THE ART OF MAKING DO: EXPLORING THE AESTHETICS OF FILIPINO SHORT FILM ANIMATION

MOLINIA ANNE VELASCO-WANSOM

Abstract

This paper is an exploration on the study of the *Aesthetics of Making Do* by Victor Goldgel-Carballo and the *Aesthetics of Poverty* by Prof. Emeritus Brenda Fajardo in the context of creating animated films in a third world country. Two pivotal works; *Anak Maynila* (*Child of Manila*) by Fruto Corre and Emmanuel "Nonoy" Dadivas and *Doon sa Kabila ng Bulkan* (*The Other Side of the Volcano*) by Ellen Ramos will be used to represent the portrayal of poverty in real life in both the Philippine capital, Manila, as well as rural life beyond the city. *Anak Maynila* and *Doon sa Kabila ng Bulkan* create a curious comparison on the duality of suffering and liberation from poverty as an overarching theme in animated short films. Likewise, the culture of material poverty of animators as well as the limited availability of resources for animation in the country play a vital role in the "making do" of the two films' production and distribution.

Introduction

The portrayal of poverty, specifically in art, is a subject of both attention and debate among filmmakers and scholars. There is a long tradition of representing poverty as an effect of a sinful life in European paintings commissioned by the Catholic church (Howden-Chapman and Mackenback 2002). Often, these

paintings served as cautionary tales for their poorer audiences and, according to Philippa Howden-Chapman and Johan Mackenback, "opportunity for the prudent and beneficent wealthy to display their charity" (1502). More nuanced representations of poverty and sickness later shifted in the late 19th century with the likes of Gustav Courbet and Honoré Daumier whose paintings were commentaries on social and political life in Europe. Depictions of poverty were finally done with dignity, portraying the poor as a symptom of an unequal system rather than as immoral beings. These depictions also became a tool to critique the existing social order, as evidenced by the works of Realist painters that followed Courbet and Daumier in the 20th and 21st centuries.

In the Philippines, social realist art and films have been used to critique the social fabric of the country. However, with such films getting international recognition and awards, there has been a steady saturation of films that merely use poverty to garner accolades. These instances are documented by Lance Katigbak in his paper, "Poverty Porn in Independent Philippine Cinema", where he surmises that "locally, poverty porn has become independent Filipino cinema's trademark exploitation film" (Katigbak 2013, 6). He uses two independent films, *Kinatay* (Slaughtered) by Brillante Mendoza and *Babae sa Septic Tank* (The Woman in the Septic Tank) by Marlon Rivera to argue that placing poverty as a backdrop, more so glorifying it, to win film awards abroad is already a form of exploitation or "poverty porn."

One might use "precarity" to examine this phenomenon. Defined as "unstable work or unstable living conditions", precarity can be used as an ideological and aesthetic weapon (Goldel-Carballo 2014, 114). Victor Goldgel-Carballo adds that precarity can be rethought as an aesthetic concept that leads to "making do" or, more positively, resourcefulness in the creation of short animation. The production of short film animation in the Philippines in the celluloid era consists of "making do" or being resourceful because of and despite budget limitations; simply put, the animators are bricoleurs (Levi-Strauss 1962, 14-15) who practice strategies

and tactics (De Certeau 1984, 36-37)[1] to be able to create their films. The concept of the bricoleur is important in the creation of independent films and animation because of the process relies on limited resources.

Poverty in Buenos Aires, according to Goldel-Carballo (2014), is seen as a possible "site for distinctly creative forms of enunciation" (113). Material deprivation is thus re-appropriated from being a limitation to artistic work to being an alternative, more resourceful way of producing films. This is used not only in the context of Argentinian films but also in the filmmaking context of other countries with high rates of poverty such as Cuba, Spanish America, and India (Goldgel-Carballo 2014, 114). Poverty and precarity link the production process, the formal elements of film (i.e., technique, medium and style), and the content (e.g., plot, story, and script).

