

Looming Over the Nation, Uneasy with the Folks: Locating Mike de Leon in Philippine Cinema¹

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ABSTRACT

The article draws on filmic, popular, and scholarly references in order to trace how Mike de Leon and his films have been regarded, since his landmark entrance into Philippine cinema as director, up to the present. Specifically, it locates De Leon within the subtly shifting discourse of nationalist film scholarship and historicizing, and discusses how he and his films are written about, identified, associated or networked with other filmmakers and films, or utilized in discourses about the Philippines, Philippine cinema, or Philippine culture.

The article locates De Leon as (1) an insider of Philippine cinema history, (2) an outsider of the commercial film industry, and (3) a hero of the mythic Golden Age of the National Cinema. It also maps out his filmography within the nationalist agenda; appraises what filmmakers, commentators, and scholars have articulated about his films; and analyzes the thematic and stylistic trajectories of his later works. Finally, it discusses how De Leon is being written into today's discourse of Philippine cinema.

Keywords: *Mike de Leon, film criticism, film history, nationalism, institutional dynamics/myths*

INTRODUCTION

“Mike de Leon [is] not even [a member] of any guild, *pero kapag naglabas [siya] ng pelikula ay sabik na sabik tayo* (but we are so excited whenever he comes out with a new film),” independent filmmaker, Sigfried Barros Sanchez, asserted last year in a Yahoo-groups! online post. Making this assertion, Sanchez could only be

harking as far back as December 1999, when the University of the Philippines Film Center² held standing-room-only premiere screenings of the comeback film of Mike de Leon [from hereon to be referred to as MDL, except in quotation], *Bayaning Third World* (1999). The film was made after MDL's nearly eight-year hiatus.

Bayaning Third World was heralded as early as September 1999 when the maiden issue of *Pelikula: A Journal of Philippine Cinema* featured on its cover and insets stills from the film.³ By November 1999, columnists have already preempted the reception of the film and the filmmaker. For example: Ricky Gallardo called the film "Absolutely Awesome," after the Film Ratings Board rated the film "A." Lito Zulueta called it superior "[in] terms of intellectual perspicacity, stylistic sophistication and...patriotic fervor." Nestor Torre declared that while Rizal is of the Third World, "Mike de Leon's movie belongs to the world." And Zeneida Amador audaciously proclaimed "Mike de Leon the real *bayani* or hero of the Philippine film industry."⁴

When the film ran in the theaters in February 2000, the newspaper movie advertisements announced: "TWO YEARS IN THE MAKING – DESTINED TO BECOME ONE OF THE GREATEST FILIPINO FILMS OF ALL TIME!!!" "THE MOVIE EVENT OF THE YEAR!" "Highly Endorsed by: DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, CULTURE & SPORTS."⁵

However, in spite of the big premieres and the grand reviews, the film barely got past the "7TH 'MOST TALKED ABOUT' HIT DAY!!!" – a commercial flop. The box-office receipt was discrepant from the UP premiere screenings, where, as the film was projected, the audience roared in laughter on cue, fell silent at the right time, applauded vigorously as the closing credits flashed, and anticipated the marching in of "the real hero" of Philippine film, MDL.⁶

THE NATIONALIST AGENDA: FOLK MYTHS AND THE OFFICIAL MYTH

A student of Philippine film, who rummages through the dearth of bibliographic materials about the subject matter, would discover that the key pedagogical books⁷ are written in consonance

with the scholarship trajectory of nationalism. Furthermore, the student would discover that there are two tendencies under the nationalist agenda of historicizing and critiquing Filipino films. First, beginning in the 1960s, nationalist scholars and artists have sought to rediscover Philippine folk traditions and to assess how these have survived in contemporary mass culture. The purpose of this project is to question the application of western aesthetic criteria to the Philippine arts and to engender a framework for creating works of art that could be defined as “Filipino.”

One of the basic assumptions of this discursive project is that mass audiences patronize popular forms of entertainment, like the genre film, because they are configured like folk myths, bearing the people’s beliefs, values, and fears. Moreover, these generic forms are assumed to reflect *and* reinforce social trends and norms, providing a repertoire of characters, relationships, and narrative resolutions that facilitate the socialization of today’s folks.

The other tendency of the nationalist agenda is the systematizing of texts and discourses into a unified, continuous, and linear national art history. In terms of film scholarship, one can speak of the History of Philippine Cinema, with its constitutive periods and canons, its highs and greats, and its heroes. Understandably, this History cannot name all names and films and cannot list all particularities. It instead delineates a body of knowledge with a clear shape and contours, omitting and selecting and blurring and investing cultural significance to texts and discourses.

This double conjecture of the nationalist agenda has encouraged codified readings of certain Filipino films and of certain film practices, so that a present viewing of these past films would match the viewer’s expectations of what makes the films either “folkloric” or “great.”

It is important to note that this nationalist agenda of film historicizing became more pronounced in the 1970s, primarily because of the general disillusionment of the populace after Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law. Marcos, his family, and his associates consolidated political and economic control. Workers’ incomes dropped, and few farmers benefited from an earlier initiated land reform. Reports of widespread corruption grew, and Marcos was being criticized for

being a *tuta* (lapdog) of America. Political detainees increased. By the early 1980s, the government had already borrowed large sums of money from the international banking community. Consequently, the evaluation of individual films and the writing of the History of Philippine Cinema are accentuated by these sociopolitical and economic troubles, because the nationalist agenda is anti-imperial, anti-fascist, anti-commercial, and pro-Filipino.

It is within such tendencies and agendas that one can locate MDL and his films.

MDL AS AN INSIDER OF PHILIPPINE CINEMA HISTORY

In March of 1976, a year agreed upon by scholars as a landmark in Philippine filmmaking, Petronilo Bn. Daroy wrote a series of columns for the *The Philippines Daily Express*, collectively entitled “Main Currents in the Filipino Cinema” (48-61). Near the end of the serialized article, he wrote of a growing “trend toward serious⁸ cinema” (Daroy 58), being ushered in by filmmakers Lino Brocka, Joey Gosiengfiao, Elwood Perez, Rolando Tinio, Ishmael Bernal, Nestor Torre, Orlando Nadres, and Alberto Florentino, in that order. For Daroy, the promise of these filmmakers lay in their awareness of “the convention of substandard movies” that bred the Filipino audiences, on the one hand, and the familiarity with revolutions in the arts happening “all over the world,” on the other hand (61).

In October of the same year, Bienvenido Lumbera wrote about the prospects, by first tracing the history, of the Filipino film. He delineated the two movements that Philippine cinema was supposedly making. One is the movement of Brocka and Behn Cervantes toward “film as social art,” and the other is the movement of Bernal and Jun Raquiza toward the “art film” (Lumbera “Kasaysayan” 43-4).

