

Jasmine Nadua Trice and Diego Maranan

Cinemaspace, Cyberspace: Mapping the Philippine Moving Image

5th Annual Southeast Asian Cinemas Conference, State of Independence

Manila, Philippines

20-22 November 2008

Introduction

This presentation will consist of two, interrelated parts, reflecting the interests of the participants in integrating the critical and theoretical, on the one hand, and the artistic and material, on the other. Operating under the same rubric and tackling parallel conceptual problems regarding nation, the moving image, and notions of the public, we hope to unravel some distinctions between art and criticism, following the cue of many practitioners and theorists in the Philippines, in order to sketch out possibilities for links between Philippine cinema as a digital mode of production, the usual way in which cinema and new media are linked, as well as examining the use of Philippine online spaces as a digital mode of circulation.

I. Criticism as Production

I will present the first section, entitled, “Criticism as Production.” This part of the presentation will offer an overview of themes that emerged over the course of my dissertation research on transnational, independent cinema circulation within Manila, themes which I felt invited further research and analysis. In this way, this presentation is in part a proposal, signposting possible avenues for conceptualizing and positioning Philippine independent cinema within the contexts of new media. Rather than drawing solid conclusions, I hope to pose a series of questions for

analysis for what I hope will be a developing body of theory and history specific to the burgeoning, digital, independent cinema movement in the Philippines. Building from Michael Warner's work on publics and counterpublics, I use the term "circulation" to describe both the processes of distribution and exhibition of films themselves, as well as the discourses surrounding these processes.

These discourses are manifest in both the rhetorics of institutions, such as state bodies, industry organizations, and independent film collectives, as well as the everyday practices of audiences, who narrativize and discuss the practices of cinemagoing in the Philippines on various websites and blogs. This heavy online presence came as somewhat of a surprise to me, as my research at a media-communications NGO in Manila suggested very low internet use among most Filipinos, based on interviews with various organizations across the country.¹ However, studies of actual internet use vary, dependent at times on the ideological agendas of the funding institutions driving them. The Digital Review of the Asia Pacific, a fairly reliable source, puts Internet penetration at 1%. However, Raul Pertierra's work demonstrates that while household access is relatively low, putting the number at 10%, internet use for much of the country is through internet cafes, which have become a standard offering of most cities and large towns in the Philippines.²

Thus online discussion of Philippine independent cinema reaches a significant, though clearly limited audience. It occupies various media forms from the visual, to print, to the moving image, emerging from various segments of society (mainly in the Philippines, but sometimes abroad as

¹ *People's Communications for Development (PC4D)* (Quezon City: Isis International Manila, 2007).

² Raul Pertierra, "Computer-Mediated-Interactive-Communication-Technology (CMICT) & the Anthropology of Communication: A Philippine Example," in *Teletronikk 2.2008* (Fornebu, Norway: Telenor ASA, 2008). <http://www.telenor.com/teletronikk/volumes/index.php?page=ing&id1=75&id2=206&id3=1018&select=> (October 2, 2008).

well), and embodying varied modes of address (Tag-lish, English; academic, conversational). As a discourse, it constitutes a public that exists, as Michael Warner argues, merely by virtue of being addressed “in relation to texts and their circulation.”³ Rather than other forms of identity, such as nation, for example, that embody an ongoing existence, one is a member of a public through one’s engagement with a circulating discourse. For instance, you are Filipino, American, and/or Canadian, straight, bisexual, or gay, whether you are awake, asleep, young, old. However, you are only the public of this lecture in this room, for the duration of its address. Unlike some forms of correspondence such as emails, texts, or memos, the addressee of public discourse is always “yet to be realized,” open-ended, and imaginary (though with a social basis).⁴

Thus, it would seem that there is great transformative potential for such public discourse, particularly when the project of self-reflexive, recuperative, national-cinema-building attaches to it, as evidenced by one local critic’s call to build a “community of informed and active viewers.”⁵ Describing the need for a screen for local independent cinema, one filmmaker’s elaboration puts it this way: “[T]o create a route, one has to put a jeepney regularly at a stationed place so that passengers can come every time, with a certainty that a jeepney will always be there.”⁶ I would suggest that public cinematic discourse is also key for constituting an audience, not bound by the unfolding of a film in space and time, but by their relation to the cinematic texts that encounter them. New media offers one potential space for organizing cinematic, public discourse, particularly because to varying degrees, Philippine independent cinema cultures enact many of the theoretical issues linked to new media, both in circulation practices and in textuality.