Making do and being resourceful also result in an awareness of the material cost of creating art. According to Brenda Fajardo, the "aesthetics of poverty implies that there is a sense of beauty which belongs to the people who live in a condition of material deprivation. There are concepts of color, line, space, texture and movement that are conditioned by particular natural, cultural, and social environment. It results from a particular quality of life that is conditioned by its reality" (Fajardo 2010, 181). Likewise, Goldgel-Carballo insists that material deprivation should not be seen as hopeless; instead, artists can take advantage of their material deprivation, as this condition urges them to think outside the norm and look for alternate ways of doing things. In doing so, the processes and outcomes (though done within the aesthetics of poverty) are done with dignity.

1 Michel De Certeau makes a distinction between "strategies", which are situations in which a subject (or agent) can be isolated from his/her environment where s/he is able to go against the different dominant powers (De Certeau 1984, xix-xx). On the other hand, a "tactic" is maneuvering through time of the other. The tacticians have no locus or space of their own and "must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into opportunities". The tacticians remain in the system, are constantly manipulating events and wait for a proper moment to turn into an opportunity (De Certeau 1984, 36-37).

Fajardo also points out that lowering the cost of production is not the point. Because of material deprivation, artists become more aware of the socio-political conditions that surround them. She explains: "How can an artist claim to be socially responsible when he mounts high-cost productions during times of deprivation? But what is initially a by-product of material poverty becomes an expression which results from his sensitivity to the world around him" (qtd. in Khor and Lin 2001, 163). Quite the opposite of poverty porn, Fajardo's *Aesthetics of Poverty* is socially aware of the context of production which, in her case, is the production of the set designs of the plays of the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA). PETA's productions also involve the impoverished, as actors and as subjects, in its many original plays. Fajardo defines poverty as absence or lack of material goods and contextualizes this in the Philippines, where creativity and resourcefulness lead to dignified ways of practicing strategies for works to be seen and heard by the public.

Because of poverty, limited resources, and unequal distribution of wealth in the Philippines, there is a sense of precarity in the creation of full-length and short films. This precarity was especially pronounced in the era of celluloid filmmaking.[2] Without the relatively cheaper digital technologies that exist today, the production of animated shorts then was limited to the academe and to privately funded institutions such as the Mowelfund Film Institute and the PETA Broadcast and Film, Inc., which were partially funded by private institutions and foreign embassies as forms of soft power. Aside from this, animators worked under precarious working conditions: independent animators had to look for means to fund their own films, as film producers generally did not find short films viable. Hence, partly because animators were aware of their material lack, they were able present the struggles of the impoverished with dignity and respect.

2 It is important to emphasize that the films in the study belong to the celluloid era because the precarity and making do in this era is completely different from the conditions of filmmakers of the digital era. More on the Digital era of filmmaking can be read in Eloisa May Hernandez's book *Digital Cinema in the Philippines 1999-2009*.

Poverty is a reality of third-world, postcolonial Southeast Asian nations such as the Philippines. Making do amid precarity is the only way creators can successfully make animated films in the country. This study examines how two specific short films, *Anak Maynila* (Child of Manila) and *Doon sa Kabila ng Bulkan* (Other Side of the Volcano), were created in a state of precarity. The goal of this study is to answer the following questions: first, how is third world poverty (rural and urban) represented and shown in two short animated films, *Anak Maynila* and *Doon sa Kabila ng Bulkan*; second, what is the role of precarity and making do (or resourcefulness) in the themes, narratives, and production of Filipino-made, short film animations; and lastly, how successful is short film animation in providing alternative representations of poverty against the predominance of poverty porn?

Anak Maynila (Child of Manila)

Fig. 1. Anak Maynila, 1993

Anak Maynila (1993), directed by Emmanuel "Nonoy" Dadivas and animated by Fruto Corre and Dange Desembrana, is a short animated film about a distraught mother who wanders the streets of Manila with her baby. It is unclear in the film how or why the impoverished mother seeks to abandon her child, but she is certain that it would be better for both of them. *Anak Maynila* uses photographs of several iconic places in Manila and Makati, particularly Gil Puyat corner Paseo de Roxas, Binondo church,

and the Manila post office. Several recorded ambient sounds also come from actual noise heard in the streets of Metro Manila. The mother, the child, and other minor characters that interact with them are drawn using pencil sketches on white paper.

The film depicts an unnerving truth about the state of poverty and helplessness. The young mother is unable to find food or shelter for her baby who clings to her. During the first few scenes where the mother attempts to leave her child, the baby cries and she is unable to leave him behind. Also shown in the film, drawn in the same pencil sketch-like style, are kind strangers and passersby who simply ignore the mother and child.