In both articles, MDL has not been written about as being part of any of these grand movements.

Upon the commercial release of his directorial debut, *Itim* (1976; commercially released 1977), however, the basic formulation of writing about MDL was introduced. Pio de Castro III’s laudatory

review in January 1977 can be taken as prototypical (238-9). He wrote, *regarding the filmmaker*: 1) that, before *Itim*, MDL had been the producer and award-winning cinematographer of the celebrated *Maynila Sa Mga Kuko ng Liwanag* (1975); 2) that he grew up in the LVN studio compound, being the grandson of “the old lady of Philippine movies,” Doña Narcisa Buencamino Vda. de Leon, and the son of “Asia’s most respected producer,” Manuel de Leon, Sr. (238);⁹ 3) that he has technical flair; and 4) that he has had technical education. *Regarding the film*, de Castro wrote: 1) that *Itim* is enigmatic; 2) that it is technically excellent in all filmic aspects; and 3) that it will be the “touchstone against which all other films in 1977 will be gauged” (238).

This textual formulation positions MDL as an “insider” of Philippine cinema’s glorious history, being discursively associated with LVN, Doña Sisang, Manuel de Leon, and the great Filipino films of the past. MDL is also an “insider” of the current movement Philippine filmmaking was taking for the good toward serious cinema. And, like the other promising filmmakers, he is familiar with world cinema and has had technical education.

“[MDL] represents the new breed of Filipino filmmakers who has the right credentials but more important, the right taste so rare in Filipino producer-directors, who can give Philippine movies the much needed shot in the arm” (238), wrote de Castro, and on this basis invited viewers to watch the film.

Itim ran for only a week – a commercial flop. Later, it won the Best Film Award in the 1978 Asian Film Festival, and was eventually chosen by the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino¹⁰ as one of the Ten Outstanding Films of the Decade. This polarized reception of *Itim* began the articulation of the MDL film as critically acclaimed and internationally prestigious, but not commercially viable. This ironic formulation will recur again and again in various degrees of elevating significance, and will be interwoven uniquely within the nationalist discourse.

MDL AS AN OUTSIDER OF THE COMMERCIAL FILM INDUSTRY

On the year of *Itim*’s release, MDL finished his sophomore film, *Kung Mangarap Ka’t Magising* (1977). By comparing these two

seemingly disparate films, MDL's thematic and stylistic propensity becomes discernible. Thematically, he is self-aware of class belonging. He is concerned with the excesses, perversions, and aimlessness of the gentry. He is concerned with power-relations, specifically between classes, between genders, and between age groups. And he is concerned with how the configuration of institutions and traditions ironically result in the repression, fragmentation, and alienation of individuals. His characters are introspective, artistic, sensitive, and out-of-place within their socio-geographic contexts and/or their dysfunctional social units.

Stylistically, MDL works within recognizable genres of storytelling (i.e., Gothic horror and romance), with non-stars, or stars playing unlikely roles, as lead players. His films exhibit the sensibility of the European art film and the conventions of the Hollywood genre film. He exploits the performative and musical capacities of the medium. And, in spite of his marked tendency toward psychological realism, he is apt to assay cinematic conceptions of reality. He is given to visual and aural experimentations of alternate forms of reality, such as dreams and hallucinations.¹¹

The themes that inform his filmic narratives are fraught with ambivalence toward the mass audience who are used to watching the rich portrayed simply as "bad" or "good." The rich but bad characters are worthy of scorn and are punished in the end. The good-hearted rich are worthy of admiration. Such portrayals tend toward generic ritual escapism. Contrariwise, MDL's filmic characters are neither simply bad nor good, nor are they simply sympathetic or unsympathetic.

His style is also charged with ambivalence toward the mass audience, in that while the storytelling is recognizable as generic, the sensibility is quite unlike popular genre films.

These general descriptions of the thematic and stylistic propensity of *Itim* and *Kung Mangarap Ka't Magising* can be said to be true of all his films, except his last two, which are non-genre and non-realist films. This deviation from his own cinematic tendencies will be discussed below.

In 1980, after having made two films, MDL is tentatively complimented in an article by Ruben Napales as "an auteur in a

way,” but as one who “has not mastered any film yet” (4, 24). He is written about as being “a bit worried” about the disadvantage to his career of shifting genres in his upcoming film, and as one who is not yet ready to settle and find out what types of films he should be making (Napales 4, 24). MDL is referred to as a “youthful moviemaker,” making a “big compromise” in the hopes of coming up with a commercial film that would earn in the box office (Napales 4, 24).

Owing to the enigmatic *Itim*, the noncommercial qualities of *Kung Mangarap Ka't Magising*,¹² and the press write-ups for his upcoming work, *Kakabakaba Ka Ba?* (1980), MDL is being labeled as an “experimental filmmaker.” But he explicitly refuses the label, and says he is just willing to do something new, to try out various genres and exploit them originally (Napales 4).

He explains that *Itim* was occasioned by stockholders who wanted to invest their money to make a commercial film (Caagusan 49), that *Kung Mangarap Ka't Magising* was guided by commercial considerations (Caagusan 50), and that *Kakabakaba Ka Ba?* was “*ibang klaseng* commercial” that aimed to “tap a larger market” (Napales 4). He says he is aware that film is a business, and claims that after releasing *Itim* he had developed an “awareness that you don’t make a film for yourself. You make a film for others to watch” (qtd. in Napales 18).

Until his most recent film, *Bayaning Third World*, MDL claims awareness of the market and optimism for this market’s reception of his unconventional film (C. Jimenez 3). However, considering the general reception of all his films, one would readily notice the uneasy discrepancy between MDL’s attempts at popular filmmaking and the actual popular films that folks do patronize.

Napales, in the aforementioned article, also writes of MDL as a director “being ranked with Lino Brocka, Ishmael Bernal, Celso Ad. Castillo, and Eddie Romero on the basis of his two films” (24).¹³ What this suggests is that having come later than these critically acclaimed directors, and having had lesser experience, his works *can* already be comparable to theirs. But it also suggests that MDL makes too few films too long and too far apart, which is abnormal relative to the 3-5 pictures per year made, for example, by Brocka or Bernal. So, he *cannot* be fully compared to them as of yet.

Only later on will the fewness of, and the marked intervals between, his films be invested with much significance, quite apart from the practical reason that he is getting few offers from producers. As his films came out after notable gaps or prolonged production time, they became first-time events in themselves, and MDL began to be known as a perennially returning director.

