

Unruly Excesses: An Ethnographic Sketch of Early Film Audiences in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Early film writings open up paths of historical investigation that shed light on the conditions of early cinema in the Philippines, but what has remained elusive, even in current studies of cinema, are substantive, empirically-grounded studies of the Filipino film audience, or the moviegoing masses or *masa*, who are constantly invoked in sociopolitical and cultural discourses yet remain uniquely produced as they are addressed by such. Many writings relay audiences' sensorial experiences of film-viewing: how real a film feels, how hot a theater is, how noisy the crowd; however, these have been given little, if any, critical attention in academic scholarship as, historically, film theory and criticism have tended to focus on the film-text itself, its language and representations, as the nucleus of film knowledge, even as the substantial amount of sensorial discourses surrounding cinema indicates that they cannot be so easily discounted from the historical production of film knowledge. To revalue the role of the audience in producing knowledge of cinema in the Philippines, this study assembles ethnographic evidence from sensorial discourses in early film writings drawn from two periodicals, *Renacimiento Filipino* (1910-1913) and *Cultura Social* (1913-1914). In these writings, it seeks the points of intervention in which acts of agency and power disrupt the production of hegemonic knowledge about cinema and cinema cultures. Through historical anthropology, audiences may be imagined beyond their discursive production and we might begin to articulate the ruptures that may point us to alternate histories of, and thus alternate possibilities for, Filipino audiences.

Keywords: audience studies, film criticism, film ethnography, film historiography, historical anthropology

POINT OF DEPARTURE

Any historical study of Philippine cinema necessarily comes up against the brick wall of archival absence. Only 37% of locally produced films survive, and only five from the pre-war era, the earliest dating only to 1936 – almost four decades since cinematograph was introduced in 1897 (Cua-Lim 2013, 18). Yet, despite the immense knowledge gaps rendered by the virtual absence of an archive of early Philippine films, historical review does remain an absolute necessity for the perpetual urgency of, on the one hand, knowing, reconstructing, and rehabilitating national memory, and, on the other, enriching further research in Philippine cinema with historical grounding and foresight. In this pursuit, “the absence or inaccessibility of traditional sources of data should be an invitation to the historian to look for evidence in unusual, if not exotic, places” (Allen and Gomery 1985, 41).

Early periodicals provide the remaining records of films screened in the Philippines, primarily through motion picture advertorials called *anuncios*. Filipino film historian Nicolas Deocampo assembled the seminal history of early cinema in the Philippines, *Cine: Spanish influences on early cinema in the Philippines* (2007), mainly from such *anuncios*. But the subject of cinema also yielded a number of articles and essays on the medium: apart from aesthetic discourses on the films and film narratives, political discourses on screening policies and censorship, technological discourses on the film apparatus, and sensory discourses on reception and spectatorship. Early film writings open up paths of historical investigation that might preclude the possibility of an aesthetic history of Philippine cinema but invigorates new directions of inquiry that are both limited and enabled by “the historical traces of it that exist in the present” (Allen and Gomery 1985, 41).

Indeed, the cache of information that can be culled from periodicals have since yielded incredible historical findings, many on the pivotal roles played by women pioneers of cinema, such as Titay Molina (Musser 2017), Isabel Acuña (Tofighian 2017), and Elena Jurado (Pascual 2019), who have shed light on the conditions of the early film industry in the Philippines. What has remained elusive, however, even in current studies of Philippine cinema, is a substantive and empirically-grounded study of the Filipino film audience: the multitude of moviegoers and viewers typically referred to as the masses or *masa*, who are constantly invoked in discourses of political and sociocultural interest yet remain uniquely *produced* as they are *addressed by* these discourses.

The “unique sensuousness” (Stoller 1997, 76) of cinema and its relationship with truth/reality compared with other art forms necessitates exploring more deeply this link between film and its audience. Early reports on the development of film technologies marveled at how film was able to “collect and reproduce life” (quoted in Schwartz 2006, 10) and, indeed, many early film writings have relayed audiences’ sensorial experiences of film. However, audience feedback has not been considered seriously in film studies as part and parcel of the intellectual history of cinema. Film studies have

instead focused largely on the film-text and its language, neglecting to probe more deeply into the ways that these sensorial discourses embody most concretely the notion “that cognition is physical” (Stoller 1997, 77) and knowledge production is material as much as it is intellectual.

Precisely these sensory responses to film point us to an understanding of cinema as more than an audio-visual experience and to a recognition that the environment of the cinematic experience shapes ideas about film. These sensory discourses on cinema provide the means by which current scholars might begin to imagine early film cultures, spectatorships, and audience behaviors. At the same time, however, to attempt an ethnographic sketch of the historical realities of early film audiences is, inevitably, also a practice in *historicizing the gap* of audience studies research in Philippine film historiography, as we must understand “the masses” produced in these mediated writings were not “accurately” the audiences that attended the screenings being recorded and observed by the bourgeois writers who published their articles with their own particular agenda.

