

Forum Kritika: A Closer Look at *Manila by Night*
**THE LONG TAKE: PASSAGE AS FORM
IN THE PHILIPPINE FILM**

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Abstract

The essay evolves a thesis around the scene in *Manila by Night* involving a gay couturier (Manay Sharon) and a blind masseuse (Bea) who weave through a dark alley in the city and engage in a meandering exchange. It asks the question: Can Philippine film theory contemplate a different notion of “passage” or “interval” that is not exclusively a function of plot or an always-already marker of time? How does this notion reference the heterogeneous locale intrinsic to it? Using this specific scene as aperture, it probes other examples in the Philippine oeuvre through such films as Maryo J. de Los Reyes’s *Gabun: Ama Mo, Ama Ko* and Brillante Mendoza’s *Kinatay*.

Keywords

editing, development, image, Manila, walking in the city

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THE MILIEU OF THE NOCTURNAL CITY OF MANILA is not mere locus of action in Ishmael Bernal's *Manila by Night*. It is an aesthetic or a tropic, a sensitivity and a turning. Manila is space and moment; it is speed, climate, appearance, sound, habitus of humans. It is darkness, electricity, ablution, drag, the shedding of exterior. It is through this trajectory of the aesthetic that this essay works on a particular form in the film that may be co-extensive with a turn in the history of the cinematic in the Philippines. In other words, this is a study on the history of an aesthetic, of a form in the film that is provisionally characterized as the "long take," an accepted term in film theory referring to a shot that takes longer than usual before it shifts to another shot.

The long take may be viewed in relation to the classic antinomies of film theory between montage and *mise en scène*. We need not belabor here the debate between the French and Russian filmmakers and theorists and reiterate the premises of the duality (Bordwell). We might be better served if we look at the long take in relation to the other modes of editing within the film, so that we could indent its "turning," as it were, and elude the classic problematic of the cut and the tableau. The film historian David Bordwell is of the mind that "we can recognize that both staging and editing are tactics for guiding our attention.... That is, classical *découpage* subordinates staging to editing, so that the master shot establishes and orients; the space will be articulated primarily through closer views, matches on vision or movement, and the like. Alternatively, we can think of the *mise en scène* directors as generally subordinating editing to staging. Cuts will not only enlarge details ... but may also accentuate an action. We no longer need to see editing as a blemish on the beauty of an unbroken scene or as a concession to Hollywood's colonization of our vision" (Bordwell, "*La Nouvelle*" 19). Conversely, we no longer need to see the long take as an uninterrupted lingering, a hovering of the lens over reality without impediment or strain or struggle. Roland Barthes puts it most felicitously from a transdisciplinary perspective when he valorizes the tableau as intellectual and articulate, "simultaneously significant and propaedeutic, impressive and reflexive, moving and conscious of the channels of emotion. The epic scene in Brecht, the shot in Eisenstein are so many tableaux" (173).

The essay evolves a thesis around the scene in *Manila by Night* involving a gay couturier (Manay Sharon) and a blind masseuse (Bea) who weave through a dark alley in the city (fig. 1) and engage in a meandering exchange, with the former remarking in the end that it has proved to be the most useless conversation in his life. Such impression of seeming purposelessness lends itself to a discussion of Philippine film form that in the main invests in plot and certain devices that prompt its movement forward. Can Philippine film theory contemplate a different notion of "passage" or "interval" that is not exclusively a function of plot or an always-already marker of time? How does this notion reference the heterogeneous locale intrinsic to it? Using this specific scene as aperture, it probes other examples in the Philippine oeuvre through such films as Maryo J. De Los Reyes's *Gabun: Ama Mo, Ama Ko* and Brillante Mendoza's *Kinatay*.



Figure 1. Manay, Bea, and Gaying (Bea’s assistant) walk through Misericordia in Chinatown district. (Photo courtesy of Bernardo Bernardo, used with permission)

The meeting between these two characters is prompted by the importuning of one of Bea’s clients and Manay’s latest fling, Alex, a student who sings in a bar, to find medical help for the blind woman of whom he is a client. Manay thinks of the girlfriend of Manay’s other lover, the taxi driver Febrero. Adelina is supposedly a nurse; this is her masquerade. She is, in fact, a sex worker in a brothel. One night, Manay visits the massage parlor where Bea works. Here, he strikes a conversation with Bea’s lesbian lover, the drug dealer Kano. Manay and Bea, accompanied by her guide Gaying, finally meet and he walks her home through a narrow street. They first stop by a shrine where Bea, along with another woman, prays and then proceed. A long shot then captures the locale. The exchange begins with Manay alerting Bea to a “canal” through which she might fall. In this sequence, there are four cuts interspersed with dolly shots of the three that either track their movement or approach them.

Seq. 21: Misericordia. Ext. Night.

Late night. Manay, Bea, and Gaying pray before street altar on Misericordia. A prostitute joins them momentarily then leaves. A doddering old woman genuflects before the altar. Presently they leave.