³ Michael Warner, “Publics and Counterpublics,” *Public Culture* 14. No. 1 (2002): 49-90, 50.

⁴ Ibid 55.

⁵ Alexis Tioseco, *Criticine*, “One ‘M’ is better than two,” December 30, 2007, <http://alexistioseco.wordpress.com/2007/12/30/mmff-mff/> (June 4, 2008)

⁶ Kidlat Tahimik, quoted by Emmanuel Dela Cruz. “Indie *Sine*: The Home of Brave New Works,” in *Bagong Agos: The Current Wave of Philippine Digital Cinema*, Festival program. (Ortigas: January 16-24, 2007).

For the sake of time, I'll give overviews of two issues here: first, Tom Ryall's notion of "cinema cultures," some ways they are manifest in Manila, and how this parallels ideas of "virtual culture" as established by Howard Rheingold; second, I'll point to some key issues relevant to both new media in general, and the narrative and aesthetics of some particular Filipino, digital films.

IA. Virtual Screen Cultures

Initially quoting Sigfried Kracauer, Tom Ryall writes that public film culture is " 'an intermingling of ideas into recognizable formations' constituted by the ideologies of film that circulate and compete in a given historical period and the forms in which such ideologies are institutionalized."⁷ Film cultures combine into identifiable formations, made up of varied ideas and discourses that circulate both in specialized settings and across the social continuum. These cultures emerge from "the immediate contexts in which films are made and circulated such as studios, cinemas, and film journals, and those contexts which have to be constructed from the material network of the culture, the philosophies and ideologies of film."⁸ A given film culture is not uniform but is rather a "complex non-monolithic entity containing within itself a set of practices and institutions, some of which interact in a mutually supportive fashion, some of which provide alternatives to each other, and some of which operate in a self-consciously oppositional fashion." As Barbara Klinger notes, working from Ryall, "as an 'ensemble of practices,' a film culture provides an influential framework for film exhibition and

⁷ Tom Ryall, *Alfred Hitchcock and the British Cinema* (London: Athlone, 1996).

⁸ Ibid.

consumption.”⁹ Ryall’s work dates to the mid-nineties, before the internet would provide another means for discursive circulation of a film culture, within a context that many scholars of new media posit as democratizing due to its interactive, social, “Web 2.0”-driven features. Discussed in various forms of essays or blog entries, broken into representative fragments on YouTube and other sites, cinema receives public commentary. Howard Rheingold describes that in a traditional community, we search through acquaintances, friends, colleagues, and then exchange information.¹⁰ However, in a virtual community, we go directly to where favorite subjects are discussed and share with people who share our passions; these communities allow for the development of social capital. Similarly, Flew argues, “[i]nteractivity, virtuality, and globalization, as developments associated with digitization, convergence, and networking have promoted new forms of social interaction, new possibilities for the construction of identity, and new forms of community.” These are valuable perspectives on the novelty of the technological means of forming community, and they are in many ways typical of the discourse surrounding “new” media forms. In terms of Filipino cinema, however, Filipino cinemagoing has traditionally maintained this “democratizing” principle and fostered community and sociality.

Speaking in a British context, film scholar Dudley Andrew posits a teleology of cinemagoing that moves from the “distraction” of the fairground to the rapt engagement of the moviehouse:

Did the movies ever permit such distracted viewing? Perhaps in those early days when they were projected at local fairs or when traveling exhibitors set up a screening in the village square, audiences could wander about, talk to their neighbors, and intermittently attend to the films... They didn’t submit to these

⁹ Barbara Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies, and the Home* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of CA Press, 2006).