The first instance of a significant gap is between *Kung Mangarap Ka't Magising* and *Kakabakaba Ka Ba?*. MDL is directing only his third film after a three-year break, and Napales writes of this production outing as “good news for local cineastes” (4).¹⁴ He contextualizes the “good news” as a continuation of MDL’s previous works, which are “two of the best Filipino films of the past decade” (Napales 4). The discontinuity between releases is made continuous by the remembrance of his past great works that have been few and the anticipation of the next great work. Hence, his later returns have been written about as eventful returns.¹⁵

By 1983, after having released *Kisapmata* (1981) and *Batch '81* (1982), MDL has already been written about as noncommercial,¹⁶ as notorious for his troubles with the censors, and, in addition, as eccentric,¹⁷ difficult,¹⁸ pushy, and unapproachable (Caagusan 48). Consequently, producers have given him fewer offers.

By this time, MDL could no longer be easily considered an “insider” of the commercial film industry. His films’ technical polish,¹⁹ thematic and stylistic ambivalence, filmmaking practice, quantity of output, and notoriety with producers and censors, were anything but normal relative to the commercial director which he claimed he was, and to the serious director which he was claimed to be.²⁰ And since he was unlike any other filmmaker in the industry, MDL began to be articulated as an “outsider.”

He is an outsider, not in the literal sense, since he is working within the mainstream industry. But he is an outsider, because he occupies an ambivalent space in commercial filmmaking culture, and being so located underlines his uneasy relationship with commercial producers and consumers of films.

An evidence of MDL’s outsider status is his absence, or omission, from *Readings in Philippine Cinema*, a key pedagogical

anthology edited by Rafael Ma. Guerrero. The book was published in 1983, after he had already made five critically acclaimed and multi-awarded films.

The discursive project of the anthology can be situated in the already mentioned nationalist project of reappraising contemporary mass culture, or the culture of the *bakya*, according to the order of folk traditions. The anthology includes articles like Nicanor Tiongson's "From Stage to Screen: Philippine Dramatic Traditions and the Filipino Film," Jose Lacaba's "Notes on 'Bakya': Being an Apologia of Sorts for Filipino Masscult," and articles about Nora Aunor, FPJ, and Dolphy. It also features essays about the films and film practices of Brocka, Bernal, and Romero – reputed as directors who merge art and commercialism.

In the closing selection of this anthology, Brocka cautions the Filipino filmmaker to

avoid two tendencies – impetuosity in bringing about cinematic art and the opposite extreme, complete capitulation to the industry at its worst. He should slowly build his audience by making gradual changes in the style and content of Filipino movies, and at the same time retain his sense of responsibility to his audience. (Brocka 262)

Within this tendency of the nationalist discourse, the MDL-signifier is under erasure. He is *not* written about as part of this discursive project. In spite of his commercial attempts, his films have not turned out to be commercial. He is the "impetuous" filmmaker in one extreme of Brocka's continuum, as far as the folks are concerned. In an interview by Flor Caagusan published in *Diliman Review* in 1983, MDL himself says, "...I never thought I was really *in* the industry, in fact even up to now, because I was sort of *in* it and *out* of it at the same time" (48).

MDL AS A HERO OF THE MYTHIC GOLDEN AGE OF NATIONAL CINEMA

Arguably, the most indelible articulations about MDL appeared between the mid-1980s and the early 1990s in the context of Philippine

film historicizing and criticism. In particular, these articulations were by critics and scholars writing of the form, the history, and the classics of Philippine cinema, such as Emmanuel Reyes (*Notes on Philippine Cinema*, 1989), Joel David (*The National Pastime*, 1990), Nestor Torre (“Classics of the Filipino Film,” 1994), Lumbera (essays on Philippine film between 1983-1992), and Nicanor Tiongson (as editor of the *CCP Encyclopedia*, 1994). A close reading of these critics’ and scholars’ works would highlight the salient points of the discursive formulation of MDL.

Reyes conjectures that “Filipino viewers enthralled by the nuances of the classical Hollywood cinema and who have had greater exposure to Western education” (*Notes* 9), and not the *bakya*, would give critical support to “practically all of MDL’s films from *Itim* to *Sister Stella L.*” (*Notes* 9). He cites the last film as a “landmark in RP Cinema...the best Filipino film in many years” (Reyes, “Landmark” 8), which is “[not] representative of mainstream Philippine cinema” (Reyes, *Notes* 9).

David wrote of “A Second Golden Age” of Philippine cinema, which locates MDL in the “fringes of the avant-garde” (*National Pastime* 12). Here MDL is written about as one making “authoritative contributions” to Philippine cinema, along with the three directors whom David considers most responsible for the Golden Age: Brocka, Romero, and Bernal (*National Pastime* 12). Torre, in the “Classics of the Filipino Film,” enumerates the names and respective films of Romero, Brocka, Bernal, Castillo, Marilou Diaz-Abaya, Laurice Guillen, MDL, and Peque Gallaga, in that order, as the filmmakers responsible for “the Third Golden Age” (54-7).²¹

In 1981, Lumbera names only Brocka, Bernal, Castillo, and Romero – the same names that Napales enumerates as standard-bearers – as “the new forces in contemporary cinema” (“Problems” 209). Only in 1982, writing a review of *Batch ‘81*, does Lumbera promote MDL from the “rank of ‘outstanding young filmmaker’ to the level of ‘major Filipino filmmaker’” (“Rare Product” 172). That is to say, as far as Lumbera’s pan-nationalist project is concerned, before his review of *Batch ‘81*, MDL was neither “major” nor “major Filipino.” By 1983 and onwards, in separate essays²² that evaluate the achievements of the New Cinema,²³ Lumbera has already appended the name of MDL to his list of preeminent directors.

These works on Philippine cinema, written between 1983 and 1994, have for their agenda the creation of a convincing discourse of National Cinema, with a worthy and distinctive past, in need of revival in the present. The aim of the works of film critics and scholars of the period is to provide a usable framework of the past, a series of exemplary models that would inspire present-day emulation, and serve as guideposts for the National Cinema's future. These almost concerted discursive constructions of the past by periodizing and canonizing have resulted to the forging of the cultural myth of the Golden Age.

By “myth” it is not meant that the films of the period in question are not of excellent quality. What is meant though is that this discursive engineering of individual films as constitutive of a National Cinema History aspires to a mythic function that would articulate national identity, maintain national pride and unity, and mobilize producers and consumers of serious films around a common history and hope.

The canonical films of the Golden Age are regarded not as products generated by an economic sector but as cultural imaginaries of the nation. These films share thematic preoccupations (e.g., power struggle, systematic oppression, hypocrisy, search for identity) and visual tropes (e.g., familial and marital breakdown, prostitution, rape, homicide, theft) that all work around and through the sociopolitical trauma of the Marcos regime.