Likewise, contemporary film scholars, while more reflexive in their critical practice, have been similarly prone to excluding popular audiences’ sensorial commentaries from academic scholarship. Film scholar and critic Patrick Campos (2006) has described how, in Philippine film studies,

the student would discover that there are two tendencies under the nationalist agenda of historicizing and critiquing Filipino films. First, beginning in the 1960s, nationalist scholars and artists have sought to rediscover Philippine folk traditions and to assess how these have survived in contemporary mass culture [...].

The other tendency of the nationalist agenda is the systematizing of texts and discourses into a unified, continuous, and linear national art history. In terms of film scholarship, one can speak of the History of Philippine Cinema, with its constitutive periods and canons, its highs and greats, and its heroes. (36-37)

Indeed, the range of historiographic work on Philippine cinema has focused largely on these strategies, perhaps best articulated in and exemplified by National Artist Bienvenido Lumbera’s germinal essay, *Kasaysayan at Tunguhin ng Pelikulang Pilipino* (History and Prospects of Filipino Cinema) (1976). These tendencies in film intellectual historiography have also drawn largely from aesthetic and cultural analyses of films in order to “rediscover folk traditions” in the ways that they appropriate Philippine dramatic traditions, and to constitute a Philippine film canon from what critics, through various mechanisms such as film festivals and awards, have construed as masterpieces for their perceived social relevance and/or technical mastery. The centrality of film language in scholarship and criticism has thus limited the inclusion of non-filmic evidence – such as sensory discourses in film writings or reviews, easily dismissible as “self-referential punditry and not critique” (Patrick Flores, in ORP 2016,

158) – in film intellectual history.

Certainly, film audiences have attracted more critical attention because of the emergence of fan studies and star studies within the purview of popular culture studies. Film icons such as Nora Aunor and Fernando Poe Jr., for instance, have inspired passionate fan followings whose agency and imagination in the discursive construction and mythopoesis of the stars have been recognized and examined at length by media scholars and art critics such as Neferti Tadiar (2004), Bliss Cua Lim (2012), and Alfonso Deza (2006). However, more empirical and ethnographic audience studies have been far more limited, and studies focusing on audiences during the period of early cinema are nonexistent.

Cinema audiences were generally presumed in the narratives of early film writings to be passive and vulnerable spectators warranting protection, instruction, and/or discipline. The disciplining impulse in these mediated accounts must be investigated, especially because, in the Philippines, the history of cinema is inextricably linked with the history of the production of modern society at the interstices of an intercolonial transition. Here,

[v]isuality is not epiphenomenal in relation to postcolonial modernity but central to it. The visual as a semiautonomous realm emerges first as a realm of freedom and then as a zone of bitter struggle [...]. [I]n the postcolony the visual is at once a new area of colonization and a means to sustain the traditional relations of domination. It is, therefore, also a site of value production and a site of struggle. (Beller 2006, 260-61)

Indeed, it is the specter of this problem, of what appears to be the fundamentally colonial ontology of cinema, that fuels the ethnographic impulse in this research to exhume the film audience from the study corpus. These early film writings must be viewed as evidence, not only of extant discursive practices, but of material lives that physically underwent and contended with the violence of colonial modernity, and possibly in ways that complicate or subvert predominant notions of the subaltern postcolonial subject.

Richard deCordova's (2007) succinct articulation of the value of an ethnographic approach to contemporary film research is useful in explaining how confronting the colonial question through a historical anthropological approach – with an ethnographic rather than, say, phenomenological or psychoanalytical impulse – would be helpful to the project of rendering a history of audience from their residual imprints in texts:

The ethnographic impulse in recent cultural studies has arisen largely as a way of countering or complicating theories of spectatorship put forward in much of 1970s film theory. Within that theory an abstract, psychoanalytically inflected notion of the

textual subject served to account for the role of the spectator. In effect, the textual subject permitted a way of theorizing spectatorship without straying from what was largely a theory of textual determinism. Textual processes placed a pliant spectator in a position from which sense could emerge.

Ethnographic work has held particular promise for contemporary researchers as a way of challenging this abstract and deterministic view with the concrete evidence of the ways audiences make sense of texts. (Richard deCordova 2007, 230)

Indeed, despite efforts at indoctrination and assimilation in early film writings, ethnographic details embedded in their disciplining narratives reveal disorder, unruliness, and subversions, whether or not intentional. Hence, this study assembles ethnographic evidence from film writings drawn from two significant periodicals, *Renacimiento Filipino* (1910–1913) and *Cultura Social* (1913–1914), to seek points of intervention in which acts of agency and power disrupt the production of hegemonic knowledge about cinema and its attendant cultures. Through historical anthropology, audiences may be imagined beyond their textual production in these writings and, at the same time, we might begin to articulate the ruptures in their textual, historical production that might point us to alternate histories of – and thus, alternate possibilities for – Filipino audiences.