¹⁰ Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (Boston: MIT Press, 2000). <http://www.rheingold.com/vc/book/> (October 2, 2008).

movies; they glanced at them. Fairs, traveling exhibitors, Japanese benshi, parish and factory screenings—all these presentations make use of images within rituals of a sort different from the Hollywood ritual of ‘going to the movies.’¹¹

Andrew speaks of this pre-moviehouse-protocol mode as a “democratic,” as opposed to the “sacral” ritual of the moviehouse. What is interesting for the matters here is that within Manila’s spaces of alternative exhibition, these democratic and sacred divisions operate in very different ways, often combining the abstraction of the arthouse text, predicated on “maximum ambiguity” and thus, difficulty and analysis, with the standards of cinematic comportment more commonly associated with the fairground or “village square” for Andrew, or the “*pang-masa*,” local theaters for *elitista* Filipino columnists complaining about inappropriate moviehouse behaviors.¹²

Viewers autonomously fragment the text through coming in and out of the viewing space; they may also speak to their seatmates, text message friends, or otherwise divide attentions between the cinematic text and surrounding social life. Even outside the domain of new media circulation, cinemagoing in Manila adheres to egalitarian principles.

Joel David and Bienvenido Lumbera use the term “national pastime” to describe the fervor of Filipino cinephilia in practice.¹³ Like the crowds who attended movies at the independent theaters that thrived during the 1980s, such as the Paramount, Circle, and Delta theaters in Quezon City, audience members virtually flock to a Philippine blogosphere—perhaps not to watch movies, but in order to share anecdotes of movie viewing, pirated DVD shopping, or to provide directions and tips about both practices, posting maps of key locations for pirated DVDs,

¹¹ Dudley Andrew, “Public Rituals and Private Space,” in Ina Rae Hark, ed. *Exhibition: The Film Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 164.

¹² Dexter Osorio, “Dex in the City,” *The Manila Times*, May 8, 2005; Connie Veneracion, “The Shang Cinema Example,” *The Manila Standard*, May 3, 2007.

¹³ Joel David, *The National Pastime: Contemporary Philippine Cinema* (Manila: Anvil Publishing, 1990).

or explaining how one might reach Cubao Expo via public transport. The web has therefore become a key site of Filipino “film culture.”

In addition to discourses which examine Philippine independent cinema as an existing, constituted category, there are also myriad images produced by Filipinos who don’t necessarily identify as “filmmakers.” These non-professional works create an online, interactive variation of an archive, containing fragmented, “vernacular” moving images of everyday life. Sites such as YouTube, but also the less trafficked PinoyTube, which caters specifically to Filipino video-makers/posters, work in a variety of ways to circulate images of, for instance, traveling within Metro-Manila, depicting the processes of transportation through the city via MRT. Akin to the early cinema actualities that emphasized spectacle of technology and verisimilitude over narrative, the images online shift the invisible terrain of the everyday to the arena of spectacle, and the localized processes of mundane life in the city to the globalized sphere of the web.

In these ways, the presence of Philippine cinema online acts as an equalizing mechanism, in which amateur videos share space with professional works. In itself, this is not very notable, perhaps. However, it mirrors the exhibition and production practices already at work within Philippine independent cinema, which operates outside large-scale industries, within the small-scale exhibition of university screenings or microcinemas, juxtaposing shorts and features, educational films and narratives, documentaries by first-time filmmakers and established pieces of cinematic canon. The indiscriminate mixing of genres, national origins, and functionality moves the organizing principle from the text to other areas: its mode of production (self-funded, financed by European arts agencies, development funders, or NGOs, rather than, say, Star

Cinema), as well as its mode of exhibition (alternative screening spaces, rather than multiplexes¹⁴) and distribution (purchasing the works directly from filmmakers). Rather than embracing modernity's compartmentalization of everyday life, these on- and offline spaces perhaps offer an alternative modernity that opens meaningful avenues for artistic production, consumption, and the liminal spaces in between.¹⁵

II. Proposal for a digital archive/visualization tool

Overview

This section outlines some technical considerations for a proposed digital web-based application that visually organizes and archives information on the Web related to Philippine cinema.

