



**The Politics of Naming a Movement:
Independent Cinema According to the
Cinemataya Congress (2005-2010)**

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THE POLITICS OF NAMING A MOVEMENT: INDEPENDENT CINEMA ACCORDING TO THE CINEMALAYA CONGRESS (2005-2010)

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Much has been said and written about contemporary “indie” cinema in the Philippines. But what/who is “indie”? The catchphrase has been so frequently used to mean many and sometimes disparate ideas that it has become a confusing and, arguably, useless term. The paper attempts to problematize how the term “indie” has been used and defined by critics and commentators in the context of the Cinemalaya Film Congress, which is one of the important venues for articulating and evaluating the notion of “independence” in Philippine cinema. The congress is one of the components of the Cinemalaya Independent Film Festival, whose founding coincides with and is partly responsible for the increase in production of full-length digital films since 2005. This paper examines the politics of naming the contemporary indie movement which I will discuss based on the transcripts of the congress proceedings and my firsthand experience as a rapporteur (2007-2009) and panelist (2010) in the congress. Panel reports and final recommendations from 2005 to 2010 will be assessed vis-a-vis the indie films selected for the Cinemalaya competition and exhibition during the same period and the different critical frameworks which panelists have espoused and written about outside the congress proper. Ultimately, by following a number

of key and recurring ideas, the paper looks at the key conceptions of independent cinema proffered by panelists and participants. Thus, the paper maps out the discourses and contestations that have been allowed in the four-year congress—what explicit and implicit consolidations have been made by the congress director and what ideas Cinemalaya have perpetuated about Philippine independent cinema.

The Context and Peculiarity of the Cinemalaya Film Congress

THE ANNUAL CINEMALAYA INDEPENDENT FILM FESTIVAL AND CONGRESS have three components: the competition of full-length and short films; the exhibition of Filipino films not necessarily made for Cinemalaya, but are considered “indie”; and the film congress. These three components—the competition, overseen by Laurice Guillen and Robbie Tan; the exhibition, programmed by Ed Cabagnot; and the congress, directed by Nicanor Tiongson—are relatively autonomous in their discursive productions. Thus, how “indie” comes to be defined in the practice of film selection for competition and for exhibition does not perfectly fit with how “indie” is defined theoretically and critically in the congress. And it is the congress’s autonomy from the festival which makes it significant.

Unlike other local award- or grant-giving film festivals, Cinemalaya has attempted, through its film congress, to self-reflexively define, delineate, and interrogate conceptions of “independence” in cinema. However, being a congress, its end is not only to theorize, but also to discuss specific issues, with the aim of finding resolutions for them. As such, each congress frames a pre-set agenda, selects panelists who are deemed experts to discourse on the agenda, and synthesizes the proceedings at the end, in order to write specific recommendations. This framing pipeline reveals the assumptions of Cinemalaya and are, therefore, discursive.

The congress, in its first six years, had attempted to include within its frame the various filmmaking and critical traditions in Philippine film, all in the name of “creating a truly original Filipino cinema for our time.”¹ It assembled a diverse group of film practitioners (from Raymond Red and Jeffrey Jeturian to Jose Javier Reyes and Mylene Dizon), scholars and critics (from Lito Zulueta to Eli Guieb III), observers of Asian cinemas (like Max Tessier and Philip Cheah), industry players (like Tess Fuentes of Star Cinema, Robbie Tan of Seiko Films, Tony Gloria of Unitel Pictures, and Joji Alonso of MLR Pictures), and foreign film festival programmers (like Raymond Phathanavirangoon and Ansgar Vogt) to articulate the different aspects and, at many times, conflicting ideas about independent cinema. Notably, the congress has consciously aimed for rootedness as well as expansion as can be gleaned from the lineup of panelists, which include the likes of Kidlat Tahimik (filmmaker), Bienvenido Lumbera (film and literary critic), Tess Fuentes (Operations Director of Star Cinema), Ric Camaligan (Vice President for Leisure and Entertainment of SM), and Benel Laguna (COO of Small Business Guarantee and Finance Corporation, Department of Trade and Industries).

This paper examines the politics of naming the contemporary indie movement which I will discuss based on the transcripts of the congress proceedings and my firsthand experience as a rapporteur (2007-2009) and panelist (2010) in the congress. Panel reports and final recommendations from 2005 to 2010 will be assessed vis-a-vis the indie films selected for the Cinemalaya competition and exhibition during the same period and the different critical frameworks which panelists have espoused and written about outside the congress proper. Ultimately, by following a number of key and recurring ideas, the paper looks at the key conceptions of independent cinema proffered by panelists and participants. Thus, the paper maps out the discourses and contestations that have been allowed in the four-year congress—what explicit and implicit consolidations have been made by the congress director and what ideas Cinemalaya have perpetuated about Philippine independent cinema.

The Convergence of Filmmaking and Critical Traditions in Cinemalaya

The arrival of Cinemalaya in 2005 is a landmark in Philippine film history. The event saw the convergence of at least three distinct film traditions that have long co-existed in tension. First of all, Cinemalaya came at the wake of the popular mainstream cinema's supposed death. In the 1990s, industry output was second only to India in Asia in terms of quantity. But at the turn of the century, the decline in theatrical attendance and film production had been dramatic. According to published filmographies, the industry produced 103 films in 2001; 94 in 2002; 80 in 2003; 55 in 2004; 50 in 2005; and 48 in 2006.² But appearances are deceiving; the marked drop between 2003 and 2004 did not actually continue unabated.

In 2005, Cinemalaya produced nine films, and Cinema One Originals produced six more. Outside the industry and these two grant-giving entities, other full-length films were produced, such as *Bunso* (2005) and *Camiling Story* (2005). Many of these films are not counted in official filmographies because they did not have a theatrical run. In fact, if the quantity of full-length films is the only basis for the lifeline of Philippine film, the number of films stopped dwindling by 2005 with the coming of the so-called "indie digi cinema movement." The count numbered more than 60 full-length films by 2006, with independent production outnumbering industry production. By 2008, a mere sampling of indie films selected for exhibition in Cinemalaya numbered 153, and the theatrical attendance in CCP alone reached 27,000 (PEP 2008). In 2010—only five years after attempting to define "independent cinema" – the Cinemalaya congress already found it necessary to re-assess the meaning of "independence", citing the fact that indie films comprise 70 to 80 per cent of total annual films produced locally.³ Hence, the coming of Cinemalaya serves as a marker for that period when indie practically replaced popular mainstream production in terms of quantity.

