily binaristic relation between any two categories constitutes a throwback to the Oedipal scenario, with subsequent attempts (including Mannoni's) aimed at decentering the as it were two-party system. Ronald Britton proposes parental sexuality as the means by which (unlike in Mannoni) the father would not remain supreme; this results in what he called the Oedipal illusion, where the reality of the child's wish to re-enter the mother through her genital passage being obstructed by the father, is occluded by a phantasy of Oedipus, now enthroned, ignoring the fact that his queen is both his wife and his mother (93). Consequently, "curiosity is felt to spell disaster.... The discovery of the Oedipal triangle is felt to be the death of the couple [and therefore] the arrival of the notion of a third always murders the dyadic relationship" (94). The impasse in this formulation is twofold in nature: first is the elision of the crucial stage in the Oedipal narrative—the slaying of the father—and second, again in terms of this essay's interests, is the persistence of a two-party system in either instance of Oedipus in relation to his father or of him in relation to his mother. The value of Britton's formulation, however, is that it introduces the possibility of a single actant actually playing out more than one role, and in doing so upsetting the order maintained illusionistically.

The valuation of the straight male in *Manila by Night* can be seen to undergo this trajectory, but whether the (fictional) subject himself arrives at this realization may be questionable, and much less would be the concern herein. A casual glance at two available contemporary sources of Westerners gazing at Filipino sexuality helps illustrate how working within an alien framework of analysis affects the perception of the object itself. The first, an empirical study of comparative homosexualities in a number of national contexts including the US, lumps together the Philippines along with a number of other Third-World countries, presumably on the basis of their common experience of Hispanic colonization, as its way of explaining the fluidity of Philippine male sexuality (Whitam and Mathy 153–56). Although the study favorably compares the option of machismo, which justifies homosexual relations within the binary of masculine dominance and feminine submission, to that of American heterosexuality, the authors also acknowledge, though without supplying the necessary empirical contrivances, that the Philippines is unique in representing the erotic tradition “of Southeast Asia, the most tolerant area of the world with respect to variant sexuality” (144–45). The other text, a tourism guide to gay Philippine life, avoids the pitfall of seeking explanations by way of analogous Western, specifically Latinate, tradition, but nevertheless resorts to basic still-Western categorizations in describing Filipino men thus: “‘Straight’ is gay and gay is gayer”—this as a chapter subtitle, immediately followed by the observation that “Filipino sexuality has many hard to explain [sic] aspects” (Itiel 10). More knowingly, the guide differentiates between Philippine male sexuality and machismo by asserting that “Being ‘straight’ in the Philippines doesn’t dictate one’s sexual role play” (11).

The reason why the latter text arguably falls back on an even more basic and naturalized Western framework draws from its insistence on defining gay-available straight men as not straight, and therefore merely “straight.” While it may be imperative to look further into a perversion of what is already “perverse” to begin with, it would also be helpful to see what the implications of such an insistence on Westernized categorizations lead to. Granting the feminization of the Other already imposed by Orientalism, the fact that such potentially gay men can still be called “straight,” even within quotation marks, implies, if these men were Western, the condition of bisexuality, as valorized by Freud himself. But again, since these men are not men enough by virtue of their Otherness, then as non-men (and therefore, still within the existing binary, as women), their capacity for straightness would mark them as lesbians.

The potential for radical applications of this insight can be appreciated via a recollection of the historical teleology from gay through queer to lesbian as narrated from within the ranks of lesbian activism itself. As the first visible participant in sexual activism, the (necessarily masculinized) gay person found himself dichotomized, in then-emergent public and legal debate, into either a responsible citizen (and therefore monogamous or, at best, celibate) or a dangerous solicitor; the queer response was to uphold the latter category rather than allow gays to be accepted at the expense of the very sexuality that always-already defined them in the first place (Smith 206). The lesbian predicament was that, in the privileging of the male homosexual even after the shift in discursive strategies,

the homosexual woman remained equated with the responsible-citizen codification via the sexist configuration of women as sexually passive and therefore harmless, as reflected in the invisibility of lesbianism in sodomy laws (207). In her bid to secure socially discursive visibility, the lesbian saw her options as falling within the “harmless” rather than the “dangerous” sphere of comprehension: sexualized, she was regarded as a poor substitute for the heterosexual man; desexualized, she was depicted as seeking either to mother or to be mothered (Richardson 191–93).

