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Contesting a National Cinema in Becoming: The Cinemalaya Philippine Independent Film Festival (2005-2014)

Emerald O. Flaviano
University of the Philippines Diliman

ABSTRACT

Since its birth in 2005, the Cinemalaya Philippine Independent Film Festival has proven itself a major force in the Philippine film industry. Established with the twin goals of "[encouraging] the creation of new cinematic works by Filipino filmmakers—works that boldly articulate and freely interpret the Filipino experience with fresh insight and artistic integrity" and "[invigorating] Philippine filmmaking by developing a new breed of Filipino filmmakers," Cinemalaya has been instrumental in the recent rise of what Tiongson ("The Rise of the Philippine New Wave Indie Film") has called the "New Wave Indie" films. This recent wave of independent cinema, in turn, is taken to be the next significant moment in the history of Philippine national cinema. By considering the film festival—a spatiotemporally demarcated event and a unique discourse-generating institution—as point of entry, this article discusses the contested process of constructing a coherent narrative of becoming of a national cinema. This process is found, more than ever, to surface resistance to any singular notion of "national cinema," not least because of the inescapably transnational nature of all film production and consumption. It is within this context that any discussion about "saving" a Philippine national cinema is framed, particularly as to how international recognition has legitimized local independent cinema and influenced local spectatorship practices. Cinemalaya has helped revive a failing industry by giving shape to a new film movement, essentially defined by contestation, as the film festival's experience in moderating the controversies it has found itself embroiled in has proven. More than anything, these contestations have brought to the fore previously unchallenged assumptions about what cinema a national public deserves to see.

Keywords: Cinemalaya Philippine Independent Film Festival; Philippine independent cinema; Philippine national cinema; film festivals

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INTRODUCTION

2013 was a banner year for Philippine cinema—three Filipino films, *Norte: Hangganan ng Kasaysayan* (Lav Diaz); *Death March* (Adolfo Alix Jr.); and *On the Job* (Erik Matti) were screened at the top-tier Cannes Film Festival, in its Un Certain Regard and at the Directors' Fortnight sections, respectively. Two new local fund-granting film festivals were launched,[1] even as existing local film festivals produced and showcased many of the year's commendable films in an increasing number of venues.[2] Film critic Oggs Cruz ("2013: The Year that Was in Philippine Cinema") observes that many commentators hailed 2013 as "one of the best years for Philippine cinema," rivalling 1976 and 1982, which saw the production of a number of landmark Filipino films. Yet 2013 was only a year in the so far ongoing surge of local independent film production ushered in by the introduction of digital filmmaking in the country in 1999 (Hernandez). Local film festivals funding and exhibiting independent films consistently attract both filmmakers and audiences, while critical validation from within and without the country has been replete. Ideologically positioning itself against a formulaic, profit-driven local mainstream cinema, this new wave of independent films has been seen as no less than the savior of the country's stagnant film industry. In this self-conscious positioning, independent films defy the trite and tested, and have provided space where people who work in cinema can freely practice their art. The beginnings of this wave of independent film production can be pegged in the year 2005, when the inauguration of two major film festivals—the Cinemalaya Philippine Independent Film Festival (hereafter Cinemalaya) and Cinema One Originals—underscored the rise of digital film technology. Such was the unprecedented burst of activity thereafter that Philip Cheah, former NETPAC vice president and avid supporter of Southeast Asian cinema, has cited the Philippines in 2011 as the leader in the region in terms of digital filmmaking (Cheah).

Cinemalaya throws a long shadow across this history of recent independent filmmaking in the Philippines. By providing new filmmakers seed grants, networking opportunities, and mentorship, the festival has encouraged regular film production. More importantly, Cinemalaya has given local independent cinema unprecedented visibility: the festival's annual thousands-strong audience thronging at the Cultural Center of the Philippines despite the always foul July weather[3] is testament to a potentially devoted audience. Awards won by its films at international film festivals gave prestige to Cinemalaya. The highly successful *Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros* (Auraeus Solito, 2005) had raised the bar for later Cinemalaya films: aside from making the rounds in international film festivals around the world, *Ang Pagdadalaga* made profits in its month-long run in commercial theaters nationwide

(San Diego, "Maxi Movie") and was even selected as the country's official entry to the 2007 Academy Awards. This was no mean feat for Solito,[4] who was then a first-time filmmaker. *Ang Pagdadalaga*'s achievements encouraged many other filmmakers, and soon enough, remarks made in 2005 by Ed Lejano, then Cinemalaya's Deputy Film Congress Director, proved less dramatic: "The Cinemalaya film fest is more than about indie labels or a change in film formats. The creative burst of energy it has unleashed reflects the pulse of the moment—that the big picture may be changing" (quoted in Hernandez 86).

This study is an effort to account for these changes, tracing them in particular to how Cinemalaya has shaped the discourse and practice of independent filmmaking in the country and its historical place in a history of Philippine national cinema. Through over ten years of the festival's existence, there has been a steady increase in independent film production brought on by a glut of local independent film festivals, with the label "indie"—as independent films are popularly known—gaining unprecedented currency. That Cinemalaya occupies a defining role—for better or for worse—in the directions that independent filmmaking has taken is incontestable, but a systematic, critical evaluation of the film festival has been lacking. Assessments have been abundant but are hampered by the specificities of the critics' concerns and fail to capture the bigger picture against which such issues are framed.[5] A book—*Making Waves: 10 Years of Cinemalaya* (del Mundo)—was published in 2014, on the occasion of the festival's tenth anniversary. However, because essentially commemorative, the book's essays are mostly celebratory and journalistic in their assessment of Cinemalaya. A chapter on the festival by former Festival Director Nestor Jardin in another collection of essays on film (Chua, Cruz-Lucero, and Tolentino) likewise reads like a report of Cinemalaya's accomplishments. The landmark *Digital Cinema in the Philippines* (Hernandez) only offers several anecdotal accounts on film production and distribution by some Cinemalaya filmmakers.

This article aims to fill this gap by discussing how Cinemalaya locates itself as a cultural institution in current discourses on local independent filmmaking and, ultimately, Philippine national cinema. I argue that Cinemalaya's singular position in these ever dynamic discourses is attributable to at least two major ways that the festival has introduced changes to local film production, distribution, and exhibition: (1) as a body animated by a plurality of stakeholder interests (i.e., private business and public cultural institutions) and by liberative discourses of the digital revolution, Cinemalaya problematizes "independence," revealing in the process contesting valuations of what should be represented cinematically and how; and (2) Cinemalaya has also helped mainstream references to the transnational in local cinema, both in

actively presenting its films' participation in international film festivals and in juxtaposing a distinct corpus of recent independent films with films from cinemas around the world. This article will first discuss national cinema as an enduring controlling concept in discussions on Philippine film, outlining the framework against which its organizers and supporters have posed Cinemalaya as an important historical agent in this discourse. This discussion is followed by another on the dynamics of Cinemalaya's self-/definition as a festival event and as an organization, and on the increasingly transnational context of attempts at a discursive construction of a Philippine "national cinema." Ideas on film festivals as verbal architectures and the default self-referentiality of festivals' filmic output from recent film festival literature are particularly referenced. The last part of the article draws out taken-for-granted notions of spectatorship and filmmaking as commercial practice in the discourse of Philippine national cinema to imagine the future of an institutionalizing local independent film cinema that has come to rely on the film festival form to sustain itself.

An Account of (Normative) National Cinema Discourse in the Philippines

Ian Jarvie points out that most film history takes the nation-state as its organizing unit (70), such that the concept of national cinema has long been taken as a theoretical given. It was only with the problematization of the "nation" by scholars such as Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, and Anthony Smith during the 1980s did scholarly attention critically engage with "national cinema"—or essentially, how cinema as cultural articulation and means of mass communication aids the naturalization of the idea of a unified, coherent "nation." Attempts to account for the different discursive formations around "national cinema" have categorized them along common strands of understanding—films produced within national borders, films with a distinct thematic and stylistic orientation that is taken to speak in a culturally specific manner, quality art films, and films that are actually consumed by people who identify with a particular nation (Higson 36-37)—and as they position themselves against a transnationally monolithic Hollywood (Crofts). More recently, scholarly work has emphasized the increasing interconnectedness and cross-pollination of cinemas around the world, rendering the concept of "national cinema" is irrelevant. It has also been acknowledged that "a single, all-encompassing grand theory may be less useful than more piecemeal historical investigations of specific cinematic formations" (Higson 57). If a "national cinema" is to be evaluated at all, Hayward suggests looking at the discourses in use to define it, "what they include and exclude; how they choose to frame matters; the assumptions and

presuppositions they make" (84). This study follows Hayward's proposal, mapping the discursive formations around a "Philippine national cinema" and locating Cinemalaya within this body of accumulated meanings.