Second, Cinemalaya came at the tail-end of a series of “serious” films, mostly low-budget *pito-pito* productions, produced from the “fringes” of the dying industry between the late 1990s and 2004 (cf. Tiongson 2010).⁴ Critical discourses about Philippine cinema have been conventionally categorized into critical modes: one regards film as art (art cinema) and the other regards film as social-cultural practice (popular cinema). One purist articulation of the first mode may be found in the writings of Clodulado del Mundo Jr., who believes that true national cinema is forged along the outskirts or outside of the industry. He believes that the significance of key filmmakers of the so-called Second Golden Age of Philippine cinema – notably, Lino Brocka, Ishmael Bernal, and Mike de Leon—was indelibly defined when they waged their battle against commercial cinema in order to create uncompromisingly artistic films (cf., Del Mundo 1998).

Thus, both the dying of the industry and the birthing of a community of film artists outside of the industry are a cause for celebration. In 1984, when popular films like *Bagets* (1984) and *Bukas Luluhod ang Mga Tala* (1984) thrived, del Mundo (1984/2001, 2) lamented that “the film industry is alive, but Filipino cinema is dead.” But in 2002, in the middle of the industry slump, Lav Diaz returned to filmmaking with *Batang West Side*, Jeffrey Jeturian won an international award for *Tuhog* (2001), and films not funded by commercial outfits gained ground. These events prompted del Mundo (2001, 42) to triumphantly declare: “the film industry is dead; long live Philippine cinema!”⁵

In the 2007 and 2010 congresses and speaking in the context of the triumphs of Cinemalaya films, del Mundo reiterated his critical principle when he asserted that indie filmmaking will only remain free and liberating as long as indie filmmakers do *not* crossover to the mainstream. In 2007, reflecting on “post-Brocka Philippine cinema,” he optimistically wrote that a new generation of filmmakers was succeeding the generation of Brocka, and he named 2005 Cinemalaya filmmakers Michiko Yamamoto, Raymond Lee, Auraeus Solito, Joel Ruiz, Coreen Jimenez, Mario Cornejo, and Ron

Bryant, among others, as members of this new generation (2007, 20).⁶ Hence, Cinemalaya has served as a venue for serious film artists to contribute in the forging of a national cinema, without being tied down to the mainstream industry.

Third, Cinemalaya is also historical because it appeared to be the “revolution” that alternative filmmakers had been waiting for. The call to unite outside of the mainstream industry in the name of Philippine cinema was made, and it sounded revolutionary; it was a revolution that would create a veritable alternative to the mainstream. These alternative filmmakers whose roots may be traced to what critic and filmmaker Nick Deocampo calls the “Second Independent Film Movement” in the 1970s leading up to the formation of a group of “radical” short filmmakers in the 1980s (1994, 62-67; cf., Baumgärtel 2007), have identified themselves as independent cinema of the Philippines, long before Cinemalaya. The experimental or hyperrealistic works produced within this movement and by these filmmakers in alternative formats partly account for the use of the term “revolution,” which signified a rebellion against mainstream cinema.

Lav Diaz, for the purposes of this paper, represents this tradition. Though not popularly associated with the radical short filmmakers earlier mentioned, he likewise started with non-commercial short films, and then briefly detoured to the margins of the industry with feature-length films,⁷ and finally left the industry in 1999 in order to make anti-commercial and ultra-long films. On the year he made his last industry film, he wrote in an essay published in *Movement* magazine about an “indie story in the mainstream and about rumors of a forthcoming revolution in Philippine cinema” (Diaz 1999, 32). It was unclear what this revolution would entail, what change it was supposed to bring, but his claim suggested a kind of revamp. But whether it was supposed to be a revamp in industrial structure and practice or in aesthetics and ethics, was unclear. And though Diaz had never participated as a panelist in any congress, he appeared in the “An’ng Kuwento Mo?” advertising campaign of Cinemalaya

2008, indirectly aligning himself with the cause of the festival. Other filmmakers, such as Quark Henares and Yam Laranas who had already begun with short films and were doing mainstream features, declared in the congresses of 2005 and 2006 respectively, that the rumored revolution indeed has arrived, signified, though not solely, by the coming of Cinemalaya and the digital technology it so championed.⁸

“Indie” as a Conflated Term

That people with various ideas about what kind of films should compose a national cinema should come together to rally around the idea of independence is in itself a clue to the project of Cinemalaya. In the venue of the congress, not a few people with varying perspectives, like Ellen Ongkeko-Marfil (2005), Marilou Diaz-Abaya (2006), Jérémy Segay (2007), and Misa Kimura (2007), among others, claimed that the future of Philippine cinema (i.e. based on what is happening in Cinemalaya and the indie digi cinema in general), is bright. But what *exactly* each one is celebrating and hopeful for is not always clear.

What sets Cinemalaya apart from Star Cinema, for example, is clear. Speaking in the 2006 congress, Tess Fuentes, operations director of Star Cinema, made the distinction clear. Indie films push the envelope of form and, perchance, earn international accolades in the process of doing so. On the other hand, Star Cinema is a business venture with more than 100 employees to remunerate, and with a capital investment of at least P20 million per film. Cinemalaya is also distinct from Cinema One Originals. In the 2007 congress, Ronald Arguelles, managing director of Cinema One Originals, clarified that their film selection process is dependent on formula; their festival-competition does not necessarily claim to be “indie,” as Cinemalaya claims of its festival-competition. Arguelles admitted that Cinema One Originals is still a commercial venture, while Cinemalaya is expressly not.⁹ Moreover, Arguelles further asserted in the congress of 2009 that Cinema One Originals was established

precisely to contribute to mainstream cinema which in 2005, was not producing worthwhile films. Seed money was granted to “credible and original” film concepts.

But the differentiation between indie and mainstream is itself tenuous, as evidenced in both the exhibition and congress components of Cinemalaya. In the congress of 2009, producer Margie Templo already spoke of “professionalizing” indie practices while producer and director, Coreen Jimenez, remarked that indie films must be transposed from a cultural “scene” to a legitimate industry. However, Del Mundo argued that the term “indie film industry” is an oxymoron. In the 2010 congress, the implicit question addressed was how “indie” had, in the last ten years since the premiere screening of Jon Red’s *Still Lives* in 2001, “compromised” to market realities and “system-based” demands (e.g., star system and genre system) such as those signified by the production, exhibition, and distribution practices of Star Cinema and, more problematically, Cinema One Originals. And using more or less the same terms as Fuentes, del Mundo continued to propose a still clearly demarcated but “compromised” co-existence between the indie and the mainstream. While mainstream cinema should adapt and appropriate indie practices and innovations for its own growth, indie cinema should continue to reinvent itself and defy mainstream restrictions, also for its own growth. The two are *never* to merge because this would spell the end of independence.