Treating the Web as “the world's the biggest database”¹⁶, this creative project would harvest information on Philippine cinema that has already been uploaded to the Web. The ideas outlined here rely on methods developed in the practices of information visualization, human computer interaction (HCI) design, and database design.

One type of visualization is central to this proposed application: *Social network* graphs have found uses particularly in social and behavioral sciences to uncover and describe structures of influence and flows of communication. For instance, in Exxon Secrets (www.exxonsecrets.org),

¹⁴ Indie Sine in Robinson's Galleria problematizes this strict delineation.

¹⁵ We don't want to suggest YouTube as an ideal; for social movements, for example, posting on the site is dangerous. YouTube will hand over footage to law enforcement if it's necessary for identifying people, and they can also track your IP address, which they will also give to police or the Federal government if requested. In addition, many criticize user-generated content as capitalism's means of profiting from users' unpaid labor. Other, nonprofit sites such as archive.org, indymedia.org, and ourmedia.org don't make money from users, indymedia won't track your IP address, and they won't remove material at the request of law enforcement. For more on this, see Sasha Costanza-Chock, “The Immigrant Rights Movement on the Net: Between ‘Web 2.0’ and Comunicación Popular,” *American Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (September 2008): 851-863.

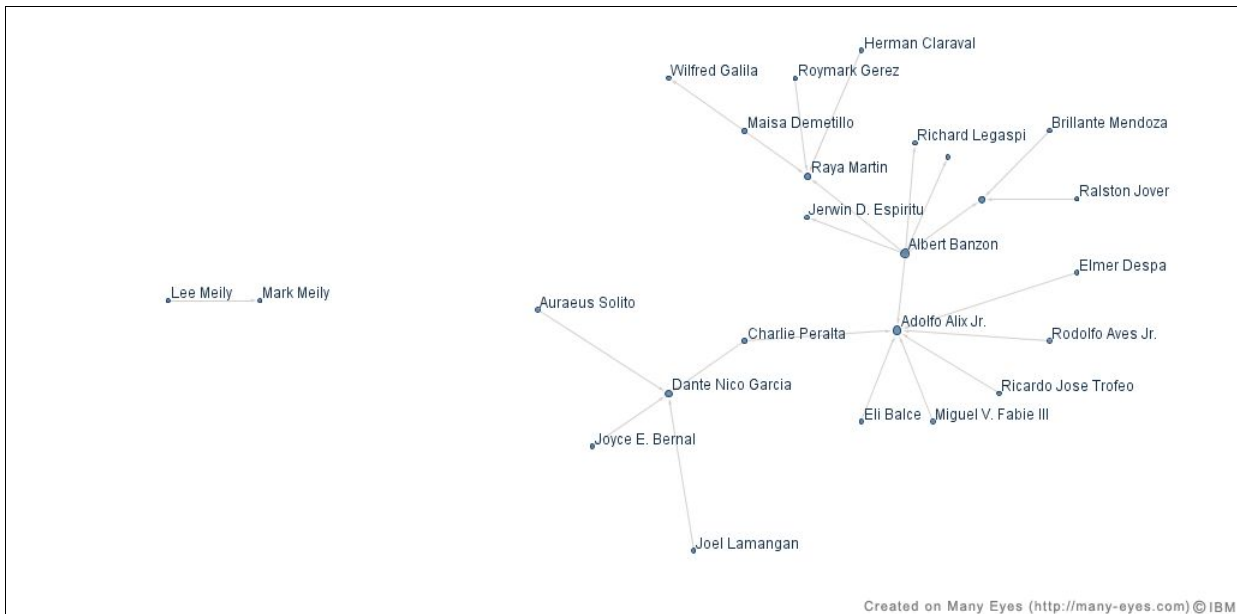
¹⁶ Tony Loton, “Access the world's biggest database with Web DataBase Connectivity,” *JavaWorld*, March 16, 2001, <http://www.javaworld.com/javaworld/jw-03-2001/jw-0316-webdb.html>

Greenpeace provides the user a blank page on which users can “place” an icon (taken from a bank of icons provided by the site) which represents either an institution or an individual. The user can then click on the icon and show what other institutions or individuals are or have been associated with the individual or institution, respectively, represented by that icon. Detailed information about each icon can be displayed with a few mouse clicks; icons can be selectively hidden or displayed. Exxon Secrets is a variant of a social network graph where users are encouraged to uncover, as it were, networks of influence in the petroleum industry and in institutions that affect policy related to climate change.