Rolando Tolentino's definition of the concept is a summation of how national cinema has been traditionally understood and deployed in the Philippine context. According to him:

> Kumakatawan sa bansa at pambansang identidad ang katawan ng pambansang sinema. Sa karanasan sa ating pambansang sinema, ito ang mga pelikulang tumampok dahil sa mataas na kalidad ng kasiningan, kapasidad sa interogasyon ng bansa at pambansang identidad, at representasyon ng marginal at subalternong karanasan at kolektibidad. ("Introduksyon" xx)

Emphasizing the central role that cultural institutions (e.g., award-giving bodies, National Artists, film critics, film scholars, international film festivals, etc.) occupy in singling out which films manifest both artistry and a critical problematization of national identity, Tolentino maintains that critical and cultural capital decides inclusion in a canonical "Philippine national cinema" ("Introduksyon" xx-xxi). In fact, the inception of award-giving bodies and their rituals roughly correspond to periods now universally acknowledged as "golden ages" in Philippine cinema: the Maria Clara Awards (1952) and its successor, the Filipino Academy of Movie Arts and Sciences Awards (1954) were established during the so-called "Second Golden Age,"[6] while the birth of the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino (MPP) and its Gawad Urian in 1976 concur with what is alternately called the "Third Golden Age" and the "Filipino New Cinema" from 1976 up to 1984.[7]

The significance of the MPP's formation for Philippine cinema is not historically specific; not only did its birth introduce autonomous film criticism and the idea of a mutually productive relationship between criticism and production (Zafra 72), but the group—primarily via its *Urian Anthologies*—also sowed seeds for the academic study of Philippine film.[8] Every decade from 1970 until 2009, the MPP published anthologies of its members' writings, making good on the group's aim to develop a critically engaged Filipino audience and to alert the industry to both its failings and achievements in terms of producing quality films (Tiongson, "The Rise of the Philippine New Wave Indie Film" vi). Each anthology provided an overview of the industry during the decade in question (with particular emphases on production issues and contestations with the government over taxation and censorship),

systematic assessments of thematic and stylistic tendencies in recent Philippine filmmaking, reviews of genre and "notable" films of the decade, and profiles of significant personages in the industry. Aside from its utility as a concrete marker more enduring than an essentially ephemeral cinema,[9] MPP's written output has had considerable influence on how Philippine cinema itself has been understood and its history written. In another important work in film studies, the *CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art: Philippine Film, Volume 8*, MPP members Bienvenido Lumbera and Nestor Torre authored historical essays, reflecting the conventional writing of Philippine film history as unfolding in at least three distinct waves, with each seeing the production of canonical narrative films. As film journalists in national broadsheets and faculty professors in prestigious universities, the MPP membership were also at crucial positions of influence.

In these writings on Philippine films of each decade, the MPP has always prioritized "substance" over form in commending films—films of note are reflective of the society from which they emanate, capable of the "truthful portrayal of the human condition as perceived by the Filipino, and … [which deal] with the Filipino experience to which the greater number of moviegoers can relate" (Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino 3). Lumbera reiterates this, pointing out that the group "has consistently preferred cinema that deals with Philippine social realities over those which are merely skilfully or artfully made" ("Problems in Philippine Film History" 42) This realist ideal reflects the singular period in Philippine film history when high quality films with potent political content—incisive critiques against the Marcos government and its New Society[10]—were abundant (Campos, "New Urban Realist Film" 4). Campos (*End of National Cinema* 88-89) observes the decisively nationalist motivation of the MPP critics, "[taking] for granted that cinema is a national formation and, as such, filmmakers are culturally, if not politically, accountable to the Filipino people" and that their writings either surface folk culture in popular genre films or position notable films within a "unified, continuous, and linear national art history."

Writing in 2007, del Mundo ("Post Brocka Philippine Cinema" 58) grafts young indie filmmakers into the family of Filipino filmmaking greats, constituting its newest—fifth, by his count—generation, who "have shown that they have the right to succeed Brocka and his generation." The social realist ideal thus transcends the conditions under which the "new Filipino cinema" of the 1970s was formed, mostly aided by MPP members themselves who enact their authority as cultural arbiters in writing and teaching about film, handing out Gawad Urians, and, of particular interest for this article, being part of Cinemalaya's selection committees and competition juries. Cinemalaya's first year saw Bienvenido Lumbera and Nestor Torre as part of the

festival's selection committee, with Torre reprising his seat for two more years. Lumbera was part of the 2012 festival jury, together with Rolando Tolentino. Journalist Lito Zulueta is the most active MPP member in Cinemalaya, serving in selection committees and competition juries from 2007 to 2016.[11] Mike Rapatan was in the selection committee for short films in 2007, and Mario Hernando was jury member in 2014. Del Mundo was part of the selection committee for short films in 2008, and jury member in 2011. Since 2015, del Mundo has also been running the Cinemalaya Film Institute. Nicanor Tiongson and Lumbera are both members of the board of Cinemalaya Foundation.

Cinemalaya: The Institution and the Festival Event

Prominent in Cinemalaya's founding narrative is the crisis in local film production toward the end of the 1990s. During this period, competition from Hollywood, piracy, and rising production costs brought on by heavy government taxation and soaring talent fees pushed many producers to bankruptcy (Tiongson, "The Best of Times, the Worst of Times"). In fact, this supposed demise, according to Campos (*End of National Cinema* 220-226), is one of the triumvirate of forces that propelled the formation of Cinemalaya, along with the radical promise that digital film technology offered for artistic film production, and the introduction of cost-saving production practices by Regal Films's "serious" *pito-pito* films. The latter, in particular, had the unintended effect of discovering the likes of Lav Diaz and Jeffrey Jeturian (Campos, *The End of National Cinema* 223), hinting at the potential of a similar discovery mechanism. Yet unlike Regal's overtly capitalist motivations, Cinemalaya's reason for being was to be nobler: the festival was to usher in a new film movement—one that would change no less than the way that local films have been made and consumed.

Cinemalaya was conceptualized in 2004, supported by the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP), the newly-formed Film Development Council of the Philippines (FDCP),[12] the University of the Philippines Film Institute (UPFI), and the Philippine Multi-Media Systems Inc. The latter, under the leadership of business tycoon Antonio "Tonyboy" Cojuangco,[13] provides a PHP 500,000 seed grant to selected film projects.[14] Cinemalaya's goal to support young filmmakers and to "[invigorate] Philippine filmmaking" positions the festival at the vanguard of this new film movement. Its aim to showcase new Filipino filmmakers whose films "boldly articulate and freely interpret the Filipino experience with fresh insight and artistic integrity" likewise reflect the widespread expectation of independent cinema's

place in Philippine film history and its contributions to a "national cinema." Featuring "original Philippine art"[15] was of paramount concern for Cinemalaya's creators, albeit for different purposes: Cojuangco wanted to generate content for Dream Channel,[16] while the FDCP under Laurice Guillen hoped to reverse the crisis in local film production.[17]

Though somewhat dramatic, Cabagnot's pronouncement that Cinemalaya has "single-handedly turned around not just local production but the whole of Philippine cinema" (145), is actually far from being an understatement. Indeed Cinemalaya's mobilization of an audience for independent films constitutes what is arguably the festival's biggest achievement. Previously, such films were little seen, usually screened at the CCP and arthouse-type venues to family, friends, and fellow artists, at international film festivals, and the odd university.[18] Cinemalaya gave independent cinema an unprecedented level of visibility and captured not only the imagination of young filmmakers but also the interest of a sizable audience of middle-class, educated youth.[19] Participating in the festival as audience increasingly became "the trendiest activity for Metro Manila's thinking class" (Mateo, "Charm of Cinemalaya"). From a meagre count of 8,440 in 2005, audiences in 2013 ballooned to 82,322 (see Table 1). For its tenth anniversary, the festival welcomed 100,158 spectators, a 22% increase from the previous year's figure (Cultural Center of the Philippines).