Interestingly, with these stated differences, Cinema One Originals films are annually selected for the exhibition module of Cinemalaya. For all intents and purposes, films from the two festivals do not look different. For example, while Cinemalaya has come up with the likes of *Big Time* (2005) and *100* (2008), which, without the trappings of discourse, look commercial and have popular appeal, Cinema One Originals has produced and awarded *Huling Balyan ng Buhi* (2006), which is non-commercial and highly experimental. In form and content, all the other films from both festival-competitions fall in between these extremes.

The reason Cinemalaya has been able to attract people with different persuasions is that it has boldly called itself “indie,” and by the end of the first year’s congress, its director, Nicanor Tiongson, provided the clear discursive direction of Cinemalaya in his concluding report. He explained that indie should not be hampered or compromised by considerations of commerce, cultural conventions, or even technological infrastructures.¹⁰

But confusion has set in with the frequent use of the term “indie” to mean anything and everything, resulting in the practical and critical inefficacy of the term. For example, in a television documentary entitled *Pinoy Movies, Buhay Ka Pa... Ba?* aired on ABSCBN 2 shortly before the end of 2005 (i.e., the year when Cinemalaya and Cinema One Originals began) we see almost immediately that the idea of “indie” is confused/ rendered indistinct.¹¹ The documentary mourns for the dying film industry by chronicling the “canonical” films of the Second Golden Age from the mid-1970s to mid-1980s, alongside the nostalgic reminiscences of popular stars like Sharon Cuneta, Aga Muhlach, and Judy Ann Santos who talk about the showbiz “of their time” (i.e., from mid-1980s to mid-1990s). But though in the cloak of mourning, the rhetoric of the documentary is undeniable; it proceeds to show that current “indie” films, represented visually by excerpts from both Cinemalaya and Cinema One Originals films, could save the industry and usher in a new “golden age.” In other words, as far as the documentary is concerned, there is only one Philippine cinema that needs saving, and there is only one indie cinema to save it. This conflated use of the term “indie” collapses del Mundo’s binary terms of mainstream and margin.

There is another sense in which the term “indie” is confusing. In the opening of the 2005 congress, Grace Javier-Alfonso provided an overview of independent filmmaking in the Philippines and highlighted a number of ideas associated with the aforementioned alternative cinema. The label “alternative” attached to these films, she explained, was derived

from two “attributes”: they are not funded by a private entity for commercial purposes, and, being non- or anti-commercial, they are alternatives to the usual mainstream genre features.¹²

This alternative cinema – also called “indie” – still thrives today in the full-length films of “old timers” like Roxlee and Briccio Santos, and younger filmmakers like John Torres and Raya Martin (cf. de la Cruz 2010). This is not yet counting independent short films, which, as Alfonso explained,¹³ is the literal alternative format. Indeed, the production of short films in various film and communication schools in the country has been inversely proportional to the decline in industry production. If one is to quantify the worthwhile short films produced and entered in local competitions such as the Gawad CCP, .mov Film Festival, Diliman Film and Video Competition, the short film category of Cinemania, Gawad Urian, and Cinemalaya, and the inter-school competitions sponsored by student film organizations like the Ateneo Video Open (Loyola Film Circle), Piling Obrang Vidyo (UP Cinema), Haute Auteur (UP Cineastes’ Studio), Inyorai Bidyo Festival (UP Cinema as Art Movement), and Bidyo Festival (Miriam College), Philippine film has never seen a slump.

This kind of film historicizing is most properly associated with Deocampo, who, apart from being an alternative filmmaker, is also the scholar who wrote how the short film constitutes a cinema. In *Short Film: Emergence of a New Philippine Cinema* (1985), he chronicles an alternative history of filmmaking built upon short films, which are generally experimental, documentary, and animation. In his book, he asserts that the short film, due to the freedom it enjoys, is the site of *real* cinema. He traces the roots of short film to the birth of cinema; forges this new cinema’s historical provenance (“[it] owes nothing of its existence to... Kidlat Tahimik... Lino Brocka, Ishmael Bernal... and Mike de Leon”); defines its “properties” (e.g. experimental, realist, independent); describes the works that constitute it (i.e. anti-illusionist, socially relevant, subjective, abstract); drafts a preliminary canon; predicts, though in uncertain terms, that a

significant shift to video from Super-8 was forthcoming and was going to dramatically affect the short film; and locates the impetus of this “real cinema” within academe.

On the mark was Deocampo’s inkling about video and the significance of film courses established at the University of the Philippines (UP), De La Salle University, and Ateneo de Manila University and the workshops at the UP Film Center (all established in 1974), and subsequently at the Movie Workers Welfare Foundation, Inc. (MOWELFUND) and Experimental Cinema of the Philippines (ECP) (ca. early 1980s). Today’s indie is definitely a product of the developments in video and academe, but what has emerged is not within the purview of Deocampo’s history. The short film no longer defines the current indie. Many of the short filmmakers of the 1980s have migrated to the full-length, even Deocampo himself. Furthermore, the newer indie filmmakers have reclaimed their ties with Brocka, Mike De Leon, and Kidlat Tahimik, among others, and the filmmakers of the so-called Golden Ages have been re-linked to the current indie in colloquia such as the Cinemalaya congress.

Moreover, the characteristics of current films labeled “indie” no longer reflect Deocampo’s descriptions. In fact, Deocampo’s history and canon highlight where the current notion of indie forks: a contest between “real indie” (heirs of Deocampo’s alternative short films) and “indie-indie-an” (films of hybrid sensibilities) is now apparent. But the distinction between “real” and “fake” becomes problematic if one assumes that the impetus of today’s indie still stems from academe. And it still does.

In the congress of 2009, panelists representing various regions and provinces of the Philippines were invited to speak on the formation of filmmaking subcultures most visible in high schools and colleges. Many of today’s indie film artists have film or communication arts degrees. And the patrons of the indie events are mostly students and teachers of the arts or media. A cursory observation would also reveal that the products of media,

communication, or film programs (now no longer limited to the three big universities) are heterogeneous, more accommodating of popular influences, and, for better or worse, disengaged from the history that Deocampo chronicles in his germinal book. Therefore, the foregoing description of indie films needs to be reevaluated so as not to undermine the short film form as merely transitory.

In fact, the short film continues to thrive as an alternative cinema, with its peculiar mode of production and consumption. To this day, the short film is considered alternative—as one participant of the 2007 congress complained about—because it still does not have proper exhibition venues in the Philippines. Neither does it ever end up in the annals of Philippine film history.¹⁴ Some of the hundreds of titles produced every year escape obscurity only when they manage to win a major, usually international, award. The perfect example of this short film tradition is Raymond Red's *Anino* (2000) which received the prestigious Palm d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival in 2001.