Renacimiento Filipino, a bilingual, weekly, anti-American magazine and *Cultura Social Revista Catolica Filipina*, a Spanish-language Catholic magazine produced by the archbishop, were published in the second decade of the 20th century, the first from 1910 to 1913 and the latter from 1913 onward. This was a significant period in the history of early Philippine cinema – the period of “the emergence of Philippines-based filmmaking” (Musser 2017, 77), which yielded a perceivable spike in the number of published materials on film and cinema in local newspapers. *Renacimiento Filipino* is particularly significant for its general prominence in Philippine history and enduring legacy to the nationalist movement: a staunchly pro-poor and anti-American ideology; and *Cultura Social* for its publication of what was probably the first film review column published locally from 1913 to 1914, “De Espectáculos,” helmed first by a writer who called himself Alonso de Mudarra and later Filadelfo.

The sensory discourses of early viewership in these magazines are construed in the purview of historical anthropology as a “production of disparate categories of people through the representational strategies of political discipline” (Axel 2002), in order to foreground how the “contextualization” of Filipino audiences in these writings have restricted critical engagements with real audiences of film. By foregrounding “the productive yet fragmentary character of...contextualization” (Axel 2002), one might begin to negotiate materially with limitations that have been produced discursively across history. In this way, the study aspires toward “the empowerment of spectators, not only by conceptualizing and

stressing their activity, but also by allowing them to speak for themselves within academic discourse and escape their status as mere objects of research" (deCordova 2007, 230-31).

THE SENSE IN SENSATIONS OF CINEMA

For Tom Gunning (1986), "[e]very change in film history implies a change in its address to the spectator, and each period constructs its spectator in a new way" (69). Early writings in *Renacimiento Filipino* and *Cultura Social* reveal the construction of spectators – and, by consequence, the early production of our knowledge of cinema – within social dynamics, practices, and contentions that emerged within the space of the theater. Of the findings that emerge in this study, three stand out: (1) cinemas in various forms catered to various classes during the period; (2) the unregulated conditions of cinemas resulted in the conception of cinema as a place of threat and transgression; and (3) the variety of exhibition modes during the period proposes alternate ways of producing audiences apart from the now-hegemonic screen practice.

Charles Musser (2017) estimates that there must have been 20 to 30 theaters in Metro Manila alone by 1910-1914 (91). Two of the articles included in this study discuss the opening of two such theaters: Lux Theater and Manila Theater. *Renacimiento Filipino* covers the opening of "*un nuevo teatro-cinematógrafo*" (a new theater-cinema), Lux Theater, on 4 Nov. 1910 to an exclusively invited audience. Remarkably, the feature digresses from *Renacimiento Filipino*'s conventional pro-poor discourse to comment on how the theater "*reune todas las condiciones de higiene, confort, etc. que deben tener esta clase de locales*" (meets all the conditions of hygiene, comfort, etc. that is required of such premises).¹ It also notes that the façade had been made in the workshops of famous artists, the Zamora brothers, implying that the Lux Theater is targeted to an upper-class clientele. The advertorial tone in the feature is likely because the *Renacimiento Filipino* was given invitations to the exclusive inauguration, as fully disclosed at the end of the feature: "*Agrademos á la empresa el pase que nos ha enviado y las localidades que hemos recibido*" (We thank the company for the pass sent to us and the seats we received).

Certainly, the construction and programming of these cinemas were implicated in the class stratification of film audiences. The social capital ascribed to the Lux Theater's premiere screening extended to its later screenings, as it would eventually capitalize on its being "*[u]nico cinematógrafo de estrenos de los sin rivales*" (the only movie theater with unrivalled film premieres) (quoted in Deocampo 2007, 180). It secured exclusive rights to premiere Pathé films before other cinemas can screen them and also eventually ventured into the selling of screening rights of other European films to other local *cinematógrafos* (Deocampo 2007, 180). Among the Lux Theater's upper-class market were the *Cultura Social* writers themselves, who frequented the venue during their tenure as columnists in 1913–1914.