Huge crowds at the usually deserted CCP theaters and sold-out screenings both within and without CCP[20] convinced many that an audience for independent films does exist. This audience, though not above shrieking with delight whenever the odd celebrity is spotted,[21] is notably keen on discussing among themselves the films they have watched. Facilitating this immediate engagement with the festival's film texts is the physical isolation of the festival's main venue. Because CCP is out of the way and the festival is scheduled during the monsoon season, a wet Cinemalaya day is not worth it if one does not see at least two films. Given the limited time in between screenings—thirty to forty-five minutes to make a hurried trip to the bathroom and grab a quick meal—audiences hang about CCP, avidly talking about the films they just saw. In short, when one goes to Cinemalaya, one can't do much else but watch films and talk about them. Most of these discussions range from value judgments whether a particular film is good or bad based on its acting performances and immediate emotional reactions, to belabored analyses of scenes and/or endings that are found incomprehensible, to suppositions about a film's "message" and/or "lesson."

Table 1. A summary of audience counts from 2005 to 2013.
Sources: Cinemalaya Audience Reports for 2005, 2007-2013, as prepared by the Venue Management Division of CCP

	2005		2007		2008		2009		2010		2011		2012		2013	
	AC**	AC/ MP***	AC**	AC/MP	AC**	AC/MP	AC**	AC/MP	AC**	AC/MP	AC**	AC/MP	AC**	AC/MP	AC**	AC/MP
GRAND TOTAL*	8,440	46	23,848	36	29,683	39	41,156	56	34,077	43	57,892	59	66,910	59	82,322	54
CCP TAC	8,440	46	23,848	36	29,683	39	41,156	56	34,077	43	49,450	59	50,202	62	58,087	58
Main Theater (TNA)	363	41	13,272	36	15,198	36	18,848	45	16,538	34	29,112	61	30,358	59	35,623	53
Little Theater (TAT)	4,748	55	6,044	44	6,686	53	7,760	61	7,519	48	8,584	50	7,958	61	10,145	60
Studio Theater (THB)	1,286	27	1,535	21	1,906	49	5,617	71	4,710	59	5,953	65	6,434	81	6,857	80
Dream Theater (TMC)	822	37	1,011	27	1,266	40	1,919	66	1,413	42	1,367	40	2,079	56	1,238	39
MKP Hall	826	52	1,229	54	1,671	65	3,404	97	2,292	75	2,886	76	2,610	77	2,811	92
TNA Lobby	395	197	-	-	-	-	1,257	251	1,432	143	964	96	622	52	1,212	121
Silangan Hall	-		757	38	1,166	39	2,351	58	173	87	425	85	141	83	201	101
Small Gallery	-		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	159	80	-	-	-	-
TNA Ramp	-		-	-	1,790	26										
Ayala Cinemas																
TAC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8,442	59	16,708	52	24,235	45
Greenbelt	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8,442	59	9,776	68	9,488	68
Trinoma	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6,932	39	12,318	37
ATC	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,429	42

* No data for 2006.
**AC: Audience count
***AC/MP: Audience count versus maximum potential, in percentage

From 2005 to 2016, Cinemalaya has produced one hundred twenty-six feature-length films, one hundred two of which are under the "Main Competition" (later renamed to "New Breed Category" in 2010) made by filmmakers who have not produced more than three commercial feature films prior and fourteen under the short-lived "Directors Showcase" category made by veteran filmmakers.[22] Discussing all these films would perhaps be best left for another article, but suffice it to say that in general, Cinemalaya films have been reflective of trends in local independent filmmaking styles, as well as of the politics of the "new wave indie" films, as outlined by Tiongson ("The Rise of the Philippine New Wave Indie Film" 29-37). By the sheer volume and variety of the produced films alone, plurality is a key consideration: from 2005, issues dealt with in Cinemalaya films included poverty and the many criminalities it engenders, folk Catholicism, labor contractualization, call center culture, child abuse, violence against women, abortion and maternal healthcare, illegal migration, outsourced state violence, environmental degradation, living with conflict in Mindanao, unethical media practices and exploitative independent filmmaking, film piracy, and new media and the reproducibility of the spectacle of ultra-reality, among many others. Jardin assures that the festival's films "have generally been about any topic under the sun that mainstream cinema would probably not touch" ("The Cinemalaya Philippine Independent Film Festival" 156). This emphasis on plurality and diversity of subjects reflects what Tiongson ("The Rise of the Philippine New Wave Indie Film" 30) claims is the democratizing impulse of the new wave of independent cinema to represent "the Filipino experience from all over the archipelago." According to its vocal followers, this movement is committed to surfacing narratives and representations counter to the seemingly unassailable facades propagated by the state, big-capital media conglomerates, and conservative social forces in whose interests it is to maintain the status quo. Many independent filmmakers make reality inescapable, elevate it from the mundane and the negligible, and correct its distortions from the hackneyed *teleserye* and mainstream film plot, to introduce into critical and engaged public discourse the politics of representation. Yet Tiongson ("The Rise of the Philippine New Wave Indie Film" 5) is careful to point out that the new wave of independent cinema is by no means similar to ideological Third Cinema, underlining the fact that this new body of films borrows more from Second Cinema centering on auteurs and art cinema rather than from Third Cinema and its "aesthetics of hunger"[23] rooted in anti-(neo)colonial movements in Latin America and Africa (34). The myth of the creatively autonomous filmmaker makes itself felt in the essentially "liberal and individualist" philosophy of this new film movement. As Tiongson argues, recent Filipino indies are products of filmmaking centered on the figure of the directors, whose cinematic statements about society's ills "will always be personal diatribes ... jeremiads [that] are basically subjective and personal" (34-35).

Writing about his attendance in the 1997 Sundance Film Festival, media anthropologist Daniel Dayan (48) observes that a film festival is an exercise in self-definition where participants—organizers, jury members, filmmakers, audiences, film journalists, film critics—are constantly preoccupied with questions of identity. Facilitating this process are the thousands of pages of written and audiovisual[24] material being produced as the festival unfolds, prompting Dayan to call film festivals "verbal architectures." As an important shaper of discourse on the new wave of local independent filmmaking, Cinemalaya has not only introduced the film festival mode of local film production,[25] but has also framed the concerns of this new film movement—formally, through its Film Congress and, in less controlled circumstances, through disputes with the festival's other stakeholders (i.e., filmmakers, producers, audiences) publicized in the media. Journalistic coverage is a crucial component in such discursive constructions, as much a part of the construction of the festival as event as its temporal compression of film-going, its star-studded gala premieres and awards night, and its distinct staging space. It is indicative of Cinemalaya's—and independent cinema's, in general—growth that in its first press conference in 2005, "there were only about four tables and very few members of the media" (Lim, "Indie specials"). Five years later, the national broadsheet *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (PDI) begins dedicating space in its Entertainment section ("Indie Bravo!") to feature independent films recognized abroad.[26] This thickening of keen journalistic attention—with hundreds of articles and columns dedicated to statements by Cinemalaya officials and festival participants, festival reports, filmmaker profiles, film reviews, etc.—has seen the effective deployment of Cinemalaya's storied identity as savior of the Philippine film industry. Even participating as audience feels like making history, for the festival "re-centers the time of projection as a live event" and the context of this activity—the irreplicable, singular event—becomes part of the film's text (Harbord 44). A charged air permeates the festival event, because the time of the present unfolding is reworked to make unique and scarce, to present the past in the recorded film.