- MANAY: Be careful, there's a canal. Oh, I'm going crazy. Why? I don't know. (*Giggles*) Funny right? I make my own questions, and I answer them myself. (*Giggles again*) How about you, how long have you been blind?
- BEA: Since childhood.
- MANAY: Really? How did that happen?
- BEA: I was about to turn three then when suddenly my vision blurred until it dimmed. I was in Olongapo then.
- MANAY: Oh, you don't realize how lucky you are! Really, you are so lucky. I mean – that is the tragedy of my life: I see everything. Even those I'm not supposed to see, I see. Even if there is nothing to see, I still see it. Crazy!
- BEA: But you might be just imagining what you usually see.
- MANAY: What do you say? It's true as well. Philosophical! Actually, what I mean to say, everyone in the world is crazy! Isn't it? Those faces that they show us, they are not true their true faces, right? People have different faces: faces for family, there are faces for friends, for spouse, for girl friend, for swardfriend (gay friend), etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, right? They continue changing. One on top of the other. Like me: when my boyfriend tells me "I love you," what face is that? It looks like it's to get money, right?

They pass by Miriam, Virgie's prostitute acquaintance, refusing a cheapskate customer's bargaining.

- BEA: But why will you pity yourself? Even if everyone is crazy, the world turns. Every good thing we do comes back to us one day, right?
- MANAY: Whatever. Queen of the Martyrs Part Two.
- BEA: As for me, I will only see what I have to see. The rest, I don't see, and I don't mind.
- MANAY: But what can you see when you're blind? My God, this is the most useless conversation I've had in my whole life! (*They arrive in front of Bea's house*) Oh, by the way, I have a friend who is a nurse. I will take you to her; she might be able to help you. I'm sure she has many friends who are eye specialists. Anyway, I've done my good deed for the day like a good girl scout. (*Leaves*).
- BEA: Don't forget to pass by for me.
- MANAY: Yes.
- GAYING: Be careful, there's a canal.
- BEA: I know.

(Bernal, trans. by author)

This long take at the outset is a pause in the hectic rhythm, both visual and sonic, of the film and the city. Deep in the night, and most probably in the liminal hours after midnight, the cadence of the vicinity changes quite markedly (see video excerpt “Sequence 21: Manay, Bea, and Gaying stroll down Misericordia” <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JuI32L-ySzM&feature=youtu.be>> [Produced by Regal Films]). The passage, this canal of sorts, may be analyzed as consisting of three parts. It commences with the empirical notion of sight and the history of its loss, with the blind woman recounting how she lost her sense of sight when she was a girl in Olongapo, which used to be a thriving sex city close to the American military bases. Her ability to see gradually dimmed until it was totally gone. This narrative of blindness terraces into a reflection on the futility of empirical seeing: that because people take on different veneers to assume different personas in different situations, their true persons could never be seen; that seeing is an inadequate discerner of the interior/internal or inner-ness; and that the veil of the “real” could never be raised. This rhetorical gesture necessarily implicates human performance in which the agent resorts to guile in order to establish relationships with others and ultimately permits the self to mutate for a multitude. In the end, this tale of blindness and the critique of its ascendancy reach the philosophical insight about vision: the blind woman makes a claim over vision and the capacity to willfully not see. This confounds the seeing of Manay and further complicates his idea of the futility of sight. With this conversation on sight, seeing, spectacle, and vision, the film is able to spin the thesis on the city as, in the words of Hannah Arendt, a “space of appearance.” This reworks the locus radically as political because it draws our attention to the facture, the crafting of the object that is the city. The subjectivity that apprehends this overdetermination is then led to repeat the maneuver so that, one, the city disappears in the pause of the long take, only to reappear within it through the passage, and, two, the city “reappears” in a new conceptual space that is no longer ocularcentric, with different “techniques of the observer” now shaping the vision.

Manila at the terminus of the long take becomes dubious. It is at this point that the long take accomplishes the all-important task to disrupt the pace of development, which is a hegemonic impulse in both the theory of film and the policy of the city of Manila. The desire for the momentum and the celerity of development is derailed by the long take and the meditation on the deceit of appearance and the effort to, according to Jacques Rancière, “redistribute the sensible”: that the aesthetic reckoning of the city is not the sole faculty of its planners or the potentates of the day; it is the responsibility of inhabitants to sense the city and to sense what is wrong with it. The artist Raymundo Albano, who was curator during the seventies of the visual arts program at the Cultural Center of the Philippines, site of the film’s fantasy scene of drug-crazed denizens plunging into the fabled bay, intuitively mindsets as “developmentalist” and translated it within the vocabulary of his art world as “developmental art.” We note how the aesthetic intervenes in the

production of the political as formative, a vital life force that animates both the structural and the imaginative:

It should be noted that the word “developmental” was an operative word given by our government and press to government projects for fast implementation. Activities that had the nature of being under fast-action plans. The building of roads, population control, or the establishment of security units for instance, have to be done quickly, within a period of days.... The implication of a fast-action learning method is similar to that of developmental art.... The use of sand, junk iron, non-art materials such as raw lumber, rocks, etcetera were common materials for the artists’ developmental strategies. People were shocked, scared, delighted, pleased and satisfied even though their preconceived notions of art did not agree with what they encountered.... It was a powerful curatorial stance—it created some negative forces, too—but it took the risk in establishing an attitude that prepared the public towards a more relevant way of seeing. For instance, bringing pieces of junk to the gallery for aesthetic perception would lean one to consider virtues of things considered ugly and cheap. It made one relatively aware of an environment suddenly turning visible. (15)

Albano’s phrase “suddenly turning visible” is interesting because it accords centrality to “image,” a moving image in more ways than one to be sure, and the acumen through which it is grasped. The levels of image that are mentioned in the conversation between Manay and Bea pertain to the range of visions through which Manila looms in the consciousness of those who must live it. These visions may have two distinct aspects as surfaced in the long take of this sequence. There is the concept of beauty that is a ruse; this is represented by Manay who is a trope of Imelda Marcos: patroness, benefactress, pageant orchestrator, flamboyant, heedless, and most of all, a veritable gay icon. His eye for beauty in terms of couture and men is of high quality, and is restless about it. The other is labor: affective labor through the work of the masseuse as therapist and sex worker and export or overseas manual labor, which is indexed by Bea’s partner, the hybrid Greg Williams, who pins his hopes on a stint in Saudi Arabia, only to be conned by an illegal recruiter and stranded in Bangkok.

These discourses of beauty and labor would constitute the project of Marcos-style development, which heavily invested in the appearance of progress, of a Third World developing nation taking off on the wings of tradition and free trade. In the words of Imelda during the opening of a meeting of bankers and global noble houses at the Philippine International Convention Center in 1977: “You have come to our country at a most exciting time though at a somewhat awkward stage when we are negotiating the challenging transition from a traditional order to a progressive humanist society. This new complex of buildings erected on land reclaimed from the sea stands in dramatic contrast to the slum areas that blight our

city. The contrast of shrine and shanty symbolizes the shining future against our impoverished past” (Stockwin 20). Surely, such a mirage or phantasmagoria raises confusion among the characters in the city and the film. Still, they place their faith squarely in the possibility of true love even as they themselves seem to disbelieve it. Kano expresses true love to Bea and Manay constantly solicits the same expression from lovers who go through the motions of professing to it.

Intrinsic in the city, therefore, is a sense of the utopian future, a *mélange* of desires for amelioration. Boris Groys contends that “cities originally came about as projects for the future: People moved from the country into the city in order to escape the ancient forces of nature and to build a new future that they could shape and control themselves” (100). But in the course of this cultivation of the city, this “utopian dream of the total rationality, transparency, and controllability of an urban environment unleashed a historical dynamism that is manifested in the perpetual transformation of all realms of urban life: the quest for utopia forces the city into a permanent process of surpassing and destroying itself—which is why the city has become the natural venue for revolutions, upheavals, constant beginnings, fleeting fashions, and incessantly changing lifestyles. Built as a haven of security the city soon became the stage for criminality, instability, destruction, anarchy, and terrorism” (100–01). This is the specter that Manila has become in the wistful eyes of its creatures.

The first moment of this long take is the conversation of strangers. This sustains the film’s motif of alienation, on the one hand, and its transcendence, on the other. Manay and Bea are brought together by Alex, who is the entry point of the film’s narrative. Alex also connects the two to his mother, a former sex worker in the storied Misericordia, the street on which they walk. This personage elaborates on the problematic of prostitution as embodied by his mother, Bea, and by extension, himself. This coming together is salient because it crosses the gap of strangeness and becomes the condition of possibility for a formation to emerge across class, history, and biography. The disparate elements are not so much reconciled as they are positioned along an axis of communication and relationality. In this scenario, a central philosophical contradiction is laid bare, centering on the vision through which the characters regard reality. That said, these tensions are worked through and not construed as irreconcilable antagonisms. Manay and Bea are made to cohabit a time and space and share relationships. This is what this “walking the city” significantly offers: an opportunity for difference to emerge as potentially and tactically affiliative and collaborative. The sight of two queer figures navigating a street in Manila is an instantiation of a deep dialogue, permitting the film to thread together some ruminations that hover around the ethical basis of sight and face, for instance, as well as the ploys of personhood and the authenticity that is negated by likeness, the imagination of the possible and the recompense of goodness. This said, the dialogue within the long take is a montage of sorts, or a bricolage of semantic tableaux, in the sense that the language spun by Manay consists in gayspeak, a

hybrid portmanteau of the gay community, and accommodates nimble code-switching between English and Filipino.