In September 1913, Alonso de Mudarra's mention of the inauguration of Manila Cinema in his "De espectáculos" column corroborates the continuing increase in the number of cinemas in Manila during that period:

El número, casi incontable, de los salones explotadores de la cinta, se ha aumentado en uno, que por la calidad y circunstancias que en el concurren, merece ser citado. Nos referimos al Cine Manila, que en la Plaza de Santa Ana contruyó Don Armando Camps, con el buen gusto que le distingue. Este cine abrió sus puertas a mediados del pasado mes y por él puede decirse que desfiló la flor de nuestra sociedad. Digamos, haciéndolo justicia, que es el mejor presentado de la capital, hecho de intento para el fin a que se destina, con muchas y buenas butacas en el patio y amplio acomodo en los palcos, sin columnas ni soportes que intercepten la visual. La decoración es severa y de buen gusto y el conjunto artístico y nuevo.

The almost uncountable number of movie operating halls has been increased by one, which due to the quality and circumstances that concur, deserves to be quoted. We refer to the Manila Cinema, which in the Plaza de Santa Ana was built by Don Armando Camps, with the good taste that distinguishes him. This cinema opened its doors in the middle of last month and it can be said that it paraded the beauty of our society. We can say, to do it justice, it is the best that has been presented in the capital for the purpose to which it is intended, with many good seats in the courtyard and ample accommodation in the loges, without columns or [structural] support to intercept the view. The decoration is severe and of good taste and the set is new and artistic.

Mudarra's description of the architectural accomplishment of the Manila Cinema indicates how the popularity of cinema had since resulted in changes to entertainment infrastructures. From the primitive and ramshackle nickelodeons and *accesorias* (converted warehouses) of the early days of cinematic projections, there were already theaters not only dedicated to cinema but architecturally designed for cinematic viewing – "*sin columnas ni soportes que intercepten la visual.*" However, the tiered pricing for these more sophisticated venues indicates that the infrastructure itself was implicated in the class stratification of audiences, with cheaper seats for poorer audiences and box seats for the wealthier. Cinema had become big business and was a rising industry for lucrative profit, not only for the film producers but also for distributors, exhibitors, and even construction companies. In fact, these new entertainment infrastructures were also meant to showcase new films as well as innovations in construction and architectural outfitting. Consider the following advertorial feature published in the *Manila Times* on 15 January 1912:

Patrons of the Gaiety theater in Calle Real, Ermita, have been much impressed with the novelty and beauty of the electrical arrangement of the building, the wiring and

installation of which was performed by the electrical department of E. C. McCullough and company and introduces several new features in electric lighting. Besides being one of the first middle moulding jobs ever done in the country, the use of the Halothane shades is a novelty as well as being a vast improvement over the other styles seen in the city.

The system is what is known as indirect lighting, the light being thrown on to the ceiling and there diffused and reflected throughout the hall. The indirect fixtures were manufactures in the shops of McCullough's electrical department. It is the first time such work has been attempted in the orient.

Cinema was thus conceived, not only as entertainment fare, but as a physical space imbricated in business and industrial relations. Cinema did not just consist in *what* was shown on the screen but included *how* this was experienced through the physical and material structures of cinema.

Of course, amid these efforts at modernizing, i.e. raising of the market appeal of theaters, cinemas for the poor did persist, as can be deduced from Filadelfo's February 1914 article, where he mentions "*suelen llenarse los 'cines' populares y económicos de chiquillos de todas las edades*" (popular and cheap 'cinemas' are filled with children of all ages). The disapproval implied in putting "cinemas" in quotation marks suggests that these smaller cinemas hardly compared with the sophistication of Manila's grand theaters and were likely frequented by the poor despite their questionable structures because of their cheaper rates. The proliferation of theaters for varying social classes foregrounds the relative liberation offered by a market not yet fully imbricated in the global capitalist economy, which would, within the next century, severely limit opportunities for players in the industry through the concentration of capital power in media monopolies and business conglomerates.

Accounts of audience responses to the films during these early years of cinema in the Philippines depict a feverish excitement over them. *Renacimiento Filipino*'s first article on cinema, "La relajacion del gusto," relates how, "*vereís todas las noches, el desfile continuo de espectadores que van saliendo unos, mientras van ocupando otros, los mismos sitios que acababan de desalojarse*" (you will see every night, the continuous parade of spectators whose seats, when they leave, are immediately occupied by others as soon as they have been vacated). The author likewise laments how Philippine society had arrived at the time when "*no ya la clase culta, ni siquiera la sociedad media, sino las masas, la verdadera plebe, el pueblo bajo, cobra su puesto en los cinematógrafos*" (not the educated class, not even the middle-class, but rather the masses, the real plebs, the lower-class, take their place in the cinemas).

Indeed, despite the cinema rates, people persisted to watch films with a remarkable tenacity that confounded even the writers of *Renacimiento Filipino* and *Cultura Social*, who apparently did not expect

the poor masses to opt to spend their limited resources on cinematic entertainment. Even in moderately luxurious theaters with tiered pricing to distinguish social classes, accounts of the viewer demographics encompassed even the poorer classes.