Cinemalaya's self-conscious positioning within a particular popular discourse of independent filmmaking has both proved key to the festival's success and—eventually—exposed its fraught position within this same discourse. Though the official Cinemalaya position—broadcasted via its Film Congress[27] which features local film industry actors "looks at all aspects of independent filmmaking and distribution … [and provides] a venue for interaction and dialogue between alternative filmmakers and those in the mainstream" (Cinemalaya Philippine Independent Film Festival)—has always been equated with bridging a divide between mainstream and independent cinema,[28] what is actually being brought forth in popular discourse

is the idea of the festival as squarely on the side of artistic independence in the potent, because Manichaean, mythology of art versus commerce. This incongruity has haunted Cinemalaya, especially after it began to attract wider attention and mobilize larger audiences. One of the biggest scandals to have troubled the festival, the controversy surrounding the disqualification of Emerson Reyes's *MNL 143* (2012) is illustrative of the fragile balancing act between conflicting stakeholder interests that Cinemalaya has to manage. Reyes was disqualified because of differences with the festival's Managing Committee over casting choices. The independent filmmaking community was up in arms when it came to light that the committee had considered Allan Paule and Joy Viado, Reyes's romantic leads, "not suitable to the material"—a decision that was elaborated further by the festival leadership who "[wanted] competence, suitability to the role, and greater audience acceptability" (M. Cruz, "Banned Filmmaker Questions"). Laurice Guillen, then chair of the Competition Committee, consequently said in a press conference: "If you're a partner, you should be open to suggestions. And in a competition like this, with a grant involved, you should be flexible, without sacrificing integrity" (M. Cruz "Boycott Calls Fail"). Guillen's statement acknowledges the precarious position that Cinemalaya finds itself in by its very structure as a film festival primarily administered by a nonprofit organization and supported by a public-private partnership. This structure, which guarantees that the festival enjoys support from both private capital and state cultural institutions, has proven beneficial for the festival in terms of "[legitimizing its] existence in the absence of financial independence" (de Valck, *Film Festivals* 207). However, this has also meant that compromises[29] are always inevitable—a situation that is, in fact, common to film festivals around the world. Ragan Rhyne, in a 2009 essay on the global turn to the nonprofit model of cultural organization, sees the film festival as reflective of fundamental changes in cultural policy that has provided for a distinctly neoliberal "new economy of public/private subsidies for the arts toward the production of post-Cold War global citizens" (16).

For Cinemalaya, discovering a niche market is its answer to the problems of reviving local film production and making independent filmmaking sustainable. Having mobilized this niche market—a fairly homogenous audience that is young, middle-class, educated, highly invested in developing their intellectual and cultural capital, and based in or near Metro Manila—the festival hopes in turn to reach a broader audience, which is deemed possible only if Cinemalaya films get commercial distribution. The achievement of this goal has been facilitated by the production of "maindie" films—films which are not produced by a mainstream studio but showcase nevertheless certain aesthetic tendencies more identifiable with commercial

filmmaking practices. Jardin (157) himself admits that Cinemalaya has been instrumental to the maindie phenomenon, but is more inclined to think of it as advantageous for everyone involved: independent filmmakers are invited to direct films for the huge studios, veteran directors "get a fresh outlook," and overlooked actors get "[re-]discovered." The Young Critics' Circle's official statement regarding the *MNL 143* scandal points out the increasingly incongruous discourse on independence in filmmaking as to render the label "independent" meaningless; indeed local filmmaking that is free—in all the sentimental, idealistic senses of the term—is impossible in the context of its "[containment] and [disciplining] by the complex matrix of funding organizations, competitions, festivals, and awards." A universally acceptable answer to what independent filmmaking in the Philippines should be is beside the point, but it must be emphasized that Cinemalaya as an institution has a stake in taking part in these contestations—if the festival is to survive at all, it has to make itself relevant either as arbiter of conflicting claims (as in its Film Congress) or as participant itself in these debates (as in when it is caught up in such controversies).

The Transnational in Cinemalaya's National Cinema: Cinemalaya Films and International Film Festivals

A significant part of Cinemalaya's buzz is built around its films' circulation in the broader arena of world cinema. International film festivals—and the exposure and recognition that they afford—legitimize filmmakers and their films as deserving of attention within their own domestic borders. Awards and exhibitions in important international film festivals always merit at least a few lines in *PDI*'s Indie Bravo! section. *Making Waves: 10 Years of Cinemalaya* includes a section on "international recognition and awards," and elsewhere, Jardin (154) cites as incontestable proof of Cinemalaya films' "artistic achievement, technical qualities, and content and message" a long list of the international film festivals where the films have either been exhibited or competed. The early success of *Ang Pagdadalaga* was particularly crucial in creating the compelling "little-film-that-can" narrative that would thereafter inspire other independent filmmakers. "A representation of Filipino indie digital filmmakers' struggle and determination," *Ang Pagdadalaga* "exemplifies the best in Filipinos," writes *PDI*'s Bayani San Diego Jr. ("Who's Maximo Oliveros" A16). Since then, Cinemalaya has been perceived as the gateway to the international film festival circuit—popularly imagined as some sort of International of filmmakers defying Hollywood in a David-versus-Goliath battle between art and commerce,[30] the local struggle between independent and mainstream cinema writ large. Cinemalaya is "today's most prestigious Filipino film festival" precisely because of

its steady supply of "an excellent roster of motion pictures for local and international consumption" and "an assemblage of actors and actresses whose caliber are undoubtedly world-class" (Ignacio 11).

De Valck's (*Film Festivals*, "Finding Audiences for Films") periodization of the history of film festivals, with particular attention to changes in festival programming orientation, elaborates on how international film festivals through time have framed and showcased films produced from different parts of the world—that is, not-Hollywood. Following periods defined by state-led initiatives to forward "national cinemas" (1932 to 1968) and by a politically interventionist emphasis on discovering and supporting auteurs and "new waves" of previously overlooked national cinemas (1968 to 1980s), de Valck (*Film Festivals*) proposes a third period characterized by the overabundance—and at the same time growing interconnectedness—of film festivals globally. Beginning in the 1980s and extending to the present, this period saw the institutionalization of the previous period's orientation in programming international film festivals: "discovering" films and auteurs from marginal film-producing countries and supporting films which not only manifest high artistic sensibilities, but also offer contested portrayals of realities in their countries of origin. Western festival programming of foreign films critical of their respective governments was a form of taking part in the radical politics in other parts of the globe. Denied exposure in their own countries, these films were given support outside their national borders. The Berlin International Film Festival, via its Das Internationales Forum des Jungen Films ("Forum" for short) section, was one of the first festivals which actively engaged in this redefinition of what is properly nationally representative cinemas (de Valck, *Film Festivals*). Born in 1971, the Forum reflected not only a general tendency for European film festivals to emphasize art cinema and their directors, but also "a passionate interest in unfamiliar cinematic cultures, especially the ones sprouting from the revolutions in Third World countries" (70).[31] Quoting Stephan Crofts, de Valck (*Film Festivals* 59) points to this repurposing of "national cinema" from the top-down deployment of the concept by states' geopolitical interests during the early years of film festival history, films programmed as representative of their respective national cinemas are now seen as offering "varieties of [cultural] 'otherness'" and, as part of their cinemas' "new waves," are also aesthetically and politically radical.

After the excitement over the French New Wave and the consequent "discoveries" of new cinemas from Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia, Hungary, West Germany, Brazil, Cuba, Argentina, Japan, and Russia (de Valck, *Film Festivals* 175), came a second set of new waves from Taiwan, West Africa, Spain, Ireland, Yugoslavia, New Zealand, Iran, and China's so-called Fifth Generation (177). By this time, capitalizing

on the discourse centering on the concepts of "auteur" and "new wave" has become matter of course; as "institutions of discovery," film festivals race to find another new cinema, and "[o]nce the aura of discovery had materialized into dedicated attention, the system would move on, craving fresh input" (175-76). In a context characterized by a profusion of international film festivals, over which bodies such as the Fédération Internationale des Associations de Producteurs de Films (FIAPF, International Federation of Film Producers Associations) control the supply flow of films from around the world,[32] it is important for a non-FIAPF-accredited international film festival to introduce a new wave and discover a new auteur to foster, in an attempt to assume stature in the greater scheme of international film festivals around the world.