Ironically, while “indie” may refer to the short film of the alternative cinema, current discourses about the indie almost always refer exclusively to the full-length film. Mainstream panelists of the 2007 congress unwittingly assumed this bias even in assessing short films. Maryo J. Delos Reyes expressed that not only are the award-winning short filmmakers of Cinemalaya merely rehearsing for the “real deal” (i.e., full-length), but are also gearing up for the mainstream genre film. Mylene Dizon, in the same panel, complained that short filmmakers tend to sacrifice story in favor of form and technique. Deocampo, in his aforementioned history of the short film tradition and critical appraisal of the short film form, demonstrates that story has not been a paramount concern among short filmmakers in the past. The observations of Delos Reyes and Dizon, hence, reveal some characteristics of the Cinemalaya short film; they now look like genre films (e.g., horror, action, and melodrama) and they appear to be narrative- and performance-driven, instead of form-driven.

The bias of these panelists and the apparent characteristics of current short films show how the current conception of “indie” is different.

In a historical overview of alternative cinema which Deocampo contributed to the *CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art* (1994), one would find a clue to yet another source of confusion in the current use of the term “indie”. In the context of Deocampo’s article, films like *Tinimbang Ka Ngunit Kulang* (1974) produced by Cinemanila Corporation, and *Maynila sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag* (1975) produced by Cinema Artists Philippines, are not counted as alternative because they do not fit his definition of “alternative” (i.e., short non-narrative, non-commercial films). They were commercially produced within the industry for a popular audience.¹⁵ The apparent confusion is how, in practical usage, del Mundo’s and Deocampo’s ideas of indie are now conflated.

Moreover, in Deocampo’s lecture in the 2005 congress, he further highlighted another nuance of indie filmmaking. He asserted that apart from the full-fledged alternative cinema to which he belongs, another peculiarity of indie may be traced back to the 1950s. He identified small-scale commercial film outfits, like Tagalog Ilang-ilang, Sotang Bastos, and RVQ Productions as independents relative to the big studios, LVN, Lebran, Premiere, and Sampaguita. He noted that when the studio system collapsed, these independents filled in the vacuum and thus became the mainstream. Currently, many small-scale production outfits have also attempted to produce both popular and serious films. It is discernible that the congress has likewise allowed these artisanal production companies to occupy a space within the continuum of “indie.” Representatives from small-scale film outfits, like Reyna Films (*Ligaya ang Itawag Mo Sa Akin*), Violetta Pictures (*Magnifico*), CM Pictures (*Panaghoy sa Suba*), MLR Films (*Kubrador*), and Centerstage Productions (*Tirador*), have found seats in the annual congress. Mainstream directors like Carlitos Siguion-Reyna, Gil Portes, Maryo J. Delos Reyes, Cesar Montano, and Jeffrey Jeturian have appeared in the congress as “indies” as well.

Through the framing of Cinemalaya, indie has also become conflated with digital video (DV). Deocampo, Raymond Red, and Tony Gloria persuasively asserted in 2005 that film and art movements are preceded by shifts in technology; accordingly, indie has not only moved away from the 35mm mainstream format which is more expensive and less portable, but has clung to the potentials of changing technologies, from 16mm and Super-8 to DV. The 2000 CCP FreeFest, which Ed Cabagnot in the congress of 2008 pointed out as one of the precursors of Cinemalaya, typifies this techno-related change in the idea of indie. This free workshop-cum-festival pushed for democratic full-length indie filmmaking¹⁶ via the use of the widely accessible video camera. And out of this promotion of intense productivity afforded by technological accessibility, Khavn de la Cruz's self-promoted *Digital Dekalogo: A Manifesto for a Filmless Philippines* easily finds its space.

Arriving after this shift in technology and emphasizing full-length narratives, Cinemalaya, at the very onset, had championed DV. In the congress of 2005, Tiongson maintained "that DV lowers the cost of production...thereby lessening the pressure on [the film artist] to make films that earn and widening instead areas for creativity." From 2005 to 2008, the congress included a panel devoted to discussions on digital technology in spite of the fact that since year one, panelists have asserted that: 1) DV is not necessarily indie (Mark Meily, Dodie Lucas), 2) indie filmmakers, given the chance, would still go for celluloid (Quark Henares, Ato Bautista), and 3) the various forms of digital technology available to Cinemalaya filmmakers are cheap because these are not yet state-of-the-art (Rolando Tolentino, Tilman Baumgärtel). In fact, the last point is what critics Tilman Baumgärtel and Mike Rapatan, and cinematographer Neil Daza, in three different panels of the 2007 congress, observed – that indie filmmakers go for the digital medium for economic and not necessarily for aesthetic reasons. These panelists urged filmmakers to take video in its own terms in order to create and maximize an aesthetics unique to video, and not to use it only because they cannot afford celluloid.¹⁷

A casual observation of the assumptions of the participants and organizers of the Cinemalaya would indicate how the digital medium is presupposed as the medium of the indie.¹⁸ A participant in 2007 thought that the Seiko Films produced *Foster Child* (2007), which was shot on celluloid, was a digi-film, because it was the opening film of Cinemalaya. The digital look has practically become the signifier of indie, especially for the uninitiated.

A further confusion arises when DV-as-indie is conflated with the concept of artisanal companies-as-indie. If a small-scale commercial film outfit, or even a branch of a major production outfit, shoots a digital film whose narrative structure is not formulaic, though not necessarily radical or experimental, the references are confused. In the 2005 congress, Quark Henares mentioned the prospect of “capitalists” jumping on the bandwagon of digi-filmmaking and thus posing a “threat.” The statement’s assumption seemed to be that digital means indie, so a participant asked Henares what could be so wrong with commercial productions using digital. In other words, in the same way that indie can thrive in this medium, the industry can also be resuscitated by it.

As a response, Henares mentioned Jon Red’s R-rated Digital Viva film, *Boso* (2005), which he claimed was shown only in limited theaters, but probably made more money than mainstream skin flicks; he then added a seemingly cryptic comment: “So just that fact, *medyo* threat *na ‘yon, di ba?*” Furthermore, he claimed that “In the DV-TV market, there will be a lot of competition.” In short, the terms are completely mixed and confused.