Mudarra is particularly vexed and descriptive in his March 1913 article, when he missed *La Viuda Alegre* (The Merry Widow) when it was screened at the Ideal and he ended up seeing it at the Empire because the Ideal was too full of people, even though it was already late in the evening on the fourth night of screening:

[L]os mismos en que sus taquillas fueron tomads poco menos que por asalto a codazos y empujones, y en que el público llenó el vestíbulo y formó cola en la calle, aguardando una oportunidad de colarse en la sala. El que no podía atrapar una butaca, se disponía a sacrificar el bolsillo y tomar un asiento de palco, pero ni por esas; los palcos estaban también de bote en bote. Entre los que hacían antesala, figuraban personas graves y seriotas de las que no acostumbran a dejarse ver en espectáculos más caras, vimos a muchos que de ordinario no van ni a las más baratas por no gastar una peseta, y de los que en tranvía van siempre en segunda por parecerles un despilfarro pagar dos céntimos de diferencia. En fin, un verdadero furor vidual.

[P]eople would push and shove just to get a ticket. The viewers filled the lobbies and the lines extended out to the streets while they waited for a chance to be accommodated in the hall. Those who couldn't get seats would burn a hole in their pockets and get the more expensive box seats on the balconies of the hall. However, even in these seats, one can hardly drop a needle. Among those in the anteroom were serious people not usually seen in more expensive shows. We saw many who usually do not attend such events, misers who usually would not spend a peseta on such shows, and the kinds of people who travel by tram but always in second class because it seems wasteful to pay the two cents' fare difference. All in all, it was a true frenzy.

La Viuda Alegre, likely an early film adaptation of Austro-Hungarian composer Franz Léhar's operetta *Die Lustige Witwe*, was reportedly presented at the Ideal with, "not just one piano player but a full chorus and orchestra" (Pareja 1998, 41).

Forced to avail himself of an alternate screening venue, Mudarra sees the film instead at the Empire Theater, which he dislikes and criticizes for its choice of predominantly American fare in the Empire's repertoire of films, although he concedes that "*suelen ser enteramente inofensivas*" (they are usually entirely harmless). In the article, he comments unfavorably on the new decorations, which he likens to a "cooked crab" (*cangrejo cocido*) because of the predominant red.

The low opinion of American films was not unique during this period. According to Deocampo, Manila audiences during this time generally did not favor American films, as these tended to be terribly damaged and worn-out. The Philippines then was a convenient and profitable market for American “junk” films, or reels that had already made their run elsewhere and were thus already badly scratched and damaged (2007, 183-85). In other words, the Philippines was at this point already being construed as a surplus market for American goods, a significant point in the historicizing of cinema and the way it has since developed as an industry in the country.

Certainly, in the years after 1918, while colonial progress allowed local filmmaking industries to bloom – in the Philippines, generally evidenced in the establishment of Jose Nepomuceno’s *Malayan Movies*² – Hollywood also began to expand its market, taking advantage of the period’s relative calm while European production and distribution channels struggled to recover from World War I; and

[w]ith the US State Department providing concerted support that forced foreign governments to accept American film products (thus overcoming the growing self-protectionist quota restrictions in the region) and with the economic incentives given by the Department of Commerce to promote films as America’s major commodity exports, Hollywood enjoyed the market boost that no other nation’s cinema could match. (Deocampo 2017, 13)

Unfortunately, the imbrication of film in global flows of power were not yet a significant point of critique during the first decade of cinema in the Philippines. In fact, Mudarra was far more vindictive of the mode of exhibition than the choice of films being shown in the Empire during the period:

[S]u empresa sigue procurando darle amenidad, haciendo que con las películas alternen otros pasatiempos que no lo sean. No ha mucho trabajaban allí las hermanas Howard, unas señoras cuya habilidad se reducía a cantar canciones de negros con voz cavernosa, como masculinizada por el alcohol, y a darse cuatro patadas con los vaivenes de marineros animados por el mismo espíritu. Primero se presentaban en traje de sociedad, muy ceñidito por quererlo así la moda para todas, no, en honor de la verdad, porque fuese una invención de ellas. Luego, cuando a instancia del público tenían que presentarse de nuevo en escena, hacían su aparición en más abreviada indumentaria con amplia exhibición de pierna y muslo y lucimiento de medias caladas.

[T]he company continues to provide amenities, alternating films with other different time-killers. Not so long ago, the Howard sisters worked there; famous for their talent of singing songs of black Americans, with booming voices and masculinized by alcohol, kicking to the curb similarly drunken sailors. First, they go out in common everyday

clothing but modified to be tight-fitting as a personal touch. Later on, when they are to present a new scene to the audience, they appear in skimpier clothing, showing thighs, legs, and the glimmer of stockings.