The second moment of this passage initiates us to a procedure of truth. First, it takes in the environment. As Manay and Bea walk, they happen by the everyday life of a quarter in the city. As mentioned earlier, the street is known for sex workers plying the trade, and we see them here as suggested by Miriam, former colleague of Alex's mother in the trade (fig. 2), making the long take a circuit of continuity between the dissimilar though not incongruent personal lives of the two and the collective economy of the setting. There are moments in which the camera strays away from the characters to integrate the image and soundscape, sometimes even asynchronously. It is through the long take that this continuum is sutured, a cognitive mapping, as it were, that foregrounds the "real," that is, the totality of the forces at work in the place that is the historical: the social ties that are bound by the trade of bodies. The second facet of this procedure is the direction of the walk, a kind of build-up toward the disclosure of the character of Adelina, who happens to be inauthentic as she is polytropic, a quotidian performance all by herself. The long take enables the film not only to configure a part of the city; it sets out an itinerary of a search for Adelina, which leads to the inevitable uncovering of the truth about her identity. It is through the search for the cure of the blindness of Bea that the real Adelina is revealed, making the long take a necessary device to mend the nexus between street and, later on, the hospital that harbors no nurse by the name of Adelina.

The third moment of the long take is the very aesthetic itself of the movement in time within the space of the street by the characters. What might be important to consider here is the spatialization of the moment, not only of the advancement of plot transpiring in a locality, but of time evoked by space, with the "present passing" of Manay and Bea rendering Manila as a synchrony of elements. It is no longer space moving in time; it is space marking the conjuncture of a promiscuous city. To deem this point allegorical is warranted to the degree that it unveils the moral of time, embodied by the space inscribed and charged by Manay and Bea in the very procedure of walking, and that it foretells the moral of a future exposure of a prostituted life, a condition that subtends several personages in the film. The next sequence takes Manay and Bea to the hospital where Adelina purportedly reports nightly; they pass through a shoot of a film featuring a nurse, and when they reach the reception desk, Manay tussles with a nurse who tells him that no Adelina Macapinlac exists. This ends in a heated debate with the nurse rattling off lines in a vernacular. This is perhaps why we could say that this deed of the long take does not have to rely on "editing" for the film to illumine the strata of its dense material. As critic Joel David explains the editing style in *Manila by Night* and Marilou Diaz-Abaya's *Moral*, the two films "may be sprawling and ambiguous in parts, but this could only certainly be ascribed to the necessity of letting go of pure or perfected technique in order to allow some nonplastic aspect of the material to



Figure 2. Manay, Bea, and Gaying begin their stroll after Bea had prayed at the street shrine [left]; they pass by Miriam [right], who had earlier requested police protection from her former colleague Virgie (whose husband is a well-connected lawyer), mother of Alex, lover-to-be of Manay. (Left photo courtesy of Jojo Devera, used with permission; right photo frame capture by Joel David)

develop” (141). This thought resonates with the perception that the potential of the long take lies in its ability to carve out a latitude for freedom for the viewer to sense the fullness, the heteroglossia, of cinema.

These three moments concretized by the long take of the walk prompts us to revisit the antinomies of modernist film theory dwelling on deep focus and montage and the ethical basis of techniques in filmmaking. For the montage film artist, the steadfast lens of the long take is a bourgeois lie, a concealment of the real forces at work that guarantees the impression of coherence. On the other hand, the *mise en scène* auteur would argue that montage is naked manipulation; it is an abuse of the film language that is instrumentalized to distort not only reality but the experience of the viewer who is led by the nose, so to speak. This discourse supplements the schemata of truth that is enacted by the long take in the film as it responds to the various subterfuges in the city. How could the long take, for instance, be refunctioned as an alternative to the classical Hollywood cross-cutting to convey contradictions, and could it be interpreted as a disposition of culture to tell stories longwindedly in the various declensions of rumor, gossip, gayspeak, self-deprecation, and so on?

As a response, this essay is led to converse with the problematic of the aestheticization of time and experience. Alison Ross has explored some of its implications in the study of Michaelangelo Antonioni’s *The Passenger* in which she schematizes the various appropriations of cinematic thinking. First is “the use of cinema to stage human tales” (40). Then there is “the use of cinema to stage a confrontation with a received pattern of meaning” (40). The latter could be “presented as tragic or depicted in critical or rebellious terms” (40). Besides these two, “there is the use of traditional characters or plots as little more than props or

vehicles to stage aestheticized settings. Here the relationship between meaning and cinematic elements in the first two cases is reversed. In the most developed forms of this use of cinematic techniques, the story line has purely evocative form, and character is treated in the abbreviated manner of a stereotype” (40). In *Manila by Night*, the emphasis might be in the third: to aestheticize the setting itself of the city through the street trodden by the characters. The plot tends to dissolve into this passage that is for the most part not purposive nor functioning, in fact, dismissed by Manay as “useless,” and therefore flits around a possible reflective judgment and maybe even around “beauty” of the talk and the walk, the sublime status of the encounter of strangers. This uselessness carves into high relief the landscape that engulfs the social types of the “gay couturier” and the “blind masseuse.” It could be that the evocation of the city in the imagination of the characters has to be demonstrated in the protocol itself of walking and of speaking nearly aimlessly, and so, perhaps without plot and interiority, which happens as a performance. Ross explains:

Moral values, motivations, moods, and feelings cannot take a specific form but may only be “shown.” Meanings of such kind are able to be experienced in aesthetic presentations, which make accessible ideas to be experienced discursively. Similarly, temporal characteristics of experience, such as waiting, or the agency of time as a force of dispersion over identity can be shown in aesthetic presentations. Film, moreover, is the ideal medium for the presentation of ideas of time on account of its capacity to spatialize temporal forms. (50)