What exactly did Henares mean? Did he mean that the mainstream is a threat to the *market* of the indie? Is the issue then a question of market or exclusivity of medium? What then should one make of *Imahe Nasyon* (2006), an omnibus by such stellar indies as Lav Diaz, Raymond Red, Roxlee, Mes de Guzman, RA Rivera, Poklong Ananding, among others, and Auraeus Solito’s

Tuli (2005) of the *Maximo Oliveros*-fame,¹⁹ which won in the Cinemanila Film Festival. Both were produced by Digital Viva, a subsidiary of a mainstream outfit, Viva Films. Are these films indicative of the triumph of the indie or a selling out, as Jon Red had been accused of when he made *Boso*?²⁰

Also, what space in the continuum of “indie” does Henares represent when he appeared in the congress? Apart from his short film, *A Date with Jao Mapa* (1999), are Henares’ other films indie? In fact, Henares, Erik Matti, Ato Bautista, and Cris Pablo, who have all appeared in the congress to speak for and about indie filmmaking, represent still another aspect of indie – “niche films” as indie. This further complicates the use of the term indie.

Pablo is credited for being the first indie filmmaker to have shot a full-length digi-film meant for commercial theaters. His gay film, *Duda* (2003), by virtue of being the first in this sense, and for explicitly featuring a supposedly sensitive non-mainstream subject matter, is considered “indie.” However, in retrospect, seeing how this thread has played out, how this type of film has increased in number and turned into a commercial genre, gay films have turned out to be not necessarily radical or even politically correct, and, in many instances, not much different from skin flicks featuring women. In the 2007 congress, mainstream observer, Jose Javier Reyes, lamented that indie has come to mean, especially for the foreign market, “fetish” films. As Reyes pointed out, these films are not necessarily liberating just because they represent a marginalized lifestyle; but undoubtedly, these films are aimed at niche markets for commercial reasons. The genre has, indeed, become market-driven and marketable, as affirmed by Paolo Villaluna when he spoke about the operations of Robinsons’ IndieSine in the 2008 congress. The confusion is further aggravated when these titillating films are directed by so-called indie filmmakers, like Brillante Mendoza, whose gay-themed *Masahista* (2005) was awarded Best Film by a number of award-giving bodies. He is also behind the exploitative and

problematic *Pantasya* (2007), produced by Viva in partnership with Centerstage Productions. Thus, up to what extent and using what criteria can one call DV-niche films indie?

Meanwhile, films like *Keka* (2003), *Sa Huling Paghihintay* (2001), and *Blackout* (2007), by Henares, Matti, and Bautista respectively, are alternatives to the main genre fare because they appeal to a relatively more discriminating, though still popular, taste. These films are also niche films (i.e., films that do not target the widest possible market). These films and those of Mario Cornejo²¹ appeal to the sensibility of the middle-class youth subculture, some of who aspire to become filmmakers as well. Arguably, this same youth subculture would go for a range of American indies,²² from Quentin Tarantino to Mumblecore.²³

That such niche films with high concept narratives or stylized treatments are associated with “indie” is no accident. Indeed, it was not the highly political, realist, or avant-garde film that connected alternative short filmmaking to the current indie digi full-length filmmaking. At the turn of the century, it was Jon Red’s *Still Lives* (1999), followed by the omnibus, *Motel* (2001), which began the migration of alternative filmmakers from shorts to full-lengths; and *Still Lives* already displayed a popular sensibility, as did Jon Red’s later feature films.²⁴

On three separate congresses, Matti (2005), journalist Jessica Zafra (2007), and Villaluna (2008) likened the interest in indie filmmaking among the young, especially among students who attend the Cinemalaya congresses and screenings, to an earlier period’s youthful interest in becoming rock stars. A notable outworking of this youthful desire to be a filmmaker is the film *Xenox*, an unabashedly formulaic sci-fi film made in 2007 by the young, self-confessed fan of *Star Wars*, Sean Lim. Amateur college students helped in the production. Lim’s full-length film which featured minor stars, Isabel Granada and Paolo Ballesteros, had neither commercial funding nor art-house pretense.

Riding the wave of the indie-hype, Lim went around schools in Manila and Quezon City to promote the film in the spirit of youth adventurism. In his stopover at the UP Film Institute Cine Adarna, he admitted to both being an indie, because he practically is, and to *not* being an indie like other indies. He said he had long dreamed of making a film that would appeal to the average Filipino youth and it was technology that made it possible for him to make one independently.²⁵ Actually, Lim also represents what Mike Rapatan, in the congress of 2006 described as the attitude of today's young filmmakers, who, owing to varied production opportunities that come their way, would rather be simply called "filmmakers," instead of "indie filmmakers," a term which carries a lot of baggage (cf. Barros-Sanchez 2005).

Aiming at a wider, though still niche market and more holistic in its approach is Unitel Pictures. In the first Cinemalaya congress, Tiongson introduced Unitel's head honcho, Tony Gloria, as "indie," and Unitel's *La Visa Loca* (2005) and *Inang Yaya* (2006) became part of the Cinemalaya exhibition module. Unitel's distribution arm has also picked up Cinemalaya and other indie features for distribution. Gloria articulates his idea of how Unitel is indie, and undeniably, his assertion very much fits the framing tendencies of Cinemalaya. Gloria stated, in the congress of 2005:

I think that what [Unitel is] can be summed up in the words of Bingham Ray, founder of October Films, a distributor of independent titles. He says: "I always wanted us to be able to try things that were not necessarily commercially viable. I'm not some avant-gardist. I know the difference between something that's truly experimental and something that's wholly mainstream, but I'd like to think that somewhere in the middle is a comfort zone where there's an audience. It might not be the largest or the most lucrative, but, for me, the rewards there are the greatest." This is what Unitel aspires to [become]....

The last assumption articulated in the same congress is that indie films are more likely to get screened or to compete in international film festivals than mainstream films.²⁶ This assumption has some historical validity since both del Mundo's and Deocampo's indies, as Roger Garcia has noted, have been screened and have competed in international film festivals. Also, it is common knowledge that A-list festivals are generally venues for art films and not for popular films; and indies are supposedly art films. Interestingly, the tendency of the congress – though not necessarily of the competition which invites foreign festival programmers as judges – has not been to insist on indie films as prestigious films worthy of world cinema. Every congress, international film festivals are framed, first and foremost, as alternative markets for indie film. Truly, international film festivals provide an avenue for the convergence of commerce and culture. Today, getting a film exhibited for competition abroad (i.e. a roundabout way of earning artistic validation) and finding either an international distributor or media mileage (i.e., for the practical purpose of recouping one's investment) are conflated.²⁷