The mother and child is a common image often portrayed positively in the visual arts, derived from the iconography of the Madonna and the child Jesus in Christian art. In the Philippine context, visual artists have portrayed the mother and child as an idealized relationship between a mother and her offspring. Cinema has also portrayed ideal mother and children relationships but has also subverted this relationship, demonstrated, for instance, by *Anak Maynila*. Unlike most films about mother and child where the two stay together despite the odds, *Anak Maynila* suggests emancipation comes in the form of separation from each other. The mother is burdened by the existence of her baby for whom she cannot provide proper food and shelter. The child is helpless and cries for his mother. The story is tragic for the mother, who ultimately drowns herself in the river, but hopeful for the child: in the last scene, he looks out the bus window and awakens to the beautiful sight of the province. Oddly, the baby does not immediately look for his mother.

Fig. 2. *Anak Maynila*, 1993

Anak Maynila's technique of line animation using realistic photographs as backgrounds was inspired from an animation project by a student at California School for the Arts that Corre saw while he was studying in New York University. In an earlier work he did with Desambrana called *The Criminal* (1984), Desembrana did the line drawings using ink on paper, which they photocopied in acetate and painted over. To save on costs, they recycled the acetate by erasing the drawings and drawing over them again: "If we [made] a mistake, we [didn't] throw away the acetate, or [we] divide[d] the acetate sheet into two (and [drew] on the clean part)". Their rolls of film were also limited; thus, they shot only one or two takes and had to rely on whatever they had managed to shoot without corrections (Corre 2015, pers. comm.). Their limitated acetate and film rolls made an impact on the smoothness of the animation; thus, some scenes had limited or no movement, relying on the background or sound effects to tell the story. For the background, they used a technique called pixilation, which uses photos shot successively to render movement.

The decision to create animated instead of live action films was a deliberate choice for Corre and Dadivas. They divided the work among themselves: Dadivas served as the storyteller and director, Desembrana served as the artist and animator (Dadivas 2015, pers.

comm.), and Corre worked as both writer and artist. Their small team made do with Dadivas' Super-8 camera, a home-video camera used by many independent filmmakers, as opposed to industry-standard film cameras used in higher budget productions. Corre and Dadivas did the post-processing, paid for the developing of the 8mm film, and did the sound recordings and foley (Dadivas 2015, pers. comm.; Corre 2015, pers. comm.).

The trio first got together when they made *The Criminal* for the Experimental Cinema of the Philippines (ECP) Short Film Festival. Dadivas had been laid off from work because the economy was bad that year, so he made a living entering short film competitions until 1989 (Dadivas 2015, pers. comm.). Indeed, applying for film grants has also become a viable funding strategy for independent filmmakers. In 1986, Dadivas and Corre received a short film grant from the Metro Manila Film Festival (MMFF), out of which they produced *Anak Maynila* and *Laho* (1988), a live action film.

Doon sa Kabila Ng Bulkan (The Other Side of the Volcano)

Fig. 3. *Doon Sa Kabila ng Bulkan*, 1997

Doon Sa Kabila ng Bulkan (1997) opens to a falling leaf that transforms into a bird and flies away. A mountain emerges from below, forming the letters of the title of the film on its slopes. The word "bulkan" appears on the mountain itself and the paint turns

to yellow and orange, showing the magma gurgling beneath. The volcano shifts into a pair of eyes watching fish swimming which eventually reveals a young boy with curly hair and brown skin. The boy, with his dog, spears and catches a fish in the flowing river. He is a member of the Pinatubo Aeta, an indigenous group that lives near the seemingly dormant namesake volcano. He takes the fish back to his mother who is nursing a baby. She is happy and proud of his son's catch; she pats his head and points to the horizon where leaves of a tree close the scene.

The trees reveal fruits and arms which extend from below to pick and catch them. The hands and arms surface from below the screen and transform into the tree trunk while its branches become its fingers. Behind the trunk, several Aeta women appear, arms full of fruits and branches for firewood. The side of the volcano is lush and many of the Aetas live peaceful lives, harvesting and hunting for a living. The women also look and point off-screen and the screen turns dark, revealing a number of searching eyes. The eyes locate a wild boar as spears fly. Several Aeta men successfully hunt a wild boar and take it back to the volcano. At night, the tribe eats, plays music with a guitar, and dances around the fire.