In other words, it is this evocative nature of the cinematic that transposes the abstract philosophical project into a political reality of appearance in space. It departs from the norm of film narrative and in fact may be construed as isolated, an interval or a pause so that a level of autonomy could be secured. With Antonioni as exemplar, this is what might take place: “His cinema makes ideas that would be inaccessible through conventional narrative—such as the ‘project’ to lose identity or the dispersion of identity in time—available for emphatic experience precisely through his relative autonomization of aesthetic moments” (Ross 51). As mentioned earlier, this essay alludes to a turn in the history of form of cinema and imbricates that turn in Philippine form. The art historian Erwin Panofsky has theorized on this epochal turn in the founding of an art:

And as movable as the spectator is, as movable is, for the same reason, the space presented to him. Not only bodies move in space, but space itself does, approaching, receding, turning, dissolving and recrystallizing as it appears through the controlled locomotion and focusing of the camera and through the cutting and editing of the various shots—not to mention such special effects as visions, transformations, disappearances, slow-motion and fast-motion shots, reversals, and trick films. (98)

The other way to consider this question is to look at the long take in *Manila by Night* within a comparative frame, more specifically in relationship to sections in Maryo J. de los Reyes's *Gabun: Ama Mo, Ama Ko* and Brillante Mendoza's *Kinatay*. This is done to provisionally appraise the pragmatics of editing and the primacy of image in the Philippine film, and how their alternation might adumbrate a theory of passage beyond the requirements of plot.

In de los Reyes's *Gabun*, the long take, like in *Manila by Night*, becomes the place where two women who love the same man finally meet. And in the same register like in Bernal's film, it is here in which the procedure of truth is fleshed out through a "walk" in a park. The time of this meeting is spatialized as well; it is set in Baguio, which is not a neutral location. It is where the man had put up residence for his mistress. It is a charged site, one that reminds the wife of her husband's transgression; it is a hideaway, an escape, the rendezvous par excellence of the illicit.

- MAMENG: Thank you for saying yes to my invitation. I would like to talk to you before I go back to Manila. Does he know?
- MERCEDES: No. We didn't tell him.
- MAMENG: How is he?
- MERCEDES: He is still confused. Locks himself up in a room and keeps on drinking.
- MAMENG: How about his business? Doesn't he attend to it?
- MERCEDES: His business is slowing down, Mameng.
- MAMENG: How did you meet him?
- MERCEDES: Why?
- MAMENG: I just want to know.
- MERCEDES: In the market.
- MAMENG: Market?
- MERCEDES: I had a friend who was fond of fruits. One time, she asked me to go with her to the market to buy stuff. After the chore, my friend dropped the fruits and Jaime helped us. He was there buying, too. He is really fond of fruits.
- MAMENG: I know. Did you know he was married?
- MERCEDES: No. Even when we got married in Hong Kong, he didn't tell me.
- MAMENG: You got married?
- MERCEDES: I only found out about everything when I was pregnant with Adrian. Mameng, what is on your mind?
- MAMENG: What do you want me to do?
- MERCEDES: I don't know. You decide. You have the right.
- MAMENG: Do you love him?
- MERCEDES: I need him.
- MAMENG: Answer my question. Do you love him?

- MERCEDES: Yes. What about you?
- MAMENG: Me? What I know is that we can't be together again.
- MERCEDES: But he needs you, Mameng.
- MAMENG: He needs me? In what way, Mercedes? Can you accept the fact that somebody shares his love for you?
- MERCEDES: I have lasted this long knowing about your relationship, so you don't have to ask. But he loves you, Mameng, I know.
- MAMENG: Love? How can you say he loves me when he was able to fool me for a long time? I'm sorry. Please tell him that I can't accept it.
- (De los Reyes, trans. by author)

It is clear that this exchange foregrounds more questions than answers. The long take facilitates a back and forth that does not avail of the parsing of the dialogue into discrete scenes through cross cutting. Rather, the lens takes in Mameng and Mercedes as a conflation of a dilemma, a shared anxiety that cannot be disarticulated. In fact, this anxiety is rearticulated through a coming to terms with ethical norms. That Mameng could not accept a love that has been tainted by betrayal does not vitiate this relationality between the two women; it, in fact, forges a dissensus, a process of sorting out difference that curiously forms a unique bond of friendship based on a common partaking of affliction and the prospects of understanding through dialogue. These ties are confirmed in the end at the funeral of the man they both love (fig. 3). After his casket is interred, Mameng takes the hand of Mercedes and leads her beyond the grave, literally and metaphorically. The walk in one of the scenic sites is a form of an idealization of Baguio as some kind of zone of freedom for paramours as in Mike de Leon's *Kung Mangarap Ka't Magising* (1977) in which the married Anna confides in her single lover Joey: "I wish there were such a place. Where everything is there, clean, cool, there is no dust and nobody will meddle in your affairs. I wish, if only there were such a place" (qtd. in Cruz 91). It should also be of interest to observe that the film, and largely through the aforementioned long take, survives the triangulation attendant to the melodramatic exercise involving the male hero as embodied in the persona of Eddie Rodriguez. In this instance, the love triangle formed by the man, the legal wife, and the other woman does not result in a restoration of the heterosexual norm of the couple with the other woman or the legal wife exiting the stage. In *Gabun*, the masculine protagonist wastes away, stabs a prostitute, and then kills himself. As the journalist Julie Y. Daza writes: "Usually, the 'other woman' recognizes the futility of a three-cornered arrangement, or she is afflicted with some malignant disease that destroys her in tender ways, or the wife performs some mighty miracle to win him back and all is forgiven" (174).