With this mythic Golden Age is installed the young heroes, Brocka and Bernal, of differing but sometimes intersecting sensibilities, and the sage Romero. These three directors would later be recognized by the state as National Artists for Film. The other directors confederated with the three were Castillo and MDL, whose works were not cited as movies for the folks but as foundational films of the Golden Age made from the fringes. It is in this context that MDL began to be held as “heroic.”

LOCATING THE MDL FILM IN THE NATIONALIST AGENDA

The assassination of Ninoy Aquino in August 1983, generally believed to be the work of the military, became a key moment in

Philippine history for a renewed opposition to Marcos. In the same year, MDL made *Signos* (1983). The film is an independent Brechtian-styled documentary about the anti-censorship protest movement, labor and student rallies, and the funeral of Aquino.

Signos is MDL's first attempt at an explicitly political film. And – apart from his two early unreleased short works, *Sa Bisperas* (1972) and *Monologo* (1975) – it is his first film outside mainstream cinema. It was produced on a limited and non-commercial scale by the progressive nongovernmental organization, Asia Visions, known for producing socially relevant films (Deocampo 64).

Tiongson discusses this MDL film in the context of both alternative filmmaking and the People's Cinema ("The Filipino Film" xxxi). The former is a mode of filmmaking that completely disregards commercial pressures, while the latter is a group of sociopolitical-oriented films that aims to expose the corruptions of the government. Both are filmmaking cultures outside mainstream cinema.

What particularly animates the MDL heroics, however, is *Sister Stella L.* (1984), which, of his films, is the most synchronized with the politicized movement that Philippine mainstream cinema was supposedly taking at that time.²⁴ It is his most conventional film (i.e., conventionally politicized and didactic), and it "acquired... the strongest round of raves and cheers (not to mention trophies) he had ever yet received" (David, "Return to Form" 256). It was a film inspired by what MDL calls his "conscientization," or the burgeoning of "a more political aspect to [his] awareness" (qtd. in Del Carmen-Pastor 28). And so, after several films of constant bickering with the censors, for the first time he makes a social realist mainstream film.²⁵

Sister Stella L. is a dip into a film genre that has direct and relevant references and motivation in Philippine social history. The film foregrounds the generic plot and theme of social unrest, political abuse, and poverty; the generic iconography of rallies and demonstrations; and the generic characterization of awakening into activism. With the twin historical Signifiers of Marcos and the Martial Law, the discursive formation of the MDL film appeared even more nationalist, as it was articulated along the lines of struggling against a repressive, elitist, and imperialist regime.

What makes *Sister Stella L.* significant for locating the MDL film in Philippine cinema is its ironic positioning as a commercial film, produced by Regal Films and starring Vilma Santos, and at the same time, as a generic political film. Being commercial and generic, this “most compelling political film to come out of the ‘80s” was pitted against the commercial and generic Sharon Cuneta-starrer, *Bukas Lulubod ang Mga Tala* (1984), but was “clobbered” at the box-office (Flores, “Bodies of Work” 61).

Sister Stella L. signifies the ironic positioning of MDL himself. He is an insider of the commercial industry, but an outsider of it according to commercial returns. He is marginal in the movie-viewing habits of the folk, but a central figure in Philippine cinema. He is irrelevant to restful folk concerns, but is most relevant not only in the development of a national cinema but of the nation itself, as far as nationalist critics are concerned.

If, in view of such an assertion, one begins with *Kakabakaba Ka Ba?* and does a generic mapping toward *Sister Stella L.*, one would find the last to be the most conventional film, in the context of the period. And reading backwards in light of this, one could regard the earlier films as already-nationalist in agenda, working toward the explosive climax of *Sister Stella L.*

Conceived in the “commercial compromise” (MDL’s words) and the absurd possibilities of the movie musical, *Kakabakaba Ka Ba?* (1980) is strategically self-effacing in its political intent and double-edged in its artistic intent. By treating as a joke the foreign control of the Philippine economy and the Filipinos’ blind religiosity, the film makes popularly palatable a political posturing. And by exploiting time-honored generic closure, like the triumph of unlikely heroes and the getting-married happy ending, the film simultaneously subverts, conceals, and announces the stupidity of a nation that dreams of its own heroism and victories, unaware of its systematic entanglement with imperialism while lapping up pop entertainment.

Kisapmata (1981) is a subtle genre admixture aimed at dismantling the concealment of nation-repression. Adapted from Nick Joaquin’s crime reportage, the film works beyond the generic constraints of the melodrama and the crime drama, beyond being

merely about murder and suicide. It works stealthily toward the psychological, social, and generic horror of incest – tragically, classically, Gothically revealed.

In the context of the nationalist discourse, *Kisapmata* has been read as an allegory of the dictatorial regime, the house the nation, and the patriarch Marcos.²⁶ If one takes into account the generic mixing of melodrama, crime, and horror, and the persistent allusions to perverted religious images and sounds, the dreadful acts of the father against his household appear not merely criminal in nature, but an evil and unforgivable sin.

Batch '81 (1982) is a movement from the generic plot and theme of the coming-of-age teenpic – “abounding in popular elements” and “box-office come-ons,” such as “[youthfulness], good times, togetherness, frenetic lifestyle, upperclass pizzazz” (Lumbera, “Rare Product” 174), sexual initiation, and song-and-dance performances – toward the uncharted realms of Philippine non-genre commercial cinema. Each time a popular element unfolds in the narrative, it is divested of its entertainment value and charged instead with formal excess. And as it moves toward non-genre, it relinquishes all of genre’s familiar and comforting plot resolutions. As it has been read in the context of the nationalist discourse, by the film’s end one would have witnessed the characteristic violence that attends fascism, blind obedience, and irrational conformity.

These films that fuse sophistication and sensationalism, highbrow and pop appeal, and psychological and pathological grotesquery represent a nation uneasy with itself, a nation where folks have no way of escape. The geography of these three filmic texts reveals the dismantling of the very generic foundation upon which the films are built, and poses as an alternative within the dominant generic cinema. By imploding the genres, the films question the overdetermination of restful folk categories, like good and evil, family, school, church, and state.