The eruption of the volcano drastically changes their way of living. The eruption fills the Aeta's homes with dust and smoke. They watch the trees die because of the fumes and lava, and the entire tribe is driven away from the mountain and into the city to beg for food. They are homeless and hungry and rely solely on begging for sustenance. Some Aeta try biting into the coins to eat and planting them in the ground thinking they would grow and bear fruit, just like the trees in their mountain. With nothing left to eat, the father starts begging like the rest of the tribe. The mother stops him and tells him to return to the mountains instead to start anew. Once they go back to the mountain, they see no signs of life except for the boy's dog that had found its way back to them. They share their last piece of fruit before planting its seed in the hope of bringing the mountain back to life. The film closes hopefully, with with foliage bursting from the ground in which they had planted.

Ellen Ramos was the first of her peers to successfully create a short film using the paint-on-glass technique. She was inspired by Canadian animators from the National Film Board of Canada, specifically Caroline Leaf (Ramos 2013), who worked on sand and paint in her animated works. Paint on glass is a "direct under-the-camera" technique associated with the experimental animation movement (Kenyon 1998). Production of *Doon sa Kabila ng Bulkan* took 71 days and was done using one fabricated animation table mounted with seven 11-watt fluorescent bulbs, color correction filters (LEE 248), oil paints of various colors, linseed oil, turpentine, thinner, and nail films. It was filmed using a Bolex camera which used two cans of Kodak 7248 16mm color negatives, two boxes of magnetic sound film, quarter-inch sound reefs, a can of 16mm positive stock, U-matic tape for telecine transfer, and a VHS tape for a PAL copy sent to ANNECY 97 Video Library (Animagination 1997, 66). Ramos worked on the animation alongside her lone assistant, with some funding from PETA Broadcast and Film, Inc. (Ramos 2013; Animagination 1997).

Notably, while Leaf and other paint-on-glass animators used the same materials as Ramos, such as oil paint with linseed oil and turpentine, unlike the Canadian animators, Ramos had to build her own table, considering her limited space and comfort. She made sure that the table she made was comfortable and allowed her and her assistant to work together. They also made sure that the camera positioned on top of the glass was reachable. "I decided to use a 10mm lens so that I could work with a 7 x 9 field in two levels. I had to content myself with only six inches to separate the two levels of glass, which sadly did not give me a chance to play with illusions of depth. I could also slide the upper glass to the side if I wanted to work on the lower glass" (qtd. in Kenyon 1998).

Aside from constructing her own table, she also experimented with pigments and lighting. Ramos had to work fast to make sure that the oil paints she used did not dry up quickly. She first used linseed with the paint but eventually it became easier and more aesthetically pleasing for her to work with pure oil paint. In an

interview with Kenyon (1998), she shares, "[T]o keep the paint wet as long as possible, I decided to use fluorescent lights for bottom lighting with a minus green correction filter. A wonderful side effect was that it made the room temperature quite bearable as well, since I couldn't afford an air-conditioned room. Except for short coffee breaks, I had to work continuously to finish a scene or get to a point where I could make a quick transition. Otherwise, the paint dried, and the scene would become dirty as I reworked it."

Her choice of medium or style reveals a fascination for experimental methods. Ramos' preference for improvisation makes her somewhat of an outsider in commercial projects. "My mode is not allowed in the industry, *kasi kailangan ulit-ulitin* (the process has to be done again and again)… I don't aim for perfection and my style is too crude. That type of spontaneity is not allowed in the [commercial animation] industry" (Ramos 2013).

The music for the film is composed by Noel Cabangon, known folk singer and songwriter, who has also written music for commercial and independent films (Animagination 1997, 66). The score uses traditional Southeast Asian wind and percussion instruments along with a more modern guitar, which give the film a peaceful atmosphere at the beginning of the film. There is also a tune played primarily with a wind instrument which establishes the helplessness the characters feel when they are forced to flee their homes. Sound effects are heard throughout the film, particularly the dog's barking, the flowing water, the clashing of spears, and the eruption of the volcano which aid the visual storytelling.