Brillante Mendoza's *Kinatay*, though strictly speaking does not employ the long take as a device, tends to quote or cite its effects in the long sequence, practically half of the film, in which the sex worker Madonna is whisked away from the club



Figure 3. Mameng, the affluent wife, and Mercedes, the mistress, at the funeral of the man they share, in *Gabun*. (Publicity still by Agrix Films)

she works in, put into a van, tied and gagged, and brought to an abandoned house in a province outside the capital of Manila where she will be hacked to pieces (fig. 4). From the red-light district in the old quarter, the vehicle goes through the spine of the city, absorbs its sight and sound, and uncovers the kernel of the abduction. It appears that she has not paid up a debt and her tormentor Cap, supposedly a policeman, can no longer wait, feeling that he had been duped. Besides this intimation of the plot, this sequence probes the emotional weather of one of the conscripted assistants in the murder, a newly married criminology student named Peping. It is around his life that the film revolves, with the first part of the film tracking his routine and configuring his milieu. The insinuation of the long take works here, aside from disclosing the inner workings of the crime and the mind of the novice would-be criminal, to aestheticize the time of the trip from the city to its outskirts, from the center to its limits, as a spatial proposition. It is the highway of Manila, along which the monorail runs, that morphs as the form of the journey, the ritual between life and death. Like the street in *Manila by Night*, the park in *Gabun*, here it is the road to perdition that is the artifice not of mere setting, but the concretization of what Michael Taussig describes as the “culture of terror” and “space of death” (4), the very procedure of the killing conceptually and temporally helmed by men called Cap and Sarge, which may well be ranks in a renegade paramilitary operation not rare in Philippine social life.

The other level of this ominous moment is the critique of the development of a city, its metropolization beyond the decrepit parts of the city of *Manila by Night*. From Bernal’s fetid quarter to Mendoza’s bustling global urbanization, the city aestheticizes the desire for development as well as its failure, its desire for renewal as night turns to day to its descent into the madness of murder outside the



Fig. 4. Peping, a criminology student, watches over Madonna, a prostitute awaiting rape and brutal execution, in *Kinatay*. (Publicity still by Swift Production and Centerstage Productions)

purview of the city. In *Kinatay*, the recently anointed hired killer goes home, just like Alex languishing on the grass of the National Park at first light, as morning breaks and lights up the labyrinth of his neighborhood. The time of night in both films is finally rendered geopolitically and psychogeographically, mapped out as an excess of violence in the city, depicting the tenacious corruption and amelioration by the state. The long take, therefore, invests in this tedium and attenuation a perfect foil to the alacrity of incessant development and the commodification of space through billboards, which in the opening scene of *Kinatay* is the scene of a planned suicide of a man who has lost his bearings. From a wider perspective, it can be asserted that the long take enmeshes both place and body, city and people so that it is able to picture what the Thai scholar Thongchai Winichakul describes in his study of how the concept of Thainess is inscribed in maps and materializes as a geobody. The latter is defined as a “technology of territoriality” (16) that creates a certain structure of feeling like “nationhood” or in this case the “city” spatially. Extending this concept of Manila as a geobody, along with Baguio as originally an American colonial hill station and therefore a node in the imperialist urbanization, and the long take as the technique through which it is imagined, we can state that the passage of the vehicle laden with criminals and their victim is an anatomy of a salvage, which is a Filipino neologism for a murder usually by hired assassins, and the very *modus operandi* of its perpetration, marking the entire expanse from city to outskirt as scene of the crime and also the unfolding of either a stricken conscience or the beginning of an education in the trade of salvage. Indeed, we

can infer from this situation the transformation of the long take from a teleological tool to a structure of biopolitical feeling in which, pace Giorgio Agamben, life and its possibility are at stake. As such, this form-of-life, or its aestheticization in film, becomes irreducibly political because it fights for the guarantee of this potential, which the State is obliged to defend. The moment the latter negates this entitlement, it separates life from its form, stripping it bare or naked and therefore depriving it of potency and its human-effect. It is “salvaged.”