If one maps the genre deconstructions of MDL’s filmography in relation to the discourse of nationalism, one would find a rough ascending movement. This movement begins with the explicit but comedic reference to the nation, as admonition and warning, in

Kakabakaba Ka Ba?; to the ominous allegory of the nation, as expression of horror and despair, in *Kisapmata*; to the microcosmic depiction of irrational violence, as demonstration of disgust and resignation, in *Batch '81*; to the explosive revelation of oppression as what it is and the film as an open call to action, in *Sister Stella L.*

The codified readings of these films as a single mega-text, coherent and cumulative in its metaphoric and symbolic power (Lumbera, "Rare Product" 173), allows for a fit between the films and their sociopolitical-historical context, so that their formal and stylistic devices facilitate the spectator's construction of allegories of meaning. The sociopolitical intimations of the films become the most conspicuous interpretive entry,²⁷ even if none of them directly implicates the Marcos regime.²⁸ This is so, because of the exploding Signifiers of Marcos and the Martial Law which slipped in and through the serious films of the time. Moreover, this is so, because the nationalist agenda of criticism allowed for this slippage between the repressed national history and its cinematic double as anti-fascist national imaginaries.

Following the generic map, one can locate MDL's next film, *Hindi Nahahati ang Langit* (1985), as a continuation of *Sister Stella L.* in terms of generic fidelity. *Hindi Nahahati ang Langit* observes the generic conventions of middle-class melodrama and *komiks* adaptation. In spite of being worlds apart from *Sister Stella L.*, the film is also a continuation of the thematic concerns of MDL – a critique of the gentry, of institutions and traditions, and of power relations, especially between man and woman, and parents and children.

However, the film is disconcerting in its generic fidelity. The nationalism presumed present in the previous films is disappeared, and an allegorical reading is difficult, especially since the film breaks the ascending movement that should follow the explosion of *Sister Stella L.* Furthermore, while *Sister Stella L.* is generic, it emerges from the idea of MDL as an outsider and a hero. *Hindi Nahahati ang Langit*, on the other hand, is MDL's first and only commercial success, and is unlike anything in his oeuvre. In an article by Nestor Torre titled "Filmmaking as Business," he writes of the film as a hit, just as the *komiks* (local comics) are a hit (15; "What's Hot" 15).

Being an apparent rupture in MDL's cinema-as-national imaginary – a cinema that flows from a glorious cinematic history, heroically waged in the margins – *Hindi Nahahati ang Langit* is out of place in the contours of the MDL film. And being so, 1985 becomes an interim year in the MDL filmography – jumping from 1984's *Sister Stella L.* to 1986's *Bilanggo sa Dilim*. For example, in *Urian: 1980-1989*, edited by Nicanor Tiongson, there are reviews for each MDL film made in the 1980s, except for *Hindi Nahahati ang Langit*. In the “Major Works” section of the *CCP Encyclopedia*, also edited by Tiongson, the film is not mentioned.

Hindi Nahahati ang Langit is the closest MDL has ever gotten to the mass audience, but if one surveys the official histories of Philippine cinema, this film barely finds articulation. And when it does, it is quickly dismissed as a lapse in the MDL film.²⁹ MDL himself renounces directorial credit from it, and calls it “a silly movie” (qtd. in Del Mundo “Conversations” 63). The omission of this film from pedagogical texts and the rendering of it as a non-MDL film reveal the trajectory of the nationalist agenda, and the place of MDL and the MDL film in it.³⁰

His next film, *Bilanggo sa Dilim* (1986), is a characteristically ambivalent MDL film. Antedating the video revolution that is the hype today, it is one of the earliest important full-length narrative video-movies. The film – a psycho-thriller – is a continuation of MDL as generic filmmaker. It is, however, a complete break from the critical bias for social realism and the commercial necessity of ritual escapism. It is neither popular for being generic nor decidedly nationalist³¹ for being unpopular.

As in many of the independent films shot on video today, *Bilanggo sa Dilim* has been largely unseen, except if one had been following the activities outside mainstream cinema. In spite of this, the film creates a space for itself in National Cinema for setting anew standards of technical competence (David, “Return to Form” 256), and for achieving early respectability for an alternate and new medium.

By the end of the year, after rating the Philippine films of 1986 “from yawn to several vomits,” Emmanuel Reyes calls *Bilanggo sa Dilim* one of the most important films of the year. He also associates MDL with the “outsiders” of the film industry, like Nick Deocampo

and Raymond Red. He writes that “independent films and videos represent the most encouraging development in our local cinema because they dare to explore new directions in visual language” (15).

By 1987, MDL became a literal outsider. He quit filmmaking altogether.

He returned five years later with *Alinwan Paradise* (1992), one of the segments in the omnibus *Southern Winds* produced by the Japan Foundation.³² The film is at once comedy and tragedy, at once outside the film industry and about Philippine cinema, and at once *not* for the folks and in consort with them.

Addressed to both the watching world that has known Filipino films through international film festivals³³ and the nation that created the Julio Madiaga and Ligaya Paraiso archetypes,³⁴ *Alinwan Paradise* is a most self-assured reproach by an outsider. A parabolic satire, and the shortest of MDL’s releases, it is a sweeping critique of Philippine history, society, and cinema, that all have turned the perennial poverty of the Filipino into an industry and a culture.

Alinwan Paradise overrides generic considerations in favor of highlighting national themes and challenging historical imaginaries of the nation. It moves beyond the commercial compromise of *Kakabakaba Ka Ba?* It moves beyond the nation-allegories that were *Kisapmata* and *Batch ’81*. It moves even beyond *Sister Stella L.*, which remained microcosmic in concern. And unlike Brocka’s *Orapronobis* (1989) or Bernal’s *Hinugot sa Langit* (1987), for example, *Alinwan Paradise* moves away from MDL’s own cinema and the cinema of the mythic Golden Age. It moves instead toward being a “meta-film” – that is, a self-reflexive, self-reflective, pan-historical, pan-national film.

The satirical montage in the opening of the film includes the anti-fascist rally which Julio Madiaga ignores in *Maynila sa Mga Kuko ng Linanag* and the *semana santa* penitence-sequence in *Itim*. These two filmic images are juxtaposed with images of musical performances and with footage and stills from the World Wars and the 1986 EDSA Uprising. The closing montage is a series of references to our urban slum realism and our agricultural-provincial romanticism, images alluding to the cinematic Golden Ages of the 1970s and the 1950s, respectively. These familiar sociocultural-turned-cinematic images are

refracted across time through Marcos, the succeeding Aquino government, and the cinematic slump, which render all previous victories ironically meaningless.

That images from the mythic Golden Ages of Philippine cinema animate *Alinwan Paradise* suggests that the radical imaginary that characterized this myth is already passé as far as MDL is concerned, and that new radical forms must be forged if any past glory is to be revived. And since he is an outsider and a hero of the foregoing Golden Age, he loomed over the nation and the national cinema as an interrogator of social and cinematic myths.

After *Alinwan Paradise* he remained a literal outsider for several years more, until the release of *Bayaning Third World* (1999), his last film to date. In this film he continues in the direction set by *Alinwan Paradise*.