Producers Joji Alonso (in 2005 and 2006) and Raymond Lee (in 2006) have been called upon by the congress to talk about international film festivals in such terms. In this sense, Unitel, which attempts to bring Filipino films to an international commercial market, is not so different from those which join festivals to recoup the expenses incurred in production. It was also in the spirit of developing a market that in 2006, one of Tiongson's entreaties was for "false notions about the independent film among media practitioners and audiences [to] be corrected."²⁸

Interestingly, by 2010, the congress found it necessary to self-reflexively and explicitly ask:

Do our filmmakers actually make films for festivals abroad rather than for their own people? Is this the reason why many of these festival films focus on abject poverty and its attendant 'evils' because this is the kind of spectacle that first world film festivals would sit up

to watch? Are many gay films masquerading as indie really nothing but soft porn with artistic pretensions? Why the obsession with violence and the violent? Are the marginalized (blind, deaf, mute, children, disabled, regional types) actually sensationalized in films made about them?²⁹

Indie according to Cinemalaya: Middle-ground and middlebrow

The concern of contemporary indie movement is market creation and audience development. In the congress of 2007, Rolando Tolentino spoke about the identity crisis of the indies. Is independent cinema gearing to replace the mainstream industry? If so, he explained, it needs to focus on distribution and exhibition and go beyond the “content-provider phase”. But even so—and here Tolentino betrayed his position—if indie takes this direction, it has to contend not only with Philippine mainstream, but also with Hollywood. Or, he continued, is indie aimed at forging a national cinema? If so, then it must represent that elusive Filipino-ness, especially the quality of Filipino-ness that the mainstream shies away from. But in an article published later that year, he confidently suggests that the indie is poised to achieve the latter. He writes that the Pinoy indie digi cinema which Cinemalaya had heralded three years earlier, though remaining a private endeavor, has been gaining ground. He optimistically declares that “with the community cohering into a solidarity of political, cultural and economic purpose, the audience development is...forthcoming” (Tolentino 2007).

However, two years after, one would sense a sharp change in Tolentino’s avowed hopes for and expectations from contemporary indie films. In the congress of 2009, he cast doubt on the capacity of indie filmmakers to be representative of the Filipino experience as they are filmmakers whose subject-positions are informed by their particular generation (i.e., youth), class (i.e., middle class), and education (i.e., tertiary). He asked, in effect, what kinds of

stories and what causes will motivate these filmmakers.³⁰ In the congress of 2008, he highlighted a production and distribution practice that Cinemalaya has never done or even attempted to do and referred to the propagandistic strategy of Political Film Collectives as a model for developing audiences. A Political Film Collective, according to him, is a group of activist-filmmakers working together to produce protest films which are shown in community spaces to an audience of 20 to 100 people in order to raise their awareness about social and political issues on the grass roots level, and ultimately, to effect social change.

In an article written after the well-attended 2008 Cinemalaya film festival, Tolentino disparages the growth of Cinemalaya's audience attendance. He calls the "devotees" who trooped to the Cinemalaya screenings, "the real box-office draw of the elitist perception and characteristic of the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP)" (2008). He continues: "Indie films, as it turns out, is the ideal market of CCP—the youth, the culturati, who are interested in the development of the local arts, willing to support, and, most importantly, willing to pay. Indie films have been able to create a niche community" (ibid.).

What he highlights as disconcerting about the formation of this elitist niche market is how the Cinemalaya films – here, he specifies *Boses* (2008) as an example – have enriched the current "mainstream look" of indie films. He complains that the competing films of 2008 largely emphasize narrative continuity and "suture," no different from classical Hollywood narratives. Tolentino, thus, pines for a truly alternative form and aesthetics in cinema, somewhat resonating the assertions of Deocampo. He even writes off the identity crisis with which he characterized indie films in 2007 and assures the reader that the contemporary indie is unquestionably moving towards the mainstream. Prescriptively, he re-identifies and tries to find efficacy for the term "indie" by assigning it to the short films of the Political Film Collectives, and, ironically, to the "marginal films of the margins" ("sa laylayan ng

laylayan”) represented by the works of Lav Diaz, which, while practically elitist, are anti-establishment and/or anti-commercial.

On the one hand, one could see why Tolentino is disillusioned by contemporary indie. Compared to the \$3.8 million which *A Very Special Love* earned when it was shown just after Cinemalaya 2008 (Philippine Yearly Box Office 2008), the audience of the indie proves to be a mere niche market. Moreover, after four years, Cinemalaya films have not overtaken the mainstream, have not turned out to be as politically and formally radical as the Golden Age and alternative films, and have not turned out to be as revolutionary as they had seemed earlier, especially in challenging the status quo, to which Tolentino is taking it to task.

On the other hand, one would wonder why Tolentino found out so late that he had mistakenly stacked his hopes and expectations on the wrong basket. Since year one of Cinemalaya, the political intent of films like those of Lav Diaz or of Political Film Collectives has *never* been emphasized in the competition and in the congress. It was only broached when Tolentino himself spoke about it in 2008. The emphasis has always been on the supposed twin virtues of artistic freedom and the democratization of the medium. Consequently, we now see the results of the supposed virtues of the call—by Tony Gloria and Kidlat Tahimik in 2005—“to let a thousand flowers bloom.” Obviously, freedom and democratization have not pushed filmmakers to the extreme tendencies that Tolentino and the alternative filmmakers have hoped for.

Moreover, the movement of Cinemalaya towards the market (“palengke”), specifically towards a niche market, which Tolentino finds frustrating, has always been emphasized in the congress and in the production process. In 2005, one of the congress objectives was to help indie filmmakers to either “create an instant and wider market” or “open up new markets”—in

other words, to reach out to a mass audience or to create a niche audience. And in 2008, one of the recommendations was for indie filmmakers to work on “a good story and a target audience” in order to achieve success in distribution. How could it be otherwise when most of the nuances of indie so far discussed in Cinemalaya point to specialized audiences and venues (i.e., cineastes, fellow and wannabe filmmakers, students and the youth sector, screening in SM or Robinsons’ special theaters and in international film festivals)? The only exception is what Deocampo alluded to as a phenomenon in the 1950s when indie became mainstream. But the circumstances of that time had to be that of *commercial* indies taking over a crumbling *commercial* mainstream, which is unlikely to happen now, at least in the next few years, notwithstanding the differences in quantity of production.

Tolentino is also inaccurate when he writes that the fourth year of the Cinemalaya is like the indie offering an olive branch of reconciliation to the mainstream. While allowing for a polyphony of critical voices in the venue of the congress, the very founding of Cinemalaya in 2005 was already a reconciliatory move to find a middle-ground, to build a bridge and not a wall, between what had been conventionally understood as indie and as mainstream. At the conclusion of the 2007 and 2008 congresses, Tiongson underscored that mainstream cinema can teach indie cinema about commercial viability. Tellingly, two of the major objectives of the first congress were to problematize how the digital format can aid in “the revival or revitalization of the Filipino film industry today” and “to identify and promote contacts between independent filmmakers and industry professionals.”