Arguing that film festivals have become self-referential, de Valck (*Film Festivals* 177) points out the fact that new waves are no longer "local and autonomous eruptions that are unaffected by film-historical knowledge and elements of self-conscious performativity." Unlike their predecessors, young Filipino filmmakers now have relatively easier access to knowledge about new trends in film style currently favored in international film festivals, either via university education or screenings sponsored by foreign embassies, features on cable TV, online on-demand video streaming, legitimate and bootleg DVDs, and online peer-to-peer file sharing, among others (dela Cruz quoted in Tiongson, "The Rise of the Philippine New Wave Indie Film" 12). This exposure to world cinema has helped inspire the so-called festival film. Dependent on the film festival rhetoric of "discovering" auteurs and new waves, festival films can easily be regarded "as esoteric art products or as shining beacons of revolutionary perfection," reflecting exoticism at play in the films' "[elevation of] cultural events, scenic oddities or ethnic peculiarities into as many proofs of cultural authenticity and national specificity" (Willemen 23). In the Philippines, the otherwise lauded independent filmmaker is no stranger to accusations of pandering to demands by audiences in international film festivals for "poverty porn"[33]—that is, images of violent and abased Filipinos. Writer Krip Yuson, writing on *Ang Babae sa Septic Tank* (Marlon Rivera, 2011) observes: "It's been a standard joke among the more percipient members of the local film industry—how only graphic homosexuality and shantytown gravitas can guarantee slots and prizes in European film fests." So pervasive have festival films become that it is possible to draw a "family of resemblances" among them, as what Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong does. Distinguished by "an austerity of sight and sound," long shots and controlled camera movements, nonprofessional actors and the focus on everyday lives and the quotidian, and challenging the audience in a confrontation with the film's "suggestive, evocative, spare, and nonlinear" text, not necessarily to understand the causality of

character actions but to arrive at "a deeper understanding of human relations" (Wong 75-87)—similarities among festival films are actually for the most part stylistic. A film's chances of being programmed in a festival still very much depends on whether it is from "[a] nation not previously regarded as [a] prominent film-producing [country which] receive praise for [its] ability to transcend local issues and provincial tastes while simultaneously providing a window onto a different culture" (Nichols 16). An illustrative example is the unprecedented film festival interest in Iranian cinema in the 1990s where filmmakers have developed a very distinct style in filmmaking reflecting strict modesty laws enforced by the Islamist state (Mottahedeh) while at the same time offering an opportunity "to go behind appearances, to grasp the meaning of things as those who present them would, to step outside our (inescapable) status as outsiders and diagnosticians to attain a more intimate, more authentic form of experience" of a society under ultraconservative theocratic rule (Nichols 19).

The "discovery"—itself an act of creation (de Valck, *Film Festivals* 177)—of a "new wave" facilitated in international film festivals feeds into the discourse of national cinema within the respective film-producing country. In the Philippines, the wider impact of this international recognition in the growth of local film production and consumption is more important than the awards themselves. To a great extent, participation in this broader arena together with other films from around the world acknowledges Philippine cinema as on an equal footing with other, "quality," resource-rich cinemas. This sort of thinking extends back to the 1950s, when the dominant studios of the period—Sampaguita Pictures, LVN Pictures, Premiere Productions, and Lebran—made it a point to commission "pang-award"/prestige films, specifically for competition in international film festivals (Torre, "Classics of the Filipino Film" 51). This export-oriented studio film production[34] began in earnest after Manuel Conde's *Genghis Khan* (1951) was exhibited at the Venice Film Festival, and Lamberto Avellana's *Anak Dalita* (1956) won the Grand Prix for Best Picture at the 1956 Asian Film Festival[35] in Hong Kong and Best Director at the same festival the following year for *Badjao* (1957). Carballo recollects that *Genghis Khan* counted no less than the famed American film critic James Agee as one of its supporters and was "one of the twenty films accepted [at the Venice Film Festival] from 720 submissions from all over the world competing against the likes of John Ford's *Quiet Man*, Ingmar Bergman's *Summer with Monika*, and Federico Fellini's *The White Sheik* among others" (8).[36] In local film history, this international recognition was a key component to the so-called "Second Golden Age" of Philippine cinema, working both ways to legitimize a new crop of filmmaking talents: whereas the Venice and Hong Kong awards "raised the world's estimation of the quality of Philippine film

culture" (Torre, "Classics of the Filipino Film" 51), they also "endowed the Philippine film industry with respectability in so far as the snobbish intelligentsia was concerned" (Lumbera, "Pelikula" 208).

Given the profile of independent film spectators, one can argue that Lumbera's derided "snobbish intelligentsia [who] ... had consistently ignored local movies, preferring American and other imported films which carried with them the sophisticated aura of cultural items approved by media here and abroad" (ibid.) approximates local film festival audiences now. Indeed, the opportunity to identify as global citizens is not something that only audiences in international film festivals can have, as local film festivals—Cinemalaya included—have begun programming foreign films together with Filipino classics and recent independent films. Writing a selection of films to screen in a film festival—that is, festival programming—is "the core activity of film festivals" and "implies a committed handling of cinema as cultural expression and an evaluation of films as artistic accomplishments" (de Valck, "Finding Audiences for Films" 26). A festival's program makes a statement about the organizers' determination of cinemas that should be seen by its public. From the outset then, Cinemalaya has endeavored, via its exhibition programs, to cohere a specific body of work that is identifiably "Philippine independent cinema," referencing a bigger film movement that the festival and its films are part of. The 2005 Cinemalaya not only featured documentaries, but also introduced names such as Lav Diaz, Khavn dela Cruz, and Raya Martin (previously unknown outside arthouse circles) to its festival public. In 2006, Cinemalaya featured films produced the previous year for the Cinema One Originals Film Festival—a practice which eventually became institutionalized in the section Indie ANI: Harvest of the Year's Best. Interestingly, ANI not only showcases feature-length films but also documentaries and short films (narrative, animation, experimental, documentary). Recent independent filmmaking is also juxtaposed with retrospectives of notable Filipino films, filmmakers, and actors, in what can be read as a deliberate effort to mark this cinema's place within a long and venerable history of Philippine national cinema. Beginning with the 2008 section "Juan Tamad Goes Indie: A Tribute to Manuel Conde," a selection of films by the National Artist Conde, Cinemalaya has regularized retrospectives, with consequent tributes featuring the cinemas of Lino Brocka, LVN Pictures,[37] Fernando Poe Jr., Mario O'Hara, Dolphy, Celso Ad. Castillo, Marilou Diaz Abaya, and Eddie Romero.

It is against this constructed body of filmic works, taken to represent Philippine national cinema, that the programming of foreign films in Cinemalaya gains particular significance. Foreign films were first introduced in a "Focus Asia" section in 2011.

After a three-year hiatus of no international cinema representation, a section on Asian independent cinema was programmed in 2015. The following year, the sections "NETPAC Award Winning Films"[38] and "Visions of Asia"—the latter with a formalized partnership between the Cultural Center of the Philippines and the Japan Foundation Manila. Thus formulated, Cinemalaya essentially closes a circulation loop: as Filipino independent films circulate in the international film festival circuit, so is this distant, somewhat abstracted, world cinema projected back to Filipino audiences. Yet, increasingly, as similar, production-oriented local film festivals proliferate and festival networks gather density, ANI exhibition films have also presented a window to this bigger world: independent films which have won awards in other local independent film festivals and/or international film festivals have become section staples. This is a straightforward manifestation of the legitimacy—as confirmed by the biggest independent film festival in the country—that local independent films gain from international film festival circulation. Cinemalaya can hardly compete for world premieres within a tightly-policed hierarchy of international film festivals,[39] but programming foreign titles and re-circulating a body of local independent films which have been inscribed, so to speak, with the traces of a world cinema, enables the festival to be part of this hierarchical network, even if it only confirms its position as a marginal node in this network.

Whose National Cinema? Cinemalaya and Its Imagined "Nation"

The past twelve years have seen Cinemalaya and its supporters trying to construct around the festival a coherent narrative of current independent cinema—that is, specifically "Cinemalaya"—as the next moment in Philippine national cinema history. This narrativizing, though highly contested on the one hand regarding the question of what is independent cinema, has seen on the other hand the unproblematic valorization of a particular "national cinema." This article has attempted to explain how the festival has been staking a claim in the larger discourse of a national cinema in becoming, by looking at how "independent cinema" has been defined—and contested—by its produced films and their transnational circulation, and the resultant "verbal architecture" that coverage of the festival's troubles and successes has produced.

It must be noted that these discussions over what Filipino independent cinema is and should be have always been framed in terms of *struggle*—between art and capital, filmmaker and commercial producer/state censor, independent and mainstream cinema—following closely how the history of a Philippine national

cinema has been written. Clodualdo del Mundo Jr., an MPP founding member, writes: "The history of Philippine cinema is a history of generations of Filipino filmmakers contending with the commercial system and the pervasive foreign forces, particularly Hollywood cinema, that exert their influence on the formation of a national cinema" ("Philippines" 90). This writing, of which the eminent critics' group Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino has taken the lead, currently dominates thinking about film history and what makes for a "Philippine national cinema." Through the decades, the MPP has steered the course of Philippine film history writing, parenthesizing periods and generations, glorifying certain filmmakers over others, discussing at length one film form (i.e., the narrative feature) while largely ignoring others, taking film practice in the metropolitan capital as representative of the rest of the country. In all this, "national cinema" is thought of as a stable concept, an autonomous ideal that needs to be struggled over against a ravaging Hollywood, an exploitative state, and profit-hungry local producers. In a sense, this reflects the MPP's historical origins in a peculiar period in the country's history, a time when the odds stacked against good filmmaking included the state under Marcos. Cinema, as were the other arts, was seen to add to the "discourses around culture [that] work to forge the link—the hyphen—between nation and state" (Hayward 82) and in the hands of Imelda Marcos, "national culture" was state power made spectacular via pageantry and infrastructure, a form of patronage to match her husband's own efforts at "national development" (Rafael 295). National culture was "a gift from above that circulated to those below"—a gift that was specifically Marcos's (ibid.). This was what the creative class critical of the dictatorship sought to counter, and the MPP, as part of this creative class, played a big role in fleshing out the politics of a "New Wave" of Filipino filmmakers whose works contested government rhetoric about what should be taken as representative of the nation. In its critical engagement with films by Lino Brocka, Ishmael Bernal, Mike de Leon, Eddie Romero, Celso Ad. Castillo, Peque Gallaga, among many others, the MPP surfaced efforts to challenge official representation and rendered these challenges historically relevant.