The film relates the fictional story of two filmmakers in search of a filmable identity of Rizal, but at the same time it relates the story of a similar quest for identity in the medium itself, of national cinema itself, of the nation itself. In one of its segments, the film irreverently raises the question *Sino/Ano si Rizal?* (*Who/What is Rizal?*) and, by film's end, boldly asserts that a Rizal film can never be made, after having just made one that nullifies all the many Rizal and Rizal-related films in the 100-year history of Philippine cinema. The boldness of the film's assertion rings even more ironically, since prior to its release, three multi-awarded Rizal films have just been made by important Philippine directors – *Sisa* (1999) by Mario O'Hara, *Jose Rizal* (1998) by Marilou Diaz-Abaya, and *Rizal sa Dapitan* (1997) by Tikoy Aguiluz. And each of these three films has as well big claims on cinema and Rizal and nationhood, which *Bayaning Third World* backhandedly erases through its meta-filmic posturing.

It is as if in *Bayaning Third World* MDL discovers that serious themes such as nationalism, heroism, patriotism, and identity are made problematic by the artificial nature of film and the discursive biases of a culture. The film approaches this dilemma by exposing the artifice of cinema deliberately and artificially, by exploring the interplay of political and cultural constructions of meaning, and by dismantling the generic foundation of the historical film and the biopic. The film itself acts as a commentary on the role of academic history and of

the popular medium in influencing perceptions. It highlights the demarcation between fiction and nonfiction, and between fiction film and documentary, ultimately calling to question mediated truth claims.

Moreover, expanding the scope of its meta-filmic posturing beyond the attempts of *Alinang Paradise*, the film calls into question the spectator's role and identity as a viewer. Having been released commercially, unlike *Alinang Paradise*, the film asks implicitly – *why* should anyone make one more Rizal film, much less watch one? *how* should one watch a Rizal film, especially one made so unconventionally? Spectators who attempt to answer such questions could be led to more meaningful questions, and perhaps some answers, about cinema and Rizal and nationhood.

But the passive spectator will be lost in the cinematic maze of *Bayaning Third World*. In fact, the film being what it is precludes the passive spectator. Consequently, it found few viewers.

True to the idea of the MDL film, however, aside from the critical acclaim and the many awards that *Bayaning Third World* garnered at the time of its release, it was eventually chosen by the Manunuring Pelikulang Pilipino in 2002 as one of the ten best films of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, along with his *Kisapmata* and *Batch '81*. *Bayaning Third World* was the only film chosen from the 1990s (“Pinilakang Gawad” n. pag.). The seven other films of the top-ten list were three from Brocka, three from Bernal, and one from Romero.³⁵

LOCATING MDL IN TODAY'S DISCOURSE OF PHILIPPINE CINEMA

In 1998, the 100th year of cinema in the Philippines was officially, culturally, and discursively celebrated in the film festival aptly called *Pelikula at Kasaysayan*. In the festival program, Clodualdo del Mundo, Jr. wrote an article that sought to retrace the peaks of recent film history for the purpose of charting the future of Philippine cinema (“Charting” 58-67).

The perspective that Del Mundo takes is clearly in concert with the nationalist agenda. He describes the 1970s and 1980s as a period defined by a growing interest in the art of cinema, and he

explicitly characterizes this period as a “continuing struggle against the commercial system” (“Charting” 59). Accordingly, he takes for granted that the future that Philippine cinema must take should likewise be against the commercial system, anchored on the myth of a glorious and usable past.

From this side of history, Del Mundo lists the heroes of the period, beginning with his valuation of Brocka, and then of Bernal, and then of MDL. And then he stops and writes, “Together with Brocka, Bernal, and MDL,³⁶ a new batch of first-time [filmmakers] broke into the industry...” (“Charting” 60). He situates MDL as a key person for producing *Maynila sa Mga Kuko ng Liwanag*, “the success” of which “emboldened more producers to take risks in film production” (Del Mundo, “Charting” 59). He specifies Brocka and Bernal as “attempting to survive within the system,” and locates MDL in the “periphery or, better yet, on the edge of the system,” making “exceptional films produced for ‘prestige’ by otherwise mainstream companies” (Del Mundo, “Charting” 60).

Del Mundo takes for granted MDL’s basic qualification for heroism – that he has contributed from the margins. The very fact of MDL’s being in the margins makes his position in this “struggle against the commercial system” heroic. The margins, in this case, are the most potent space for heroism, following Del Mundo’s logic of historicizing.

In 1999, the year when MDL’s last film was released, he was officially ratified by the state as a cultural hero in the centennial celebration of Philippine independence. He was conferred the Centennial Honor for the Arts, for the critical acclaim of his films, for his experimentation, and for his rising above commercial orientation (*CCP Centennial* 76). Specifically, the criteria for selecting the recipients of the Centennial Honors, which he presumably met, were: 1) commitment to advance the cause of nationhood and/or rise of nationalism; 2) high-quality works that started, popularized, or institutionalized a trend, movement, or style in Philippine art; 3) national and international recognition; and 5) a dedicated life (*CCP Centennial* 8).

Since the untimely deaths of Brocka (1991) and Bernal (1996), both “big [blows] to a generation of filmmakers that [need] to

recapture the idealism that energized its takeover of Philippine Cinema in the 1970s” (Del Mundo, “Charting” 62), MDL has been written about as “local cinema’s only living film master.”³⁷ The idealism that needs to be recaptured by the new generation and the superlative compliment paid to MDL find a discernible correlation in light of the nationalist agenda of Philippine film historicizing.

The aspirations of today’s independent filmmakers are articulated by Tiongson in the summary of the first Cinemalaya Independent Filmmaking Congress of 2005.³⁸ According to him, independent filmmakers aspire to make films “that break out of the mold to express a filmmaker’s original and unique insights into Filipino reality”; “films...[that] discover new ways [and] new techniques of telling...stories”; films that are “unhampered by considerations of commerce,” “free of cultural parameters, free of ‘the prison of the genres’, ‘the prison of the star system’, ‘the prison of the cinema that is expected to entertain’, and ‘the prison of technological infrastructure’” (*Cinemalaya* 156-8).

All these ideal aspirations of the independent spirit have been uniquely and consistently embodied by MDL and are decipherable in the MDL film. A glance at some of the fairly recent writings about film and at interviews of younger filmmakers would reveal the continuing influence of MDL to a generation of cineastes who yearn for such a model of idealism.