This explains why Tiongson cited Gloria (2005) and Jeturian (2006) as models for the indie; why the congress secured spaces for the likes of Matti, drawing expressed irritation from Deocampo; why Gil Portes (2006), Delos Reyes (2007), and Boy Abunda (2006), by degrees, implicitly think that the full-length indie filmmakers of Cinemalaya are heading towards the industry; or why a Manuel Conde program has been incorporated in an indie event.³¹

Tolentino's complaint clarifies what Cinemalaya is *not* and what Cinemalaya has done to alter practices, tendencies, and systems of relationship in Philippine film culture. First, Cinemalaya has fostered an atmosphere of community and tapped a niche market for middlebrow films, which it has implicitly encouraged filmmakers to make. Second, it has not explicitly championed the extreme practices and even the sociopolitical bent of alternative cinema, but has instead promoted artistic freedom, democratization, and an eye for the market. Ironically, it has even encouraged indie filmmakers to "give importance to the producer who can fund and distribute their film" (Tolentino 2008), paralleling the relationship between the grant-giving "gatekeeper" (Tolentino's term) that is Cinemalaya and the recipients of its grant. Third, it has helped in paving the way for, though not necessarily in promoting the development of a wider audience for what in the current setup remains to be alternative even to indie cinema – or "the margins of the margins."

Fourth, Cinemalaya, as expressed in several congress recommendations, has not been diametrically opposed to the mainstream, but to the tired old formula of filmmaking and its restrictions, as Tiongson qualified in 2005. Fifth, it has moderated the hostilities which have long been maintained between mainstream and indie, both in its exhibition component and its congress component. Sixth, it has congregated a community of filmmakers, film professionals, and film enthusiasts and has strengthened regional and international linkages. Seventh, Cinemalaya—as Gloria and Raymond Red (2005) described DV filmmaking—has proven to be an evolutionary phase and not a revolution in Philippine film. Eighth, it has implicitly perpetuated the idea, in spite of contrary celebrations and claims, that Philippine cinema is one.

In short, the course that Cinemalaya has set for itself is the creation of a kind of liminal space, a space for the "becoming" of a national cinema, a space that is poised for cultural expansion, if not for impossible cultural dominance. Obviously, since its

first year, Cinemalaya has aimed to become an established and not an independent (in the sense of “maverick”) institution: self-sustaining, far-reaching,³² and – as far as the congresses have been conducted – accordant with disparate conceptions of independence. It has remained romantic and idealistic in its promotion of (1) a harmonious community of indie filmmakers (though not all filmmakers who consider themselves indie subscribe to Cinemalaya’s institutionalized and rigid setup); (2) a financially sustainable film sector that is aimed at *all* Filipinos and conducive to fresh, varied, and uncompromised artistic endeavors; and (3) a national cinema culture free from the tyranny of market and profit, socially responsible, and expressive of Filipino-ness.³³

Notes

This article is a reworking of a paper that was first presented at the 5th Annual South East Asian Cinemas Conference, which had the theme, “States of Independence,” held at the Ateneo de Manila School of Humanities, Quezon City, Philippines, on 21 November 2008.

- 1 This was stated by Nicanor Tiongson at the conclusion of the 2005 congress as the reason for continuing the Cinemalaya festival and congress.
- 2 See, for example, the published filmographies compiled by Lucenio Martin Lauzon et al. in the *Plaridel: A Journal of Philippine Communication, Media, and Society* 1.1; 2.2; 3.2; and 5.2.
- 3 See the Cinemalaya Congress 2010 program.
- 4 Pito-pito, literally “seven-seven,” originally referred to a film practice, in which a film is shot in seven days and post-produced for another seven days on a shoestring budget. Later, the term simply connoted low-budget

filmmaking. On the other hand, the use of the term “serious” recurs in many nationalist writings about film, and refers to canonical films that tend to be non-generic and/or unpopular. “Outskirts,” “fringes,” or “margins” are used by film critics to describe the relationship between “serious” films and the mainstream industry; it signifies films that are made by commercial production companies, usually for prestige or for a niche market. See, for example, Del Mundo 1998 and David 1990.

- 5 Quark Henares echoes this phraseology in the 2005 congress.
- 6 In the *Sanghaya* article, Del Mundo characterizes the older directors, like Marilou Diaz-Abaya and Chito Roño, as being calculated and safe, and he praises the young filmmakers for coming up with fresh works. Significantly, in 2005, Del Mundo himself won for his film *Pepot Artista* the top prize in the first Cinemalaya competition. His film may be regarded as a marker of the shift from the older tendencies of Philippine cinema (i.e., scene-oriented, episodic, didactic, dialogue-driven filmmaking) to the newer ones, epitomized by the other winners of that year – *Big Time* and *Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros*. In the congress of 2006, Gil Portes claimed that the screenplay for *Pepot Artista* was written before Del Mundo’s *Maynila sa Mga Kuko ng Liwanag*, which is acknowledged by many as the first important film of the Second Golden Age. In retrospect, *Pepot Artista* may be said to be a tribute, on several levels, to “the good ‘ol days” of Philippine film.
- 7 As did Nick Deocampo, with *Pedrong Palad*, and Raymond Red, with *Sakay*.
- 8 Notably, Laranas and Henares are not included in the recent volume that most properly characterizes this alternative tradition at present. See de la Cruz 2010.