Such a no-win situation extended to lesbians’ bid for visibility, in their call to use slogans that assert that dykes “Solicit and Fuck Too” (Smith 210), a representational bid that has carried over to the use of active-passive interplay and even sado-masochism in lesbian pornography (Richardson 197). But just as lesbians had seen their sexuality appropriated by feminists in the clamor for “political lesbianism” where the options for dominance and submission were rejected (195), the quest for queer-inflected visibility presents the same danger of legal repression faced by gay males (Smith 210), while the promotion of lesbian sexuality in pornography stands in danger of either straight-male acceptance or, in its more extreme phase, alienation from even lesbian subjects themselves (Richardson 198). Tamsin Wilton, in quoting B. Ruby Rich, echoes the perception that “while gay men may *unearth* gay material, lesbians must conjure it, invent it” (7)—a complaint that in fact can be turned around and converted into a strong point.

Recent discourses that appear to be most applicable to the lesbian predicament as recounted herein reconsider the condition of invisibility (notably in Phelan)—not as a form of edenic nostalgia, but as a further means of distinguishing subjects formerly oppressed by their concealment from public awareness and acceptance. Judith Butler, in writing of the Foucauldian regimes (primarily that of heterosexuality) of discourse/power that regulate the materialization of sexual norms (15), stresses that

it will be important to think about how and to what end bodies are constructed as it will be to think about how and to what end bodies are *not* constructed and, further, to ask after how bodies which fail to materialize provide the necessary “outside,” if not the necessary support, for the bodies which, in materializing the norm, qualify as bodies that matter. (16)

In this essay’s admitted valorizing of *Manila by Night* as a multiple-character Third-World text, one can readily draw correspondences between two items mentioned. On the one hand would be Butler’s paradoxical configuration of bodies that “fail to materialize” serving material functions by way of helping define the bodies that are granted material privilege, in both physical and pecuniary senses. On the other hand would be the cultural text’s capacity to leave historical traces and generate ideological shifts in its wake without necessarily allowing itself to be the same body that it had been for prior and current experiencers. Even more uncanny, although this would be a point too ambitious and open-ended for this essay to pursue, would be the manner in which these latter-day discourses on gender and sexuality conjure up the Philippines’s still-enduring anti-colonial response—that of guerrilla warfare. It were as if the eventual articulation of what

may have been at this point the most successfully suppressed First-World gender-cum-sexuality wound up sounding not much different from the long-complaining Third-World voice, with both realizing upon their asynchronous awakening the need for small-scale struggles of attrition premised on the readiness for covert operations and aimed at maximizing popular sentiment for the movement and against unconscionable oppressors.⁶

In taking up arms against the phallic system, some debate has predictably been directed at the signifier of desire itself; among the notable alternative propositions to the immutability of the phallus are the anus in Guy Hocquenghem's advocacy of homosexual desire (97–100), Butler's postulation of the lesbian phallus (57 et seq.), and, in postcolonial terms, the adjunction of the body through the hand to include the writer's pen (Mishra and Hodge 283). Teresa de Lauretis, however, argues that the mediating term in perverse desire should be not the phallus but rather the fetish, since the instinctual investment it represents resides "not in the mother (negative Oedipus) or in the father/father's child (positive Oedipus), but in the female body itself, ultimately in the subject's own body-image and body-ego, whose loss or lack it serves to disavow" (289). The negotiation in psychoanalysis toward an order that could be termed postpatriarchal might assume certain features of postcoloniality in that the persistence of oppressive structures is not denied even as the subject's agential potentials are being critically explored beyond the "exorbitation of discourse" that writers like Bhabha are discommended for (Parry 43). The condition of what can similarly be termed postphallicism may be derived from De Lauretis's decentering of the phallus—i.e., a multiplicity of alternatives in relations of contention and complementariness, rather than a singular attribute subsuming all others, can be put to work.