Now, with Cinemalaya, the MPP has become more directly involved in the rise of a new film movement, the latest in a linear progression of great filmmakers in Philippine film history. MPP members's long-standing involvement in Cinemalaya as members of the Board of the Cinemalaya Foundation Inc., the festival's selection committees and competition juries, and most recently the Cinemalaya Institute, makes this apparent. Cinemalaya's many films introduce into the larger public discourse problematizations of taken-for-granted local issues, critical discussions that are meant for a broad local audience in its frequent borrowings from popular genre filmmaking. Yet it is exactly for the latter that Cinemalaya films have been

criticized as compromising independent filmmaking—top-billing huge celebrities, playing safe with subjects and treatment,[40] and generally equating growing profits with the success of the festival.[41] For many of its critics, Cinemalaya has been borrowing far too much from mainstream filmmaking and has become the popular "alternative"—the new status quo to challenge.[42] In fact, its central position in defining independent cinema has been increasingly contested by other festivals which markedly deviate both in terms of filmic output and festival programming. Cinema One Originals, for example, has been more proactive in producing regional films,[43] while the rapidly growing QCinema International Film Festival was the first to produce and showcase documentaries. Cinema One Originals and, most recently, Brillante Mendoza and Wilson Tieng's Sinag Maynila have since followed suit with their respective documentary sections.[44]

More recently, this more or less taken for granted notion of "national cinema" has been taken to task, not least by the growth of a dense network of international film festivals which has facilitated the increasingly transparent transnationality of cinema. Financed by funds coming from foreign cultural agencies, local governments, and businesses, these festivals have facilitated the production of films by filmmakers from any part of the world. More importantly, audiences have become more cosmopolitan and more exposed to foreign cinemas not only via the physical international film festival, but also its myriad by-products: arthouse foreign films circulate, through channels both legitimate and illegitimate, as online film communities flourish. In the Philippines, bootleg by-products are especially important in helping create these communities, revealing spectatorship practices that resist neat categories of what is rightly "national" and "international," even as they simultaneously—inescapably—function as such. Trice's work on the pirated DVD market in Quiapo, Manila elaborates how such a small community thriving on the illegal exchange of films from around the world worry national borders with their cinephilic boundary-crossings, the engagement with a marginal Muslim community, and its site at "the heart of the city and the crossroads of the country" (84). Tiongson ("The Rise of the Philippine New Wave Indie Film" 12), surveying interviews by Khavn de la Cruz with select independent filmmakers, enumerates foreign filmmaking influences, many of whom would not have been encountered if not for pirated DVDs or illegal file transfers. On the other hand, a young population of local film audiences have also been schooled on these bootleg DVDs and files circulated online via peer-to-peer sharing platforms.[45] As world cinema—and the wealth of knowledge produced about it—was made more readily available, so did criticism not necessarily by critics' groups, academics, or journalists writing about films in periodicals, flourish. Between 2007 until the early 2010s, film blogs

were religiously updated with content: local independent films were reviewed side by side with films from France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Sweden, South Korea, Japan, and Thailand,[46] in Lessons from the School of Inattention, Lilok Pelikula, Piling Piling Pelikula, Auditoire on Film, among many others.[47] In a sense, film blogs parallel the general trend of local film festival programming today, situating a Philippine film movement developing alongside emergent film practices around the world.[48] This critical environment is markedly different from that during the Filipino New Wave in the 1970s and 1980s, where, as David (1) observes, there was very little effort to examine new films vis-à-vis similar film movements outside the country. Indeed, in MPP writings of Brocka's realist cinema, significance is imputed to Brocka's local milieu, and not his cinema's place in a broader world cinema (e.g., Italian neorealism, British kitchen sink, French New Wave) (Campos, *The End of National Cinema* 285).

Be it by the state, film festival programmers, distributors, filmmakers, film critics, or academics, the deployment of an idea of "national cinema" has always aimed for a unified, coherent hold of meanings, even as histories of national cinemas are "histories of crisis and conflict, of resistance and negotiation" (Higson 37). Yet recent scholarship on Southeast Asian cinemas, Campos (*The End of National Cinema*) observes, have instead both "[celebrated] and [problematized] independence as the end of national cinema" (16-17). From whatever specific context any discussion on the topic emanates from, independent cinema's "inherent and constant capacity to signify a refusal of any despotic claim on and to interrogate unproblematized notions of the nation" (17) has made it the call to arms for many filmmakers in the region, fighting as they do Hollywood, unsupportive governments, and big commercial studios. An independent cinema defying conventional representations of reality—propagated by institutions seeking to preserve the status quo—to expose hidden populations and silenced voices underneath layers of calcified and ultimately marginalizing assumptions about society is a worthy ideal. It is for this that the concept "independent cinema" carries such political weight and has thus been intensely contested. This wrangling has been particularly intense locally, because of Cinemalaya's early and long-standing efforts to position independent cinema—or rather a specific notion of independent cinema—as the next moment in Philippine film history. Reviewing proceedings of the festival's Film Congresses from 2005 to 2010, Campos (*The End of National Cinema*) disentangles what Cinemalaya is—as in how its organizers have conceptualized the festival—from what it is not. A niche market for a body of films which is not "diametrically opposed to the mainstream, but rather … to the tired old formula of filmmaking and its restrictions" has always been the festival's chief objective (243). The historical moment in

Philippine cinema that Cinemalaya is supposed to herald will see the demolition of divisions between mainstream cinema and "the short-film, 'experimental' filmic frame of mind that caters to a small, inbred and cliquish viewership" (Torre, "Learning Experience"). In this schema, a more politically engaged cinema, advocated by Tolentino ("Cinema and State in Crisis"), is incongruous and in fact discouraged because "requiring indie filmmakers to carry one political line is tantamount to asking them to do what a commercial producer wants them to do. Both would be regarded as impositions from interested parties, and therefore lethal to the indie spirit" (Tiongson, "The Rise of the Philippine New Wave Indie Film" 35). Indeed, the festival's promoted type of independent cinema shares more affinity with the neoliberal logic of mainstream filmmaking than its organizers would admit, a fact which film critic Alexis Tioseco called out in 2008 when he claimed that Cinemalaya was a "self-involved attempt to start a micro-industry." Cinemalaya's niche market, an audience that is young, "culturati na may interes sa pag-unlad ng lokal na sining, willing tumangkilik, at higit sa lahat, magbayad" (Tolentino, "Indie Cinema bilang Kultural na Kapital"), is premised on the profitability of "indie culture" and how the label "independent" confers "distinction, a means by which its audience asserts its superior taste" (Newman 22). Where indie culture consumers are self-aware in their consumption choices, mainstream culture consumers are thought of as "passive victims of corporate-consumerist ideology" (ibid. 33). Derogatory labels for these (non-ironic) popular culture consumers like *bakya* are no longer used, but the "masses" who watch the latest Vice Ganda or Vic Sotto film are still thought of as "walang-muwang at madaling matangay ng agos ng komersiyo" (Zafra 69).

Cinemalaya has helped homogenize a particular notion of independent cinema (Campos, *The End of National Cinema* 244), the diversity of cinemas outside the local movie industry notwithstanding. It is beyond the aim of this article to assess whether "independent cinema" has lost some of its potency under this state of affairs,[49] but it must be pointed out that this homogenization has resulted in the discrediting of experimental filmmaking—or at least any others which do not conform to the idealized feature narrative form that marries social realism with the aesthetics of mainstream cinema—as narcissistic and self-indulgent. The argument for Cinemalaya maindies only logically follows from thinking about cinema as an essentially commercial endeavor, and sustaining independent cinema as a matter of expanding a base of paying customers. If Cinemalaya represents an "evolutionary phase" in Philippine film history (Campos, *The End of National Cinema*), a more diverse cinema is in the offing, albeit still almost always primarily apprehended in commercial terms.