- 9 According to its official website, Cinemalaya is “a non-stock, not-for-profit, non-government foundation dedicated to the development and promotion of Philippine Independent Film.” See www.cinemalaya.org.
- 10 Tiongson based this assertion on Kidlat Tahimik’s lecture in the congress. This is a tall order, of course. Filmmaker, Sigfried Barros-Sanchez, who made a film each for Cinemalaya and Cinema One Originals, expresses the weight of the label “indie” in the context of current Philippine film culture when he wrote in one YahooGroup! thread: “ni minsan ata ay hindi ko nasabing “indie” ako. di ko pa nile-labelan ang sarili ko. unlike the others who made films para mapansin ng mainstream at mabigyan ng pagkakataong makapagdirek sila doon, ako naman ay baligtad. kasi galing ako sa mainstream na pumasok sa mundo ng indie at gumawa ng pelikula na mukhang kapag napanood na mga taga-mainstream ay hindi na ako makakabalik sa mainstream”(2005).
- 11 The documentary, featuring Vilma Santos and Luis Manzano using colloquial language and humor, is apparently meant for a popular audience.
- 12 In his keynote speech in 2006, Roger Garcia, a foreign observer of Philippine cinema, presumed that the tradition represented by Brocka, Bernal, and Mike de Leon stemming from the industry is separate from the alternative tradition represented by Raymond Red and Nick Deocampo. See *Kino-Sin* (2007) for insights on the “alternative tradition.”
- 13 Nick Deocampo also makes this point later in the same congress.
- 14 This obscurity is what Deocampo, in the 2005 congress, claimed to be the characteristic of independence. Hence, he asserted further that the short films of Benedicto

Pinga or Lamberto Avellana are unknown to many, and that the short works of the likes of Roxlee are known only to a specialized audience. In *Short Film*, Deocampo attempts to rectify this by featuring five scripts from award-winning short films and providing a time-chart of the development of Philippine short film, a list of prize-winning works, and a filmography of about 500 titles.

- 15 Both are Brocka's films. Brocka succinctly puts his filmmaking philosophy. Thus: "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" (262).
- 16 Freefest was originally called the First Independent Full-Length Film Festival.
- 17 In a lecture he sent to be read in the 2005 congress, Daza already raised the same points. See also an interesting critique of the use of DV by Baumgärtel in "The Downside of Digital: German Media Critic Plays Devil's Advocate," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* 24 Sept. 2006: J2; and a response to it in Marinel Cruz's "Jon Red Reacts to Tilman Baumgärtel's Article: The Maker, Not the Medium," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* 28 Sept. 2006: D1.
- 18 In the congress: Raymond Red steadfastly promoted HDV; Kidlat Tahimik cast an aside that, being no purist, he just might be able to finish a film he has been working on for two decades if he shoots, not even with a mini-DV, but with a Hi-8; Ric Camaligan spoke about SM Cinemas' support for the indie through the installation of video projectors in major SM Malls. Relative to such an emphasis, there is almost no mention

- of films shot on celluloid but purport to be indie, like *Ploning*. Perhaps no small reason is the fact that the Cinemalaya competition is open only to digital films.
- 19 Critic Mike Rapatan, in the congress of 2006, attempted to descriptively encompass diverse indie films in three distinct, though not mutually exclusive, film representational practices: 1) the practice of opposition to mainstream cinema (*Ebolusyon ng Isang Pamilyang Pilipino* and *Maximo Oliveros*); 2) the practice of hybridization (*Big Time* and *Dilim*); and 3) the practice of cultural stylization (*Tuli*). However, the last two practices in certain instances would be just as meaningful when applied to popular mainstream films.
 - 20 See the YahooGroup! thread of exchanges about *Boso*, beginning with Abet Umil's "BosoRebyu: Anong Klaseng Saksi ang Piping Tom na 'to mula sa Kisame." 8 Apr. 2005. Online Posting. *Cinemanil aYahoogroups!* <<http://movies.groups.yahoo.com/group/Cinemanila/message/1168>>.
 - 21 Cornejo directed Cinemalaya's *Big Time* and, later, Star Cinema's *First Day High*. Reyes compares these two films by Cornejo and calls the treatment of the Cinemalaya film "indie" and the treatment of the Star Cinema film "mainstream." One possible reason, apart from the circumstances of their production and exhibition, is that the former is a niche film and the latter, a film meant for the mass audience.
 - 22 One Internet Movie Database (IMDB) user describes Henares' *A Date With Jao Mapa* as "fresh" in relation to the old Filipino comedy, but "old by Hollywood standards."
 - 23 The alternativeness of these narratives encased in the popular feature are "new" and "original," but certainly

not radical; these “risky” narratives are in what mainstream productions aim to produce now, following both the local indie trend and the high-concept film trend in Hollywood.

- 24 *Still Lives* which premiered in January 2001 at the Mowelfund Film Institute, the home of many alternative filmmakers, was warmly received by a community of artists and supporters.
- 25 In 2008, Lim wrote and directed the sequel *Xenoa 2: Clash of Bloods*, starring mainstream celebrities but still featuring minor stars, Victor Basa and Roxanne Barcelo.
- 26 Tess Fuentes believes that indies have better chances in foreign festivals, and that the victory of the indie in world cinema is the victory of Philippine film.
- 27 For instance, in the Global Lens forum held at the UP Cine Adarna on September 12, 2008, Joji Alonso revealed that she recouped her investment in *Kubrador* after the film participated in seventy-two festivals.
- 28 Zafra, from whom Tiongson draws the recommendation, gives an anecdotal remark of such a “false” notion: “ay, [winner sa] international film festivals, it’s probably going to be artsy. I probably won’t have a good time.” This idea was once again reiterated by filmmaker, Adolfo Alix Jr., in the congress of 2009 – that audiences must change their perception of indie films. This suggests the continuing difference between the popular regard for indie and mainstream cinemas. The question that must be asked, following Deocampo’s notion of indie is: is not this difference in regard for indie and mainstream films expected, or even, *necessary*? Moreover, what are the implications of a change, if at all possible, in popular regard for indie? See Note 14.
- 29 See the Cinemalaya Congress 2010 program.
- 30 In a somewhat similar vein, critic Eli Guieb in the congress of 2010, asserted that indie filmmakers may have the boldness to show the shocking aspects of poverty onscreen, or even to allegorize the nation, but the

question remains: What alternative social vision can these filmmakers give and where does indie go after the shock?

- 31 Regarding Manuel Conde's discursive association with contemporary "indie," see this author's "Manuel Conde and Filipino 'Indie' Cinema" (2009).
- 32 This can be gleaned from the 2005 Congress closing remarks of Nestor Jardin, now president of the Cinemalaya Foundation, when a foundation had yet to be established. He said, "I think that the sustainability will be better taken care of if this is non-government, because papaano kung wala na kami, because ako, si Nic [Tiongson], si Laurice [Guillen], and some other government leaders, who are very interested in independent film, would not be here next year or three or four years from now. So we thought that a non-government foundation would be best. [...] We want some of the winners to enter into international film festivals and competitions abroad. We want to go into training and education also.... We want to develop an audience for independent films.... We also want, eventually, five, ten years from now, to go into research and archiving for independent cinema."
- 33 The idea of social responsibility, though implicit in the past congresses, was only emphasized and problematized in 2008, apparently as a response to the then recent indie films, which Marilou Diaz-Abaya in 2006 rightly described as tending to be "parochial" and characterized by "great internal struggles among ordinary people," but not very "critical of the structural problems in our political and economic life."

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