Exhibition modes during the early years of cinema were certainly far more varied than today. Even after cinema had come into its own and films were no longer twin-billed with theatrical performances, live intermission numbers were still very much in fashion. The scenes that the passage paints are vibrant and messy, full of unruliness and play. Film seemed to be, in every sense of the word, *performance* – a sensorial, visceral, and ephemeral spectacle. The successes of these performative screenings reflected the successes in previous decades of theater – a medium that Filipinos by the time of cinema's emergence had a solid grasp of and the medium that had primarily produced and placed them as spectators.

According to Musser, prior even to the coming of cinema, "Manila [already] possessed an entertainment infrastructure and a tradition of theatergoing" (2017, 88), a tradition that included the avid consumption of seditious plays and other subversive theatrical forms. If film was presented in a performative frame to an audience familiar or well-versed in the language of theatrical performance, Filipinos perhaps had greater agency over their cinematic experiences than what conventional history has given them credit for. Especially as structures of formal education in the vein of European Enlightenment had not been available to Filipinos under three centuries of Spanish rule, the theatrical mode of spectatorship, far more corporeal and disruptive than cinema, was the experiential precedent from which Filipinos could imaginatively draw and make sense of their cinematic viewing experiences.

Precisely, Mudarra's complaint in the cited passage foregrounds, on the one hand, the performative creativity and innovation that went into curating film exhibitions during this early period, and, on the other, the view of cinema as a place predisposed to moral decadence and rowdy, "uncultured" behavior – therefore, also, a space of threat, transgression, and subversion. These behaviors characterize early audiences as unlearned, undisciplined, and unsophisticated, yet these accounts also corroborate how "[t]he colonized [did] not merely absorb foreign cultural influences like a sponge;" films were cut and screened with a variety of lively performances, and people did not necessarily gaze upon the screen as a passive, spellbound collective.

According to film critic and historian Clodualdo del Mundo (1998), "[i]nfluence happens through a complex process of adaptation, negotiation and, *eventually*, indigenization" (8) (emphasis added). I add emphasis here to highlight that this reconsideration of the subversive potential of multisensorial cinematic exhibitions by no means claims an inherent self-conscious and political resistance in the way that Filipinos experienced cinema during its early period; in fact, these accounts were likelier to have been efforts at the manipulation of audience satisfaction and pleasure to ensure continuous revenue.

Figure 1. "El Fumar en Los Cines." Source: *Renacimiento Filipino*, 21 August 1913.

Yet, the unregulated theater and the multimodal and multisensorial cinema of the early period were attractive precisely for occasioning alternatives to the way that, eventually, "[t]he magic of the Hollywood style at its best...arose...from its skilled and satisfying manipulation of visual pleasure" (Mulvey 1999, 835). Walter Benjamin, in his seminal essay, *"The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility"* (1936/2008), points to the ways that cinematic technologies can reconfigure the relations of art and its spectators:

A person who concentrates before a work of art is absorbed by it; he enters into the work, just as, according to legend, a Chinese painter entered his completed painting while beholding it. By contrast, the distracted masses absorb the work of art into themselves. Their waves lap around it; they encompass it with their tide. (40)

This is a point to be explored further in the concluding section of this study.

The *Renacimiento Filipino* article, "El fumar en los cines" (Smoking in the cinemas), published on 21 August 1913, corroborates the lack of regulation in cinemas during its early period in the Philippines with its account of people complaining of smokers in the theater, whose tobacco fumes irritate fellow viewers and refract and blur the film projections. While the writer opines in the article that smoking is not a vice, he concedes that *"este calificativo cuando se le practica en ciertas reuniones, y en ciertos lugares donde se congreguen muchas personas"* (it qualifies as such when it is practiced in certain meetings and places where many people gather). He remarks that, previously, cinemas had prohibited smoking inside but were unable to sustain the implementation of the rule (see Figure 1).