PETA funded *Doon sa Kabila ng Bulkan*. Soxi Topacio and Avic Ilagan, the division heads of PETA's Broadcast and Film[3] section during that time, encouraged *Bulkan*'s director and animator to make films for children; hence, her characters also became children (Ramos 2013).

3 "While PETA advocates for social change by becoming the 'people's theater' PETA BFI is a spin-off production-training-research unit with a very special concern: alternative mass media for people's empowerment... The unit intends to develop radio broadcasting and film as instruments for people's empowerment" (Khor and Lin 2001, 169).

Joining Mowelfund workshops proved to be enlightening for Ramos and helped her develop her own process in animation:

> Everything starts with the idea. More than the story my first work was more of experimentation with the medium. *Paglalaruan kung saan ka gamay* (playing with what you're good at), if it is line drawing, mixed media, etc. We had limited exposure because back then the only things you can watch in TV were Walt Disney and anime. Mowelfund exposed me to other animation styles. [... So, at the beginning] I was just doing experimentation, sometimes with no fixed story; it all mostly just starts with a concept… From the concept you also think of the form... concept, form, and style struggle with each other if they really suit each other. Of course, you first make a storyboard as a guide but along the way you still improvise. (Ramos 2013)

Despite initially having drawn storyboards, Ramos shares that the state of bher ody and mind affected her work during production. The arduous and repetitive process of paint on glass animation made Ramos liken herself to Tibetan monks who would labor over their sand mandalas and then destroy them as part of the ritual. She regarded herself as an "animation prisoner" in her production calendar, which was reprinted in the Animagination '97 festival booklet. She recalls: "To be able to do twenty seconds (480) frames in one shooting day is glory. In some days, I can do only three to five—very poor […] my back ached and I can hardly walk. Gallons of coffee kept me up on my feet for months. 'Why do I torture myself?' over and over I asked. Somehow, I feel an affinity with the Tibetan monks—laboring over intricate patterns in the sand, only to cast away to the wind" (1997, 66).

Ramos was heavily influenced by the real life struggle of the Aetas after the Mt. Pinatubo eruption in 1991 which drove many of them to the lowlands where they lived in resettlement centers and were forced to adapt to modern ways, become Christianized, and were sometimes forced to beg (Balillia et al. 2013). The resilience of the Aeta family is something that Ramos highlights in her film. Despite the destruction of their home, the family chose to return and till

the land. Ramos regards them well, stating, "I deeply respect and admire those who vitally know that it is the best way for them to live, and maybe the only way to survive. They create and grieve with the earth. They know birth, death and rebirth. Their gentle spirits will help the earth heal and will nurture it well. I have a lot to learn from them" (qtd. in Animagination 1997, 66).

The Animated Form

The nature of the "short" medium is grounded on the aesthetics of poverty. Short films are cheaper to produce than full-length films in terms of amount of manpower involved, availability and purchase of equipment, film reels needed, length of production, marketing, and distribution. Regardless of the difference in their animation styles, the creators of the two films discussed in this study still worked on and were able to finish their films by employing the same concepts of making do with available materials. Both *Anak Maynila* and *Doon sa Kabila ng Bulkan* were created in less than a year and the animators maximized their time working on their films before moving on to other endeavors.

Likewise, the animators' decision to use non-traditional animation techniques or to incorporate non-traditional methods with the traditional celluloid 2D animation also embodies the aesthetics of poverty. They were keenly aware of their material lack compared to animation studios which had more funding and support, but they persisted with makeshift tools and available technology. Choosing an animation style is also part of the act of making do and this is where choosing experimental over traditional animation provided the animators more flexibility in their production.

The materials used in their animated films were also nothing like those used in the Canadian animations that inspired them. All materials were bought using their own funding, particularly Nonoy Dadivas'. Similarly, Ramos used oil paint and worked with whatever was available in bookstores and art shops in Metro Manila.