Example: Visualizing professional collaborations

Applying the practice of visualizing social networks to the field of Philippine cinema, we can construct a network graph using a small data set manually taken from information posted on IMDb.com and generated using Many Eyes, a free, publicly available visualization web-based tool:

Figure 1. A view of Philippine of directors and cinematographers who have worked together on films listed on IMDb.com. A larger, interactive version is available on <http://manyeyes.alphaworks.ibm.com/manyeyes/visualizations/philippine-cinema-directors-and-cine>



In Figure 1, each arrow connecting a director with a cinematographer represents a film they have collaborated on (as listed on IMDb.com). Multiple film collaborations are not indicated, and information about the films themselves are absent. However, these details, as well as other kinds of information, could be easily incorporated in the proposed web-based application.

A version of this graph that incorporates much more of the publicly-available data about Philippine cinema might prove to interesting and useful in several ways and on different levels:

- Social pathfinding:** Director X could use this graph to determine the individuals she would need talk to in order to meet (and possibly work with) Cinematographer Y. She could even choose a “best path” from among several paths based on any number of criteria. (For instance, Director X could choose a path that contains the most number of people who are currently be on speaking terms with each other and that contains the most

number of family friends.)

- **Fostering new professional networks:** The graph can show at a glance clusters of collaboration (i.e., which group of people tend to work with each other), as well as individuals who belong in multiple clusters. These “bridging individuals” might prove to be crucial to the formation of new professional clusters and lead to new kinds of collaborations.
- **Research:** The graph might be useful in explaining specific trends in Philippine cinema based on a broad understanding of who tends to work with who.
- **Outreach and education :** The graph could be used as a creative tool for thinking about and describing various aspects of Philippine filmmaking.

Social network graphs are but one kind of visualization that could be relevant to our proposed web-based application. *Cartographic visualizations* associate data with a well-defined terrain, such as a representation of the “real” (i.e., physical) world. The terrain could also be located in a virtual space (e.g., the Web), a conceptual space (e.g., the evolutionary tree as reconstructed by evolutionary taxonomists), or a fictional physical landscape (e.g., Middle-earth). Potential uses of cartographic visualization—which can also be combined with social network graphs—are numerous:

- Blogs on Philippine cinema can be mapped onto a Google Map using extracted data about the location of their authors.
- Trackbacks and comments can be used to map inter-blog conversations, referencing, and other forms of participation in discourses on Philippine cinema.
- Virtual exhibition spaces could be juxtaposed against physical exhibition spaces and simultaneously mapped onto a Google Map, with information about filmmakers and films

associated with each space embedded in the mapping.

- Using network graphs, blog entries about certain films specified by a user could be highlighted and contextualized visually in the space of online writing on cinema in general.

Using network graphs, maps, and other types of visualization, the proposed application could leverage advances in the field of data visualization, starting with what Ben Schneiderman introduced as a key best practice for gaining insight from data: “Overview first, zoom and filter, then details on demand”.¹⁷ The network graph presented in Figure 1 can be augmented to satisfy this principle. We can develop navigation tools that allow customized views of that graph, giving the user the option to view only, say, directors over the age of 40 that have collaborated with cinematographers active within the past five years.

In the following sections, we outline two important technical considerations in the design and implementation of this proposed application.

Data types and structures

Using standard techniques in software development (as outlined, for instance, by Sommerville¹⁸), we would need identify and specify *data classes* (i.e., unique types) that represent agents, objects, or ephemera related to Philippine cinematic discourse. We wish to come up with a data scheme that can anticipate a range of possible situations. (“What happens if the director is also the director of photography as well as the producer? What if the film has only screened on YouTube, or in Second Life?”)