It is tempting to characterize the vein of this aesthetic as both film noir and ethnographic to the extent that it attentively draws out the motifs of crime and simultaneously chronicles the telling nuances of everyday life. This approach is not without its virtues because it partakes of the politics of ethnographic writing that has problematized the temporal and the spatial, among other exigencies of the task of sensing the economy of the everyday across intersecting lifeworlds and ethnoscapes. The anthropologist George Marcus explains the former in terms of a “break with the trope of settled community in realist ethnography. A recognition of the deterritorialization of culture: Its production in many different locales at the same time, each of differing character” (43). On the latter, he apprehends it as a “break with the trope of history ... the modernist ethnography is interested in the constitution of collective memory and its expressions, remembering that discourses are critical and responses to emergent, not yet fully articulated conditions in a way that the assimilation of ethnography to historical narrative is not” (43). What may be derived from this poaching on anthropology is the contingent condition of relationships as well as the tension between structure and agency in social life that the long take is able to play out with adequate measure of enigma and empiricism. The aesthetic of the film noir emerges in the evocation of “night” in the city as it is in *Manila by Night* and, as Charles Tesson avers, in Lino Brocka’s *Maynila: Sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag* in which the search of the lead character Julio Madiaga of his provincial girlfriend Ligaya Paraiso who is virtually enslaved by a Chinese man in Misericordia in Manila “uncovers the tragic, nocturnal underside of city life, a legacy of the film noir” (162). This said, it is not altogether productive to isolate “night” as the overdetermination of the discourse of the city, for in the time of Marcos, for instance, night was day as well, or that there was contiguity in the implementation of development projects: the building of some structures had three shifts of workers so that the contractors would meet their deadlines. This is the speed of Manila’s development, the space-time that generated equally breathtaking displacement. We are reminded, of course, of Walter Benjamin’s figural that it is the *flâneur* who is at home with the world and its circulating goods. In a peculiar way, the film is the *flâneur* roaming the city of Manila and, like Benjamin’s *flâneur*, it might be outdoing the “whore” because it “takes the abstract concept of the whore for a stroll” (Butler 213).

It could also be said that the long take in the Philippine film may be partly explained by a cultural disposition. It has been argued, for instance, that the

Hollywood mode of editing the local cinematic tradition has inherited fails to dwell on the robust emotional world of the Filipino face. The film historian Agustin Sotto comments: “This style misses out on something valuable in the Filipino. Because the Filipino’s face is very sensitive. If he wants to show he’s angry, he doesn’t have to verbalize it, he just looks at you. If he’s happy to see you, his face says so” (qtd. in Tiongson 54). The filmmaker Lino Brocka agrees, saying in some of his films the camera does not move, and he explains: “This is deliberate ... because I feel nothing must intrude. Nothing. It’s as simple as that.... It’s very instinctive on my part. Here is Hilda Koronel talking, saying something very important and vital, and I just feel that I should not cut to this and cut to that or speed it up” (qtd. in Tiongson 61). In these quotes, there is a tendency to invest in the “natural-ness” of the Filipino and that it should not be violated by the cunning of editing.

This characterization of the long take as more hospitable to, and this is used with caution here, the Filipino habitus is contrasted with the reception that it is also experimental and therefore may detract from the “culture,” a vexingly typifying category as it is, that surrounds and suffuses it. As one reviewer put it in 1980:

The film is susceptible to considerable textual analysis and thematic interpretation. There are those who would surely compare some of the film’s techniques and elements to the works of Fellini and Antonioni. That long walking scene for example where Bernardo Bernardo leads the blind Rio Locsin and they encounter assorted distractions along the way is sure to elicit all sorts of comments and speculations. Some will read a lot of meanings into Bernardo’s Oscar Wildish declarations. Some will dismiss it as another tongue-in-cheek experimentation that is typically Bernalian. (Bautista 156)

Joel David’s idea of “pure film” as tendency in Philippine cinema in the seventies and eighties supplements this sentiment. He remarks that Bernal may have been the “only major Filipino director” who has investigated the exceptional viscosity or ocularity of the cinema as medium. This carries through the legacy of the French New Wave, which maintained the “visual” nature of the art. According to David: “Bernal’s essentially silent works—*Nunal sa Tubig* (1976) as a whole, most aspects of his portion in *Bakit may Pag-ibig Pa?* (1978), and the ending of *Ikaw Ay Akin* (1978)—raised the question of the appropriateness of a style that was branded by some members of the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino as ‘Western’ in nature” (20). The idea of “sensibility” in Philippine film as endorsed by these critics has been questioned by the art critic Alice Guillermo, who gleans in the source of this Philippine identity in film a colonial, and therefore also a mediated aesthetic formation.