As a multiple-character sample situated within this ongoing inspection of its levels of consciousnesses, *Manila by Night* also functions beyond merely fragmenting traditional notions of character. The resultant reliance on types facilitates the move away from concepts of property and money economy associated with modernist capitalism and toward the Western reader's postmodernist realities of corporate individualities (Suvin 688). More important, the constant shifting of identification from one subject to another without any singular subject predominating enables the configuration of a social formation—an abstract super-character that is literally socially constructed. If one were to unreservedly drive this argument to a state that could be pronounced progressive, one could advance this milieu character as a figure to be set against the father, thus ensuring its being both distinctively non-patriarchal and protective toward its subjects in a manner that partakes of both feminist-motherly nurture and lesbian-perverse alterability attributable to the fictional nature of the text; i.e., in a worst-case scenario where the possibility of critical annihilation appears inevitable, the entire super-entity along with its comprisable subjects could simply dissolve in its presentational mode and constitute the equivalent of a dream that can always threaten to recur. If on the other hand the preceding statement were to be regarded as too visionary to lend itself to questions of institutional change, one can still safely enlist the horde of leaderless subjects whose adaptability applies not just to their agglomeration but to their individual sexualities: developmentally

regressive, carnally productive without being reproductive, disclosing without the solicitation of sympathy, they foster the Othering of the powerful by revealing what patriarchy has denied as consequences of its historical interventions and has largely managed to suppress within its own boundaries. There is more to be feared, after all, in the return of the unrepressed.

Notes

- 1 Strangely enough, this same attitude has been assumed, in the case of the Philippines at least, by the colonizers themselves—expressed of course in the form of complaints about the unprofitability of the colonial possession (Anderson 305–06). There are two ways of responding to this reductive remark, neither of which should necessarily negate Mannoni’s point altogether. First, the nature of colonial exploitation, particularly in the case of continuing counter-insurgency expenditures, facilitates a whole lot of shadowy transactions which makes it not just possible but even desirable to claim losses in order to justify repressive measures and exude an aura of benevolence in the colonizer’s persistence in the face of the colonized’s hopelessness. Second, the global development of capital *does* make colonization unprofitable for the state after the initial stages of exploitation, when the country’s natural resources get depleted and/or such blatant exercise of power becomes untenable—in which case representatives of the colonizing power’s private sector (comprising Church officials in the case of Spain and bureaucrat-capitalists in the case of the US in the Philippines) take over and provide the motive for maintaining colonialist relations. In both cases the transition from classical colonialism to, if not national liberation, then neocolonialism, appears to be inevitable.
- 2 The 1970s saw a relative proliferation of multiple-character films, with the *Encyclopedia of Pop Culture*, in its entry on *thirtysomething*, attributing the phenomenon to the maturation of baby-boomers (thus drawing a lineage from *Howdy Doody* through *Woodstock* to John Sayles’s *Return of the Secaucus Seven* and Lawrence Kasdan’s revisionist *The Big Chill*—Stern and Stern 519).
- 3 Again, the cautionary view that such a category is of necessity always-already culture-specific can range from as wide as cross-species studies, which could facilitate the conclusion that the exclusive sexual orientation in normative North American practice may actually be atypical of primates in particular and mammals in general (Pavelka 22–23), to relatively more localized observations of how reproductive sex, as a *sine qua non* in such Judeo-Christian contexts as American culture, leads to a two-sex and two-gender system (Herdt 80).
- 4 The compromise version submitted to the censors in a last-ditch attempt to obtain approval for participation in the Berlinale includes a where-are-they-now sequence that declares how seven of the major characters had transformed themselves into responsible members of Philippine society.