Among younger writers, Jessica Zafra believes that MDL has never made a bad film in his career (69). Noel Vera believes the same, and adds that “[it] is easy to call Mike de Leon...the greatest Filipino filmmaker who ever lived” (“Thin Line” n. pag.). Lourde Veyra maintains that MDL “is the only living director who understands film language, who never compromised his vision regardless of the cost” (Romulo, “The Burden” E6). Erwin Romulo refers to MDL as “the only genius director still living,” and he believes him to be to the Philippines as Alfred Hitchcock is to England, Stanley Kubrick to America, and Yasujiro Ozu to Japan, making films “for art” and not “for the money or prestige” (Villasera 3).

On the other hand, a new generation of filmmakers such as Raymond Red considers MDL a National Artist with or without official conferment (Romulo, “The Burden” E6). Jon Red claims

that MDL “brought alternative and experimental filmmaking to the mainstream format, venue, and audience,” and that independent filmmakers today look up to him (Romulo, “The Burden” E6). Lav Diaz cites MDL as one of the most important “authors” in the history of Philippine cinema, a model who never compromised (Kaludercic and Baskar n. pag.; Romulo, “The Burden” E6). Jeffrey Jeturian names MDL as one of the directors he adores (Lo, “Jeffrey Jeturian” D6).

When Quark Henares was asked which director he admired, he named MDL, for his being uncompromising in an industry where it is hard not to compromise (Kalaw, “Quark Henares” K2; Romulo, “The Burden” E6). Neil Daza believes that MDL’s “work is consistently excellent and continues to inspire a new generation of filmmakers” (Romulo, “The Burden” E6). Yam Laranas contends that all of MDL’s films are “classics” and that he is influential to new filmmakers (Romulo, “The Burden” E6). Rico Ilarde, RA Rivera, Miguel Fabie III, Robert Quebral, Cinemaregla (a collective of independent filmmakers), Mark Meily, and many other film practitioners likewise acknowledge MDL’s foundational and enduring influence on the new generation of filmmakers (Romulo, “The Burden” E6-7; Kalaw, “Mark: His Words” G2).

Like MDL before them, many of today’s filmmakers are now schooled, technically trained, and exposed to world cinema. These filmmakers are also struggling to create new forms and to tell their stories without compromise. They are also now struggling for an audience, especially in a nation where movie-going is no longer a national pastime, where cinema itself is being threatened to become an outsider of culture. And like MDL, today’s promising filmmakers are continuing the struggle to speak to and for the nation, and be heard by its folks.

ENDNOTES

¹This article is a reworking of the paper, “Looming Over the Nation, Uneasy with the Folks: Locating Mike de Leon-as-Text In/Around the Generic Mapping of His Filmography,” presented at the College of Mass Communication Faculty Colloquium, held on 16 August 2006, University of the Philippines Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines.

²Since 2003, it has become the UP Film Institute Cine Adarna.

³This heralding of MDL’s comeback could be traced back to as early as 1996, when his name resurfaced in relation to the making of a film based on the life of Jose Rizal to be produced by GMA Films. See, for example, De Guia 6. Between 1996 and 1999, a number of articles published in different newspapers and magazines – all related to the much publicized, multi-million-peso GMA Films production of the Rizal film and the controversies related to its making – prepared the way for articulating the return of MDL. MDL eventually resigned from the project and went on to make *Bayaning Third World* (1999).

⁴These quotes, among other quotations of superlative praises for the film, were extracted from individual newspaper and magazine reviews and cited together in the leaflet for the special premiere screening of *Bayaning Third World*, held on 8 December 1999, at the UP Film Center, sponsored by The Film Center of the University of the Philippines, Cinema Artists Philippines, and the Cinema as Art Movement organization.

⁵See for example *Bayaning Third World* advertisements in *The Philippine Star* (22 Feb 2000) 35.

⁶An open forum with the filmmakers after the screening was publicized, but MDL did not participate.

⁷Most of the key pedagogical books are collections and anthologies of previously published periodical articles or monographs.

⁸The use of the word “serious” recurs in many of the nationalist writings about film, and is used to refer to canonical films that tend to be non-generic and/or unpopular. It is a subtle and politically charged word that can serve to highlight the nationalist agenda of film writing.

⁹De Castro specifically mentions the films produced by Manuel de Leon, which are *Higit sa Labat* (1955), *Anak Dalita* (1956), *Badjao* (1957), *Maharosa* (1958), and *Biyaya ng Lupa* (1959). These films are generally regarded as canonical films of the Golden Age of the 1950s. The idea

of the “Golden Age” as written by nationalist critics and scholars will be discussed below.

¹⁰The *Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino* at that time was the only organized group of film commentators. The group today remains to be an important nationalist body of critics.

¹¹MDL’s earlier unreleased short film, *Monologo* (1975), is about a photographer who stumbles upon an alternate reality.

¹²This film was criticized by Rolando Tinio as “futile” for being “pure film” (qtd. in Caagusan 50).

¹³In the same vein, after MDL makes *Kisapmata* in 1981, Alfred Yuson writes: “...if fantasy may allow the naming of a cage dream team from among our commercial filmmakers, I’d put Brocka and Bernal as guards, Eddie Romero as center, with De Leon and Celso D’kid as forwards. Mike would be a steady pointmaker, not flashy but consistent, a quiet worker sniping from the wings” (28).

¹⁴See also “Mike de Leon Tries” 15.

¹⁵In the 1996 article noted earlier, for example, De Guia writes that people who like decent and meaningful films have long awaited MDL’s return, and that those who have waited for MDL remember with pride his past movies. See De Guia 6. For other examples of writings about MDL’s later eventful returns with reference to his past greatness, see Hernando “Mike de Leon” 18; Eugene Asis 11; Rodriguez “Mike de Leon’s ‘Bayaning Third World’ 2” 6+; Miranda 19; “Rizal Lent” 11; Salvador “A Tale” 19, to cite just a few.

¹⁶By this time MDL has been around for eight years, with five films, but no commercial hit.

¹⁷See Salvador “First-Class Director” 18-19 for an example of anecdotal writing about MDL’s eccentricity.

¹⁸An example of how this idea of MDL is still true today is in Gatdula “Execution” D1+. Here she writes of MDL as being “rumored” to be throwing tantrums on the set, which GMA Films executive producers deny. One of the executive producers of GMA Films, Butch Jimenez, took great pains to separate “preconceived notions...gossip, hearsay and one-sided fictional stories or anecdotes” about the director’s “madness” from the “truth [of his] character of perfection and excellence.” Jimenez insisted that MDL’s main intention was to make a film, and not to make money. See B. Jimenez B15.

¹⁹The frequent allusion by film commentators to the technical polish of the MDL film implies both MDL's consistency and his contemporaries' relative technical flaws. See for example how the MDL film is compared with the films of Eddie Romero, Lino Brocka, Ishmael Bernal, and Celso Ad. Castillo in David, *The National Pastime* 20-37 and Isagani Cruz, *Movie Times* 307-23.