Furthermore, such experimentation may be construed as deviating from the more political style of montage, which has to a significant extent been privileged by the more perceptive critics like Petronilo Bn. Daroy. His view on the editing

of the film *Daluyong at Habagat*, which explicates the plight of Filipino workers after the Pacific War, is instructive. He lauds the director Celso Ad. Castillo for the potency of his cinematic image but at the same time faults him for failing to round out the historical context. It can be inferred that the main dynamic of this antinomy rests on the long take, on the one hand, and montage, on the other. For the Filipino film critic, the dilemma of the Filipino filmmaker is how to reconcile the materialities of both. For it is quite obvious in Daroy's cogent analysis that both these methodologies of the cinematic propose to viewers the intimacy with the historical. First, Daroy acknowledges the accomplishments of spatialization in Castillo's oeuvre:

Castillo's genius is in realizing, on film the glaring actuality of place; the lush countryside in Laguna in *Asedillo*; the beaches and sunlight in *Pinakamagandang Hayop sa Balat ng Lupa*; the sea and the rituals in *Ang Madugong Daigdig ni Salvacion*; the noise and anarchy in the slums in *Daluyong*. In these instances, Castillo more than revises the sense of reality of a setting but authenticates it in terms of the aggression of color, sound, and familiarity on our senses. In *Daluyong*, he goes beyond the simulation of virtual reality in favor of a more detailed documentation; a close-up of a "Victory" currency; the re-play of "Liberation" day's song; careful costuming, et cetera. (189)

While all this is salutary, Daroy thinks it is not enough mainly because the spatialization is not able to stir up the image as sufficiently moving. The much-vaunted "moving image" must have a developmentalist, progressive, and perhaps even teleological logic. According to him: "These details, however, are not sufficient to complete our sense of the real; reality here has to be sought in the very logical development of the workers' situation during those decades, which means we have to discover it in the very stuff of history. This is where Castillo proves to be deficient" (189). This lack is a lack of editing and the incommensurate prowess of the image. The film only redeems itself when it ineluctably resorts to montage, which enables it to overcome the supposed stasis of space, the mystification of its reality, and activates the interaction of the contrasting elements in film and society:

Towards the end of the movie, however, Castillo achieves a triumph. Through a series of intercutting, he shows three related series of sequences—Igus rushing headlong to meet his adversary, the bourgeois Ricky Belmonte; Igus' brother (Rez Cortez) standing at attention in a courtroom listening to a judge render a sentence on him; and the laborers going on a strike in a factory. Through the technique of intercutting, Castillo manages to show these sequences are relating to three forms of violence, namely, the organized workers against the exploitative

system; institutional violence against the individual; and the type of anarchistic or senseless violence that man within a given context of society perpetuates against his own kind. These final sequences are a testimony to Castillo's power as an artist and his capacity to make a profound understanding of social issues. Given this equipment, he really does not have to evade historical truth. (191)

It is important to stress Daroy's tenor in his insistence on Castillo's evasion of historical truth. In its analysis of the long take as a form of historical passage or the passage of the historical in the Philippine film, this essay tries to refunction the contradiction as sketched out by Daroy by looking at the long take as a distinct motion of history, a movement of its own, or better still, a syncopation of the time of drama or its normative drift from conflict to denouement. It is proposed that the long take or its kindred techniques are able to confront this historical truth and not necessarily through the medium of the dialectic or the rhetoric of the struggle of antagonistic forces. The long take is most productively interpreted as a tropic: a vector through which things "turn visible" or apparent or ostensible, sometimes "suddenly" and sometimes ploddingly, but always through an interrogative process of ethical and philosophical questions and an interval of self-reflection of well-being and survival. At varying levels, *Manila by Night*, *Gabun*, and *Kinatay* contribute options in the meditation on the long take as a procedure that, first, concretizes the process of history through the passage of its agents, conversing and reflexive agents with discrepant interests, through a parcel of place within an urbanity, and, second, that references the ontogenesis and current morphology of that said place as a conjuncture. The latter crosses the gaps of estrangement and initiates conversation, a revelatory one that does not lead to a dramatic peak. Rather, it moves toward a confluence of positions, and inexorably to the unraveling of a *trompe l'œil* or a trick of the eye, the sleight of hand of a woman who mimics the immaculate whiteness of a nurse but clutches a synthetic bag of screaming, shimmering red. This said, the aspiration for a coming together is not to be viewed as a negation of difference. The long take as it has been demonstrated in these films disseminates the sensible across the surface of the film, the heightened and competing contingencies of the transients in the city, relocated by travel or traversal, and may result in the wrenching of bodies or their equally violent longings for autonomy and integrity. The "political" as a procedure of truth in time and space, an interrogation of a "fact" as broadly conceived assumes social thickness and resonance as in such exemplary works animated by the long take as Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948), Andy Warhol's *Empire* (1964), and Alexander Sokurov's *Russian Ark* (2002). In the Philippine cinematic corpus, we could examine the works of Lav Diaz and Mes de Guzman that mingle philosophical and anthropological propensities in their cogitations mainly on changing Philippine ethnoscapes.

In all this, the long take is sympathetic to the aesthetic goals of a film that gathers a milieu through an ensemble of figures with the view to configure a socius and a

sociality in which people perform a democratic ethic of participation and solidarity. It is a “copresence, a bringing to presence—conceptually, cinematically—of parallel streams of life” (Shapiro 53). To a certain degree, therefore, the long take and its consequences of passage as form in the Philippine film overcomes the impasse of mise en scène and montage of Hollywood editing and the plenitude of the Filipino face of truth, of the “glaring actuality of space” and the “stuff of history.”

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