- 5 Michel Foucault has speculated that the proprietary function assigned to women by heterosexual men has made it easier for women to engage in bisexuality than for men to do the same, for two reasons: first, men had to prevent women “from having contact with other men, so ... more tolerance was exercised with regard to the physical rapport between women”; and second, straight men “felt that if they practiced homosexuality with other men [sic] this would destroy what they think is their image in the eyes of their women” (“Sexual Choice, Sexual Act” 299). This line of logic can be seen as an interiorizing of the functional moralism I used to draw up the hierarchy of what may be termed preferable preferences.
- 6 An early '90s “Vision Statement” released by the “National Democratic Front in the US” included a section on “Gender Justice and Equality” that denounced “discrimination based on sexual orientation and the separation between public and private, between the personal and the political” (42). Elided, perhaps necessarily, was the question of how Marxist principles could allow the masculinized and heterosexualized class-based struggle for national democracy to make way for the interests of, say, straight women, gay men, and lesbians, especially if certain of these groups’ constituencies do not happen to fall under the category of economically oppressed groups. Just as problematic would be the incongruity of what the statement maintained as the NDF-US’s “struggles in the US [as] part of the national democratic revolution in the Philippines which, in turn, is part of the international struggle against imperialism, neocolonialism, and other forms of domination” (42), even as it clarified that, among other historical instances, “this struggle for freedom, equality, and solidarity ... is an anti-imperialist struggle against the US and other foreign entities...” (39).

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BY WAY OF AN EPILOGUE

Commemorating a Colleague

Laura Samson, retired sociology professor at the Philippines's national university, passed away in 2020, though not from the Covid-19 pandemic. Only five years my senior, she was the first of my book publishers to leave, and ironically the youngest. Our association stretched way back to my undergraduate years during the military-dictatorship era, when she conducted a kick-ass writing workshop for the sub-rosa student writers' collective I was in charge of. I made sure to take her popular-culture class later for the Philippine studies master's degree I never completed, and congratulated her on her appointment to the University of the Philippines Press. She gave the most invaluable practical advice when I informed her that I was accepted to a US doctoral program despite the expiration of my Fulbright grant: finish everything, including the dissertation, before returning home, or else accept that you will never be able to complete the program.

It was during my last visit during my graduate-studies years when she insisted on an extended merienda at a café near the press. She asked me about the books I'd written, so I described the first and second and how one differed from the other (demonstrating some chronological development, or so I hoped). She responded by mentioning how she convinced O.D. Corpuz to allow her to publish his monumental study of Philippine economic history by working on an earlier manuscript of his, and then she came up with the clincher: she wanted a book out of me, during her term as UP Press director. Of course she recognized that my grad studies had to remain my priority, so we should look at existing materials that I already had on hand—term papers, reports, notes, and the like.

I mentioned the classes I took (I was ABD by then) and the papers I wrote for each one, as she scribbled on a piece of paper. After my recollection, she presented me with a structure, essentially a ready-made table of contents. I forget the exact proposal she prepared, but I was astonished: this was the way our grad-school advisers were telling us to get our dissertations ready with minimal suffering, by writing papers that could serve as chapters. The first of four sections that she suggested focused on formalist arguments, but I wound up jettisoning some papers here (as well as in the other sections) and incorporating the others in the other three sections—specificities, subjectivities, and sexualities.

This was how I came up with *Wages of Cinema*, a book for which I hold much ambivalence. I told her why I thought it suffered several lacks and lapses, but she brought up a crucial insight: no book (and this includes any thesis and dissertation) will ever be satisfactory enough, and the ratio of the author's discontent will be in direct proportion to its ambition. Through the years, with several titles preceding and succeeding it, *WoC* remains the book I have the most complaints about, even though I've been able to draw forth several journal articles, my dissertation, and my first book monograph from it. But I've also learned to keep Laura's admonition in mind: like having an unruly brood of siblings or a classroom of restless students, the most gifted will invariably cause the most headaches.

What unusual mentors I've had, and what an exceptional one Laura was.

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