Short films also emphasize brevity. Therefore, what the animators lacked in resources, they made up for with short stories of scarcity ,thereby dignifying the lives of those who truly lack resources. They sought to remove the focus from the technical achievements of animation in favor of concept and storytelling. "The idea/story comes first in the process. How the budget influences the work would show in the quality of our work" (Corre 2015, pers. comm.). For Dadivas, the story and concept were more important than the quality of the animation. Given the limited tools, manpower, time, and budget, they anticipated the resulting crudeness in their work. They, particularly Dadivas, valued experimentation over perfection of technique:

> The emphasis on technique alone was never the main focus. I value most that the technique be used as the best way to tell a story. Storytelling, after all, was how you win both the audience… My collaboration with Fruto Corre… was key to my making successful films, animated or otherwise. But with regard to animation, the hardest part of the process was really on [*sic*] the script. I think that the influences of the Canadian and European films on us… were keys to maintaining very high standards of conceptualization and scriptwriting. (Dadivas 2015)

But making do with the budget given to them and the lack of materials did not mean that their works were inferior to high-budget films. Dadivas and Corre were aware that they relied on experimentation more than perfecting their work and used the roughness of their animation to emphasize the filth of the city of Manila. In a way, rough drawn lines, rather than clean ones, seemed more fitting against the photographic backdrop of the slums and garbage on the streets. The use of raw photographs for stop-motion backgrounds, which were not as bright, helped with the overall bleak and miserable tone of the short animation.

Access and Institutions

Being ready for opportunities, for Corre, Dadivas, and Ramos, is part of their strategy to work within their means. Their involvement with the Mowelfund Film Institute, which allowed them to watch foreign animation and experimental cinema from different countries, made them realize that there were methods in animation other than the commercial Hollywood animation they were used to. They were particularly influenced by animation imported from the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), citing *Special Delivery* by Eunice Macaulay and John Weldon (Dadivas 2015, pers. comm.) and Caroline Leaf's handcrafted animated works as examples. The NFB is a public producer and distributor of films and animation and is funded by the Canadian government.

The Filipino animators took inspiration from the form and the liberty to experiment. It also helped that the Mowelfund Film Institute and the UP Film Center gave them the opportunity to play around with films and their concepts (Dadivas 2015, pers. comm.; Ramos 2013). The Filipino animators did not have the same amount of government support compared to, for instance, what Canada grants its art producers. Instead, Filipino animators relied on cultural institutions and private support for their space and funding. The limited budget did not stop them from creating animation; to be able to add to the small funding they earned, they worked precarious jobs as part-time live action directors and animators, as well as part-time teachers and instructors. Moreover, unlike the animators who were members of the NFB, their animation studios were all makeshift and situated in their own homes. Their cameras and materials, such as paint, celluloid, and light boxes, were all self-funded.

These animators usually come from middle-class Filipino families who can afford university education, as was the case for the animators of both *Anak Maynila* and *Doon Sa Kabila ng Bulkan*. Fruto Corre and Dange Desembrana graduated from the University of the Philippines while Nonoy Dadivas graduated from

the Ateneo De Manila University and was mentored by filmmaker Surf Reyes (Dadivas 2015; Corre 2015).

On the other hand, Eleanor Ramos finished her degree in Architecture at the University of the Philippines and became a licensed architect before studying animation at the Mowelfund Film Institute in 1992. She often got together with fellow Architecture classmates and animators who were already involved in the Mowelfund Institute film and animation workshops and eventually joined the group and even held her own workshops in animation (Ramos 2013).

While their class backgrounds meant that these animators did not have first-hand experience of poverty, it did not mean that they were completely ignorant of it, as the economic demands of their craft nevertheless pushed them into conditions of precarity. Their motivations were derived from their desire to create content that was Filipino in identity, and their choice of themes and subject matter were carefully thought out. Their backgrounds in art, architecture, and film provided them the opportunity to tell these stories.

Reclaiming the Aesthetics of Poverty from Poverty Porn

Beyond resourcefulness and making do, the aesthetics of poverty informs us that productions should be aware of the social condition surrounding their creations.

The animators of *Anak Maynila* and *Doon sa Kabila ng Buwan* did not hold back in showing the different facets of Metro Manila using photographs and the pixilation technique: the mother and child are seen walking in the smoggy streets of Makati and the polluted roads of Manila are teeming with garbage and informal settlers. This backdrop of chaos and garbage function as a stark contrast to the simpler and cleaner provincial scene the child awakens to at the end of the animated film.

Fig. 4. *Anak Maynila*, 1993

Also, more than simple material lack, *Anak Maynila* surreptitiously portrays the struggles of being an impoverished, single mother, possibly suffering from some sort of post-partum depression. Poverty is not simply the lack of material resources but also the lack of access to mental health services, maternity services, and even support systems such as friends and family. These are the hidden consequences of poverty more keenly felt by single mothers and children.