Yet, in describing these "condemnable habits" inside the theater, the author's ethnographic account does not, by any means, remain neutral or innocent. He takes the opportunity to call out, in particular, *"una caballero rojo de rostro, de pelo rubio, de anchos hombros y abdomen abultado"* (a blond, red-faced gentleman, with broad shoulders and bulky abdomen), and proceeds to narrate in meticulous detail the conduct of this most inconsiderate and arrogant foreigner:

[E]n uno de los cines más renombrados y prestigiosos de Manila, quizás el de mayor fama, entró en un palco donde había dos señoritas; se sentó en uno de los asientos desocupados del palco; hincó el bastón sobre el piso y apoyó una mano sobre él, mientras con la otra empuñaba un grueso cigarro, al que daba frecuentes chupadas, regondeándose bonita y ufanamente, seguidas de bocanadas de humo, sin tener en cuenta para de que este envolvía en sus espirales á las delicadas señoritas, quienes se esforzaban por alejar de sí el humo con el abanico y se defendían con el pañuelo tapándose casi todo el rostro. Dicho caballero no hizo caso alguno á las muestras de disgusto y desazón de de dichas señoritas. Veía que éstas se abanicaban por defenderse del humo, pero no por eso dejaba de fumar, todo lo contrario

parecia deleitarse en el splicio de las tiernas jóvenes y siguió fumando con más gusto y mayor furia, hasta que las pobres víctimas de su ineducada y grosera tarea se alejaron para na morir asfixiadas bajo aquellas bocanadas de humo molestísimo al olfato.

[I]n perhaps one of the most famous renowned and prestigious cinemas in Manila, he entered a loge where there were two ladies. He sat on one of the empty seats. He put the cane on the floor and put one hand on it. In his other hand, he held a thick cigar which he took frequently, sucking it ostentatiously and proudly puffing out the smoke, ignoring the fact that the puffs smothered the sensitive ladies. The women made efforts to fan the smoke and covered their faces with handkerchiefs. The gentleman paid no attention to the signs of displeasure and discomfort of these young ladies. He saw that they fanned themselves from the smoke, but that did not stop him from smoking. On the contrary, the young girls' unpleasant experience seemed to delight him. He continued to smoke with greater pleasure and strength until the poor victims of his uneducated and rude conduct moved away so as not to die by asphyxiation from the puffs of smoke.

The slanted description of the scene in the writer's language is certainly reflective of *Renacimiento Filipino's* anti-American bias and pro-Filipino rhetoric. The caveat that the account seeks merely to relay the fact to the reader "as it happened and as we witnessed it, to expose with complete impartiality the judgment that the aforementioned gentleman deserves" (*como ha sucedido y hemos presenciado, para que pueda exponer toda imparcialidad el juicio que merece de él el citado caballero*) only highlights further the fictionalization of the narrative.

The production of the American as oppressor and the vulnerable Filipino women as poor victims appropriates the narrative of the colonial oppression of the Philippines by the US at the same time that it reveals the writer's "contextualizing desire" (Axel 2002) to construct a negative identity against which Filipino readers might be able to define and place themselves. By implying the context of oppression, the article succeeds in producing the argument that Filipinos continue to suffer colonial oppression, thereby, ideally, inciting patriotic fervor.

Yet the attempt to critique colonial oppression while disciplining all bodies within the theater ultimately proves to be self-defeating. In much the same way that Benjamin describes how "[f]ascism attempts to organize the newly proletarianized masses while leaving intact the property relations which they strive to abolish" (1936/2008, p. 41), the fictionalization of political life through a cultural critique of cinematic audiences accomplishes what Walter Benjamin (1936/2008) describes as "granting expression to the masses – but on no account granting them rights" (41). This, of course, is not an argument for the perpetuation of smoking in theaters but a reiteration of the oversight and lack of

awareness in the cinematic discourses of early nationalists of how their cultural nationalism was complicit in producing “the logical outcome of fascism [which] is an aestheticizing of political life” (Benjamin 1936/2008, 41).

Nowhere is the disciplining of audiences and, dialectically, the resistance of audiences to discipline more apparent than in the discursive propositions for an appropriate cinema for children and their accompanying sensory discourses of children’s behaviors inside the theater. On 14 October 1913, M. Reyes Revilla published a fuming tirade (see Figure 2), with a particularly pronounced anti-poor prejudice unexpected of a *Renacimiento Filipino* article, denouncing the bringing of children no older than three or four to film screenings and calling it “*insano, cruel, fatal*” (insane, cruel, terrible):

Hoy, en Manila, parece que el mal progresa de una manera sorprendente, especialmente en los cines de segunda y tercera clase en donde las tres cuartas partes de las personas que á ellos acuden son de la baja especie. Las butacas y la entrada general repletas están de mujeres, vestidas indecentemente, asquerosamente, con sus niños en brazos que apenas cuentan dos o un año y, hasta de algunos meses de edad. Qué triste cuadro!

Today, in Manila, it seems that evil progresses in a surprising way, especially in second and third class cinemas where three-quarters of the people who come are of low species. The seats and the general entrance are full of women, dressed indecently and disgustingly, with children in their arms barely two or one year old, up to just a few months of age. What a sad picture!