¹⁷B. Shneiderman, “The eyes have it: a task by data type taxonomy for information visualizations,” in *Visual Languages, 1996. Proceedings., IEEE Symposium on*, 1996, 336-343, doi:10.1109/VL.1996.545307

¹⁸Ian Sommerville, *Software Engineering (6th Edition)*, 6th ed. (Addison Wesley, 2000)

One data scheme is represented in the data classes described below. (Abbreviated, alternative, or nonstandard nomenclature has been employed where we found it necessary.)

cVideo	
text	Title
date	DateReleased
hh:mm:ss	Length
cLocation	ReleaseLocation
cPerson	Director
cPerson	Producer
cPerson	DirectorOfPhotography
cPerson(s)	Actor_1, Actor_2, etc.
text	Description
(video type)	[feature length, documentary, short, commentary, etc]
etc	etc
cPerson	
text	Name
cLocation	PhysicalLocation_1, PhysicalLocation_2, etc
cLocation	VirtualLocation_1, VirtualLocation_2, etc.
text	Notes
etc	etc
cWriting	
text	Title
cPerson	Author
cLocation	Repository
cWriting	WritingItCites_1, WritingItCites_2, etc.
cVideo	VideosItCites_1, VideosItCites_2, etc.
(writing type)	[Blog, Journal Article, etc]
text	NotesAboutThisWriting
cLocation	
text	Name
URL	WebAddress
URL	GoogleMapAddress
text	Description
text	Notes
etc	etc
cExhibitionSpace	
text	Name
cLocation	PhysicalLocation
cLocation	VirtualLocation
text	Notes
etc	etc

This scheme allows us to simplify greatly the various kinds of objects, agents, and ephemera related to Philippine cinema. Full-length films, documentaries, video commentaries, and shorts—whether posted online or not—are all classified as type **cVideo**. (The “c” stands for “class”.) Directors, actors, blog authors, cinema scholars, and moviegoers are all instances of type **cPerson**. Exhibition spaces can be either online (e.g., a Facebook video gallery or a YouTube channel) or located in the physical world (e.g., Mogwai), but are collectively referred to by the class **cExhibitionSpace**. Canonical texts, scholarly articles, blog posts, news articles, and even website comments (if they have their own unique URL), are all examples of type

cWriting. Using this way of representing information, we can construct relational database tables (using MySQL, for example) from which we can extract various kinds of data and data relationships, which in turn can then be used in a unified, web-based application that provides users with various views into Philippine cinema-related data.

Populating the database

Data can be entered manually or extracted from a variety of data sources using application programming interfaces (APIs)—code that websites provide to programmers for accessing data stored on the site. Facebook, YouTube, the Internet Video Archive, and Google Maps all provide public APIs. However, as of this writing, IMDb does not provide a publicly available API. IMDb also forbids data mining its site without IMDb's written consent, although software engineers have already done so and have shared publicly the tools they have used to do so^{19,20}. The need to get IMDb's written consent to mine their data might pose a significant block to the application legitimately harvesting data from the Web on an automatic, regular basis.

Summary

In this section, we outlined the possibility of a web-based application that visually (re)organizes information harvested from the web about Philippine cinema. We used a network graph of professional collaborations to illustrate one type of visualization that this web-based application would be able to generate, and suggested some immediate uses for such a visualization. We proposed a typology of data classes that would be useful for this application, and outlined possibilities and a significant stumbling block towards gathering the kind of data the application

¹⁹“Copyright and Conditions of Use,” *IMDb*, http://www.imdb.com/help/show_article?conditions

²⁰Stephen Becker IV, “ruby software developer engineer:imdb api,” *Becker [Coding Like A Hobo]*, http://stephenbeckeriv.com/imdb_api

would need. Further work needs to be done in fleshing out the technical requirements and the high-level design of this proposed application, which could provide a platform not only for uncovering and articulating trends in Philippine cinema, but also for inviting wider public participation in the field.