In *Doon sa Kabila ng Bulkan*, Ramos portrays the Aetas' lives as harmonious with nature through her experimentation with the paints and transitions. The colors and music, which uses indigenous instruments, play a large part in depicting the scenes in her work. Bright and vivid colors are used to portray the lives of the Aetas before the eruption; later, these colors are replaced by monotones, depicting the lahar and the infertile earth.

Ramos also relied on naïve character designs which, according to her, were easier to paint and animate: "For me the crude style is more emotional. *Mas gusto ko iyong nakikita mo ang dumi* (I prefer to see the dirtiness), *ang* process, *ang* handmade quality" (Ramos 2013). Using this naïve aesthetic, Ramos' animation drives a message about the plight of the displaced Aetas from Pinatubo,

showing, again, how the film relies more on theme and concept than technical perfection.

Because *Doon Sa Kabila ng Bulkan* was produced by PETA Broadcast and Film Inc. and Ramos has worked with PETA's production designs on several occasions (Ramos 2015), she supports initiatives towards educating audiences about social issues. In this way, she has imbibed the aesthetics of poverty not just as a production designer but also as an animator. Although she did not necessarily involve the poor or the Aetas in the production process, she was still conscious of their issues.

Aside from Ramos, Dadivas, and Corre, other short film animators have agreed that animation is a most expensive artistic endeavor. Because of this, many filmmakers eventually focus more on live action films, such as documentaries, experimental films, and feature films, which have more audiences and higher market demand. Many also become animation teachers and trainers to younger filmmakers, imparting not just techniques but the freedom to experiment and the resourcefulness to make do with available materials, focusing on the content and themes more than on the medium used.

To summarize, the aesthetics of poverty claims to be a more dignified and nuanced way of portraying poverty in the tradition of the social realist painters and filmmakers. The filmmakers of *Doon Sa Kabila ng Bulkan* and *Anak Maynila* sought to tap into various means to be able to successfully create their animated works. This included a careful consideration of the medium and technique used, an emphasis on story and concept over technical quality, and using the material lack in production to emphasize that the subjects of both animated films are the underprivileged themselves.

The portrayal of poverty as a reality by filmmakers, animators, and artists involves a deep reflection on its intent and purpose. These highlight the existence of poverty and at the same time critique the socio-political conditions that make it a perennial problem

of the country. Precarity and material deprivation are not just constraints for creating art; the act of making do, combined with self-awareness and reflexivity, can foreground the different ways in which people are affected by poverty. The existence of the two short films discussed makes us aware that poverty is relative not only to the conditions of a country, but also to different social groups, particularly women, children and indigenous people.

In the age of digital filmmaking where the creation of digital art works and animation have become more democratized since the celluloid era, distribution and exhibition of animations can now occur beyond the reach of big media networks and movie producers. Artists can now showcase their work on the internet through social media and video sharing sites, reaching a wider audience and allowing more people to produce and consume animation. With technology as somewhat of an equalizer, the standards by which animation is now judged will rely heavily on its storytelling and emotional connection to audiences.

The act of working through precarity means working outside of the Philippine animation industry that is dominated by business process outsourcing. Precisely, the conditions of precarity enable filmmakers to experiment and focus on telling a story, just like Nonoy Dadivas, Fruto Corre, Ellen Ramos. Storytelling does not forego visuals and style; instead it asserts that these visuals, regardless of technique or availability of resources, should enrich the narrative.

While the democratization of technology has allowed more people access to the art of animation, the art form is still mostly populated by the educated middle-class who may either get a degree in animation or get a National Certification. Moreover, the art form is still expensive even if the digital technologies are available to more people. Indeed, there is still a severe need for institutions to address the worsening material lack in the country.

In a sense, animation has not trickled down to the lower classes yet and therefore cannot be used by them as a form of emancipation from their poverty. However, the middle-class animators of today can work with the aesthetics of poverty to use material lack as an aesthetic tool to portray more profound and meaningful themes and narratives. This in turn may shed light on the critical need to address the long-standing problems of the people and critique the socio-political structures that allow this to continue.

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