²⁰“Serious” directors, such as Brocka and Bernal, did have conflicts with producers and censors, but these conflicts were confined to their more serious films, which are few relative to the quantity of their output. Meanwhile, conflicts with producers and censors were present in the production and distribution of almost all of MDL's films.

²¹This period is for David “a Second Golden Age,” but the periodizing of Torre and David is different. While Torre does not explicitly specify the years which constitute the Golden Age, he highlights the “artistic and commercial success” of Brocka's *Tinimbang Ka Ngunit Kulang* (1974) and the combination of “personal conflict with social and political significance” of the same director's *Gumpang Ka Sa Lusak* (1990) (55-6). The latter is the latest film in his list of classics of the period, thus implying that for him the period in question began in 1974 and ended in 1990. Meanwhile, in “A Second Golden Age,” David argues that Brocka's *Maynila Sa Mga Kuko Ng Livanag* (1975) “could properly serve as the marker for the Second Golden Age” and that the same director's *Miguelito: Ang Batang Rebelde* (1985) closed the era (5, 8).

²²Particularly, the essays are “Flashbacks on Film and Theater as Interlocked Forms” (1983), *Pelikula: An Essay on Philippine Film* (1989), and *Pelikula III: Philippine Film 1961-1992* (1992).

²³The New Cinema, writes Nicanor Tiongson, constitutes the 5-10% of the annual industry output. The films of the New Cinema are characterized by social and psychological realism. See “The Filipino Film in the Decade of the 1980s” xxix-xxxi. These few but “serious” films are the same films that constitute the “Golden Age.”

²⁴Lumbera compares *Sister Stella L.* (1984) to Behn Cervantes' *Sakada* (1976). See “*Sister Stella L.*” 155-6. The film is also compared to Brocka's *Kapit sa Patalim* (1985). See Sotto, “Interview with Jose F. Lacaba” 320-327 and Paterno 14-16. Visually, the film can already be compared with the earlier images of demonstration in Brocka's *Maynila sa Mga Kuko ng Livanag* (1975) and the later images of the actual 1986 EDSA Uprising. For other articles on *Sister Stella L.* see Guillermo 26-27 and Del Carmen-Pastor 28-29.

²⁵Earlier, he called this type of filmmaking mere “radical chic.” See Caagusan 46.

²⁶A contrary reading of the film can be found in David, *The National Pastime* 28-31.

²⁷For instance, in the context of surveying the history of alternative cinema, Nick Deocampo writes that the 1980s have been productive for “political filmmaking” because of Brocka and MDL (64). Here it is taken for granted that MDL is a political filmmaker, even if of his seven films in the 1980s, only two are overtly political.

²⁸The only exception is the seemingly tangential mention of martial law in *Batch '81* (1982). In the film’s fake-torture sequence, the father asks his neophyte son, who is playing dead, if the martial law has done the Philippines good. Since the son is “dead,” he is unable to answer his father’s question.

²⁹For example, Patrick Flores evaluates MDL’s body of works in “Mike de Leon: Consummate Filmmaker”. Instead of critically reading the film as he does MDL’s other films in this essay, Flores dismisses the film as silly, just as MDL himself did. See Flores “Mike de Leon” 18.

³⁰This omission is also true of his apolitical and generic film, *Kung Mangarap Ka’t Magising* (1977), for which an allegorical reading of the nation is elusive. *Kung Mangarap Ka’t Magising* is also skipped in *Urian: 1970-1979* and the *CCP Encyclopedia*.

³¹Unless an allegorical reading is attempted as what has been done with his earlier films. But such an allegorical reading is more difficult to attempt, because the Marcos regime has already collapsed by this time and the ascending movement of MDL’s allegories have been interrupted by *Hindi Nababati ang Langit* (1985).

³²Alongside segments from Japan, Thailand and Indonesia.

³³Such as his own films, *Kidlat Tabimik*’s, Nick Deocampo’s, and most especially Brocka’s.

³⁴These are the names of the protagonists in Edgardo Reyes’s novel, *Sa Mga Kuko ng Linanag*. This novel was later adapted into film by Brocka as *Maynila sa Mga Kuko ng Linanag* – the film which David cites as the beginning of the Golden Age, and a film which Brocka made a year before his international exposure. The archetypes, therefore, are for the Filipinos, first of all, and not presumably for an international audience.

³⁵The films cited, listed here in chronological order, are: *Maynila sa Mga Kuko ng Liwanag* (Lino Brocka, 1975), *Insiang* (Lino Brocka, 1976), *Ganito Kami Noon ... Paano Kayo Ngayon?* (Eddie Romero, 1976), *Nunal sa Tubig* (Ishmael Bernal, 1976), *Manila by Night (City After Dark)* (Ishmael Bernal, 1980), *Kisapmata* (Mike de Leon, 1981), *Himala* (Ishmael Bernal, 1982), *Batch '81* (Mike de Leon, 1982), *Orapronobis (Fight for Us)* (Lino Brocka, 1989), and *Bayaning Third World* (Mike de Leon, 1999). The ten films were awarded the Pinilakang Gawad in 2002, when the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino celebrated its 25th anniversary.

³⁶Around this time, the triumvirate of Brocka, Bernal, and MDL would be, as Sigfried Barros Sanchez observes, the “most-dropped names in Filipino filmmaking”. See Pantilla I4. See also the online video store <<http://www.kababayancentral.com>>, in which the names, photos, and biographical sketches of Brocka, Bernal, and MDL are headlined.

The order of naming has apparently shifted as well. For example, in the television documentary, *Pinoy Movies, Buhay Ka Pa...Ba?*, Nick Deocampo enumerates the important filmmakers of the 1970s, in this order of importance: Lino Brocka, Ishmael Bernal, MDL, Celso Ad. Castillo, and Eddie Romero.

³⁷See Rodriguez “Mike de Leon’s ‘*Bayaning Third World*’” 6 and “Mike de Leon Snubs” 6; Romulo “The Burden” E6+; Eugene Asis 11; and Villaseran 3, to cite just a few examples.

³⁸Cinemalaya is “a non-stock, not-for-profit, non-government foundation dedicated to the development and promotion of Philippine Independent Film,” primarily through its annual independent film festival, competition, and congress. One of Cinemalaya’s stated purposes is “to help develop and support the production of cinematic works of Filipino independent filmmakers that boldly articulate and freely interpret the Filipino experience with fresh insight and artistic integrity.” See <<http://www.cinemalaya.org>>.

Nicanor Tiongson is a founding and board member, and has constantly been the congress director of Cinemalaya. Bienvenido Lumbera is also a board member.

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