CONCLUSION

Mike de Leon's critique of current cinema at the transition period between dictatorship and democracy in *Aliwan Paradise* (1992) resonates more than two decades after its release. By far still the most incisive critique of how cinema has been practiced and understood in the Philippines, the short film exposes the propensity of the market to absorb all forms of filmic representation, rendering images of human suffering—real or imagined—as just another "radically new" ("bagong bago") product to sell. De Leon might as well have been taking to task not only independent filmmakers, but also the entire machinery that has developed around the independent film industry, including film festivals such as Cinemalaya. For Campos (*The End of National Cinema* 117), *Aliwan Paradise* marks the passage of a "radical imaginary" that had defined the work of de Leon's contemporaries, but the film also surfaces the problem of cinema in the Philippines being thought of as a fundamentally commercial enterprise. That this sort of thinking is not historically specific speaks to the still taken-for-granted nature of the issue. Zafra's findings in 2002 that spectatorship practices are thought of as largely determined by purchasing power still hold true today, and writers of the canon of Philippine cinema, including the Manunuris have been no less guilty in perpetuating this view. Joel David has previously connected this conventional writing of Filipino audiences, passive and willing to watch (pay for) cinema only to be entertained, to "the need [to position] Philippine film history vis-a-vis the largely great-men approaches of US and world film writing" (121). This auteurist tradition assigns the work of producing meaning in film solely within the province of the filmmaker, the wielder of the "camera-stylo."

Cinema's essentially plastic form, its "ability to subsume all forms that have come before it," and its universal appeal as visual medium, Pavsek argues, provide for the utopian possibilities of the art form (6). In the Philippines, digital technology holds much promise for filmmaking, and during the early years of its introduction, festivals such as Cinemalaya provided the needed infrastructure that guaranteed audiences for independent films. But the institutional need to legitimize the resulting new film movement—by delimiting its aesthetics and politics—eventually came to police the sort of independent cinema that should rightly represent a Philippine national cinema to a national public. Filmmaking practices which explore the plastic possibilities of cinema are discredited, reflecting, at its core, a condescending attitude regarding local audiences as unconscious cultural consumers. Despite this, opportunities to trouble this attitude were simultaneously presented by Cinemalaya, which encouraged discussions—while also attempting to shape them—about the

recent independent film movement. Local festival audiences, along with producers, filmmakers, film journalists, film critics, and other industry members, are invited to participate in fleshing out the contested nature of this "national cinema." Plural points of access to cinemas from around the world—within and without the context of Cinemalaya and other local film festivals—are thus paralleled by different means of making sense of what rightly represents national cinema. Cinemalaya's contribution resides in this invitation—not so much its attempt to present a cinema that represents an essential, unproblematized "Filipino experience", as providing a unique stage where these contestations can be surfaced.

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ENDNOTES

[1] The Cinefilipino 2013 Film Festival (PLDT Smart Foundation, MediaQuest, Studio 5, and Unitel Productions) and QCinema: Quezon City International Film Festival (Quezon City local government).

[2] Aside from the annual output of Cinemalaya and Cinema One Originals, the Film Development Council of the Philippines' third Sineng Pambansa National Film Festival featured "master works" by veteran Filipino filmmakers Tikoy Aguiluz, Elwood Perez, Mel Chionglo, Gil Portes, Romy Suzara, Maryo J. Delos Reyes, Peque Gallaga, Lore Reyes, Chito Roño, Joel Lamangan, and Jose Javier Reyes.

[3] Beginning 2014, the festival is held every second week of August. The weather however, remains foul.

[4] Auraeus Solito has since changed his name to Kanakan Balintagos. To avoid confusion, Balintagos will be referred to as Auraeus Solito, as credited in his two Cinemalaya films, *Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros* (2005) and *Busong* (2011).

[5] See for example the 25 and 31 July 2007 posts by filmmaker Raya Martin on the 2007 Cinemalaya in his—now deleted—blog, *Cinematografica*; the 1 August 2007 and 2 March 2012 posts by Oggs Cruz in his film blog, *Lessons from the School of Inattention*; film critic Alexis Tioseco's 15 March 2009 blog post, "Wishful Thinking for Philippine Cinema"; and the 8 August 2009 and 10 December 2010 posts by Richard Bolisay, another film critic, in his film blog, *Lilok Pelikula*. Notable exceptions include several of Rolando Tolentino's articles in *Bulatlat* and Patrick Campos' "The Politics of Naming a Movement: Independent Cinema according to the Cinemalaya Congress (2005-2010)," which will be referred to in the latter part of the article.

[6] Indeed, the major studios of the period, Sampaguita Pictures, LVN Pictures, Premiere Productions, and Lebran, have made it a point to commission "*pang*-award"/prestige films (Torre, "Classics of the Filipino Film" 51).

[7] During this same period two other festivals were also launched—the Catholic Mass Media Awards and the Philippine Movie Press Club's Star Awards (Zafra 71).

[8] Thereafter cultivated especially by film historian Nick Deocampo, whose work on accounting for those films (shorts, experimental films, documentaries, animated films, etc.) largely ignored by the film industry, including MPP, has been invaluable in local film scholarship.

[9] For an account of the state of film archiving in the Philippines, see Lim ("Archival Fragility").

[10] City films by Lino Brocka (*Maynila sa Kuko ng Liwanag*, 1975) and Ishmael Bernal (*Manila By Night*, 1980) especially, exposed the Marcos' delusions of grandeur—exemplified by Imelda Marcos' dictum "the true, the good, the beautiful"—and national economic progress by revealing the true face of the regime's showcase capital city Manila (Tolentino "Marcos, Brocka, Bernal, City Films, and the Contestation for Imagery of Nation"). That these two films have enjoyed the most scholarly attention (e.g. Tolentino's dissertation on Brocka's ouevre and a special issue of *Kritika Kultura* dedicated to disentangling *Manila By Night*) is significant.

[11] Except 2009.

[12] RA 9167, which created the FDCP, was signed into law on 7 June 2002. The law's implementing rules and regulations were approved on 5 September 2003. Laurice Guillen was FDCP's first Chairperson.

[13] PMSI, which owns Dream Satellite TV, was later replaced by another Cojuangco-owned company, Econolink Investments Inc., as the official private partner and primary financier of the festival.

[14] Cojuangco has ceased bankrolling Cinemalaya beginning 2014. Expenses for the film festival's 10th edition was sourced primarily from the CCP's annual budget. (San Diego, "Cinemalaya 'Loses' Cojuangco")

[15] Millado, Chris. Personal interview. September 30, 2014.

[16] See Hernandez 190 for an extended discussion. It must also be noted that the Cinema One Originals Film Festival, also inaugurated in 2005, was also conceptualized to meet the need for new content for Cinema One, a cable TV channel.

[17] Tiongson, Nicanor G. Personal interview. October 27, 2014. Guillen was chair of the FDCP from 2002 until 2005.

[18] Typically the UPFI's Cine Adarna, which, aside from CCP, enjoys freedom from state censorship of films to exhibit. Although some of its findings are now anachronistic given the rapidly changing local independent film scene, Trice's dissertation on exhibition spaces and practices in Metro Manila is a key resource.

[19] Loy Arcenas, theater set designer turned Cinemalaya filmmaker, and Raymond Red, one of the leading lights of alternative cinema in the 1980s and 1990s, have both cited Cinemalaya films' ability to draw in huge crowds as the primary consideration behind their decision to join Cinemalaya (Arevalo, "Loy Arcenas"; "Raymond Red").

[20] Beginning 2011, Cinemalaya has been partnering with Ayala to add festival screens in mall multiplexes. A couple of satellite cinemas in Greenbelt 3 in 2011 has increased to 7 in 2016, which included screens in Greenbelt 1, Glorietta 4, UP Town Center, TriNoma, Fairview Terraces, Solenad in Nuvali, and Ayala Center Cebu.

[21] The 10th festival in particular saw a remarkably fair amount of celebrity attendees (for an independent film festival, that is)—I had spotted Ejay Falcon, Christian Vasquez, John Lloyd Cruz and Angelica Panganiban, Paulo Avelino, and Tom Rodriguez, all of which did not star in any of the films in competition but who nevertheless made appearances.

[22] The "Directors Showcase" category was introduced in 2010. In 2015, festival organizers decided to scrap the "New Breed" and "Directors Showcase" categories—a decision which prompted Kidlat Tahimik to return the Gawad Balanghai for Outstanding Contribution to Philippine Independent Cinema awarded to him during the festival's 10th anniversary. Guillen explains, "Clearly, the change was needed here…Change was coming because the 'new breed' [of directors] were becoming the existing [directors] and some of them [were] already accepted [as] the mainstream directors. So now we sat down, after the 10 years, to think about the plan—what Cinemalaya should be doing now after all the many new independent film festivals [that have sprung up]." (Chua)

[23] A phrase coined by Glauber Rocha, one of Third Cinema's key thinkers. For a concise summary of the history of theory and practice of this film movement, see Robert Stam's discussion in "Third World Film and Theory" in his book, *Film Theory: An Introduction*.

[24] The festival had enjoyed TV coverage courtesy of Sundance Channel (now Sundance TV).

[25] This is not to discount the efforts of the Cinema One Originals Film Festival, which was introduced around the same time as Cinemalaya was, but as I have argued above, Cinemalaya's success in attracting growing audiences each year has meant that the festival, by bringing independent films to unprecedented visibility, has encouraged audience growth for other grant-giving festivals.

[26] PDI has also been holding an annual Indie Bravo! Tribute, a mini-film festival screening the year's best independent films and honoring their filmmakers.

[27] Participation in the Congress comes with a fee. Congress proceedings are also not made public.

[28] Jardin, Nestor O. Personal interview. July 14, 2014.

[29] The starkest of which of course, is the involvement of Seiko Films' Robbie Tan as head of Cinemalaya's Managing Committee who, as filmmaker Erik Matti in a furious exposé of the festival writes, is "trying so hard to make himself the savior of Philippine cinema knowing full well that he's trying to make up for all the crappy movies his film company has produced."

[30] The reality is far from this essentially cinephilic conception of the international film festival. In reality, international film festivals' facilitation of the cultural exchange of different cinemas around the world is defined by a cutthroat competition for world premieres of films by well-known auteurs and ("discovered" new filmmakers) to boost festival stature. See Peranson, Iordanova, and Loist for more on the international film festival network and the governing hierarchies that both enable and limit circulation of films.

[31] Today, the Forum features "avant garde, experimental works, essays, long-term observations, political reportage and yet-to-be-discovered cinematic landscapes," as "the most daring section of the Berlinale" (Berlin International Film Festival).

[32] Primarily via accrediting the top-tier festivals, i.e. identifying the target festival circulation points for maximum global media exposure and consequently, potential for being "discovered." The FIAPF also overlooks a calendar of festival schedules to ensure that world premieres of films by auteurs in the top-tier festivals are well-coordinated.

[33] A problem not unique to the Philippines. In 2008, three Bolivian filmmakers—Martín Boulocq, Rodrigo Bellott, and Sergio Bastani—published a manifesto against what they term "pornomiseria." In the manifesto, Boulocq, Bellott, and Bastani promised that "their films would not exploit the political situation, poverty, or others' misfortune in order to obtain audiences" (Ross 262).

[34] While at the same time producing films tailored for consumption by the local population

[35] Originally named the Southeast Asian Film Festival, the AFF was formed in 1954 under the initiative, primarily, of Daiei Studios' Masaichi Nagata, who had produced Japanese cinema's breakout film *Rashomon* (Akira Kurosawa, 1950). *Rashomon*'s grand prize win at the 12th Venice Film Festival introduced Japanese cinema to Western audiences and to the canon of world cinema "classics" thereafter. Baskett argues that this interest in Japanese cinema and Japan's moves to assume a central role in the configuration of a regional cinema in Asia can be attributed to Cold War geopolitical concerns by the West with a growing communist bloc in the region.

[36] Behind this narrative of successful foreign validation however, rests another, remarkably paralleling present discussions regarding international circulation vis-à-vis local reception: Conde narrates the starkly different receptions of *Genghis Khan* by, on the one hand, American audiences during the film's Hollywood preview, and on the other, Filipino moviegoers at the Times Theater in Manila. Where the former were amazed at the apparent bravado with which Conde attempted to tell a narrative of such epic proportions and his resourcefulness in making do with limited funding, *Genghis Khan*'s Manila audiences laughed at the puny horses that they were supposed to take as "Mongolian" (Sotto and Delotavo 320).

[37] See Lim ("On Retrospective Reception") for an account of watching films of the LVN Pictures Tribute in the 2010 Cinemalaya.

[38] Cinemalaya has a long-standing partnership with the Network for the Promotion of Asia Pacific Cinema, an organization created "to promote a greater understanding and appreciation of Asian films and filmmakers." Since 2009, the organization has been giving out NETPAC Awards to Cinemalaya competition films.

[39] See de Valck (*Film Festivals* 71-72) for an extended discussion about the subordination of film festivals from Third World countries to top festivals in Europe and North America.

[40] Tiongson ("The Rise of the Philippine New Wave Indie Film") calls this "transformed genre," describing it as "[borrowing] conventions of the popular genres in order to communicate a fresh insight into or lodge a critical comment of Philippine society." (22)

[41] For an early critique, see Tolentino ("Indie Cinema bilang Kultural na Kapital").

[42] Ed Cabagnot, who was part of the group which oversaw Cinemalaya's formative years, describes the film festival in the Cinemalaya Philippine Independent Film Festival Facebook group thus: "Highly-compromised competition giving Pinoy talents blood money to produce new full-length features in digital format. Festival held last week of July annually at 6 venues of the Cultural Center of the Philippines. With exhibition and special modules." Cabagnot had a falling out with Laurice Guillen in 2011, over the former's critique of *Maskara* (2011), a film by Guillen and which also opened that year's Cinemalaya, in a Facebook post.

[43] Filmmakers whose debut—and later—features were supported by Cinema One Originals include Sherad Anthony Sanchez, Richard Somes, Arnel Mardoquio, Victor Villanueva, Christian Linaban, Ara Chawdhury, and Keith Deligero, among many others.

[44] The biggest surprise of course was Metro Manila Film Festival's—the biggest national film festival and main exhibition platform for the big studio (i.e. Star Cinema, Regal, Viva) moneymakers—inclusion of a documentary, Baby Ruth Villarama's *Sunday Beauty Queen* (2016) in its main competition last year.

[45] Adrian Mendizabal, one of the founders of Facebook group CINEPHILES!, recollects his introduction to art films as a college freshman via pirated DVDs circulated in the Kalayaan Residence Hall at the University of the Philippines Diliman.

[46] For the most part, films were critiqued based on each blogger's interest.

[47] *Lessons from the School of Inattention*'s Oggs Cruz, *Lilok Pelikula*'s Richard Bolisay, and *Piling Piling Pelikula*'s Dodo Dayao have all been absorbed by the independent cinema industry. Cruz reviews for online news site *Rappler*, and occasionally sits on selection committees for the Cinema One Originals Film Festival with Bolisay. Dayao made his debut feature film, *Violator* (2014), also for Cinema One Originals. *Auditoire on Film*'s Adrian Mendizabal, now studying film at the University of the Philippines Film Institute, continues to moderate CINEPHILES!

[48] To keep up with the broadening media for dissemination of critical works, the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino and the Young Critics' Circle Film Desk have been publishing criticism online. The MPP has its own website at http://www.manunuri.com/, while the YCC maintains a blog at https://yccfilmdesk.wordpress.com/. Unlike the previously discussed film blogs however, reviews published in these are for local films.

[49] Many have been calling for the erosion of categories such as "mainstream" and "independent" cinema, suggesting that "independent cinema" as a political marker may have already served its purpose of introducing a film movement in the Philippines.

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Emerald O. Flaviano <emflaviano@gmail.com> is a university research associate at the Third World Studies Center, College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of the Philippines Diliman. Aside from her work on Cinemalaya and Philippine independent cinema, she was also involved in a study on social memory of Mendiola as protest site. Her research interests include Philippine political and popular culture, Philippine cinema, and memory and film. Flaviano is currently an MA Art Studies (Art Theory and Criticism) student at the Department of Art Studies, University of the Philippines Diliman.