Revilla then attempts a scientific explanation for his argument: that children should not be allowed in the cinema because the flickering lights would produce an abnormal effect on their weak constitutions, and that doctors generally recommend bright walks in open fields and outdoor exercises for kids anyway. In bringing them to the cinemas, he reasons, “*robaríamos el tesoro que tanto bien les hace*” (we steal the treasure that ensures their wellness). Yet his recommendations reveal that his complaint has more to do with how children disrupt film-viewing when “*[s]us gritos de fastidio y de aburrimiento aumentan á medida que las horas avanzan*” (their cries of boredom increase as the hours advance) than with children’s welfare, especially when he sets a very low age limit for those he believes ought to be allowed in theater: children no younger than three or four, or “*los párvulos en general*” (infants in general).

The presence of infants in theaters is corroborated in Mudarra’s September 1913 column, where he decries what a pity it was to see “*niñas que apenas levantan dos palmos del suelo*” (children who can barely lift two hands off the floor) being subjected to “*escenas de seducción*” (scenes of seduction).

Ang mga hiwagâ ng Paris (Los misterios de Paris) ni Eugenio Sué. Tinagalog ni Francisco Sugui. Maynila, S. P., Limbagan «Tagumpay» 1913, es la portada de un libro de 19 por 13 cms. con texto de 175 páginas y en la vuelta de la última el Índice.

La famosa obra de Sué es bastante conocida, y no cabe duda que al ser vertida al idioma vernacular, se presta un servicio a la literatura tagalog, que vendrá a enriquecerse con un título más de autor acreditado, mientras que de paso, aquellos que desconozcan el castellano, encuentran oportunidad de saborear lo que han producido autores afamados. De aquí la importancia que para nosotros tiene, esa labor meritisima que vienen realizando algunos compatriotas reconocidos como acreditados escritores.

Toda esa obra de traducción, supone la vulgarización de ideas, y ese es trabajo que debe ocupar la atención de cuantos amamos el progreso y desarrollo de estas privilegiadas comarcas.

La bibliografía periodística, por otra parte, aumenta de día en día, proporcionando nuevos títulos y abriendo más el campo de la difusión de ideas mundiales, tan necesarias en estos tiempos, y sobre todo, ello es una prueba de que el país cuenta con hábiles e inteligentes escritores.

Y luego se hablará de la capacidad de nuestro pueblo!

SAGITRA.

RENACIMIENTO FILIPINO

EL CELIBATO Y LAS

PROFESORAS AUSTRIACAS

Desde hace muchos años, las profesoras de Viena han estado sosteniendo una enérgica campaña para la supresión del celibato. Gracias al apoyo de numerosas personalidades políticas, acaban de conseguir al fin que el Landtag austriaco falle a su favor. Pero solamente las profesoras de la capital podrán disfrutar de ese beneficio, y las demás profesoras de la baja Austria están obligadas, como hasta aquí, a renunciar sus funciones cuando contraigan matrimonio. Ocurre preguntar: ¿por qué esa parcialidad en favor de las profesoras vienesas? ¿Acaso el celibato es más penoso en Viena?

Aviso a nuestros favorecedores

Nuestros talleres de fotograbado y zincografía, se ha trasladado a la calle de Arlegui núm. 605 esquina a la de El Dorado, Kiyapo.

LOS NIÑOS EN LOS CINES

No soy el primero en censurar esta costumbre lamentable y fatal a veces. En tiempos remotos, cuando la zarzuela y la comedia estaban en boga, tal cuales son ahora los cines en Manila, ya brillantes plumas de escritores con nobilísimos deseos atacaron este mal; más apesado de las notables censuras de aquellos, el público (de las gentes ineducadas se entiende), terco, orgulloso, incorregible, no prestó atención a la sana advertencia.

Hoy, en Manila, parece que el mal progresa de una manera sorprendente, especialmente en los cines de segunda y tercera clase en donde las tres cuartas partes de las personas que a ellos acuden son de la baja especie. Las butacas y la entrada general repletas están de mujeres, vestidas indeciblemente, asquerosamente, con sus niños en brazos que apenas cuentan dos ó un año y, hasta de algunos meses de edad. ¡Qué triste cuadro! Durante la función y en los intermedios, dichas criaturas entonan su «música wagneriana» ora en concierto, ora alternando. Sus gritos de fastidio y de aburrimiento aumentan a medida que las horas avanzan. ¿Y por qué no se han de aburrir los pobres niños? Si los adultos que ya comprenden el interés ó la preciosidad de una cinta cinematográfica, por el calor, por la multitud y por el olor malsano que despiden la misma ó por la longitud de la función se fastidian, ¿qué no se fastidiarían ellos, los niños de menos de dos años de edad que no entienden nada absolutamente de lo que allí se representa, ni tienen bastantes fuerzas para aguantar el tremendo calor que allí se siente ni tienen la paciencia jacobina que tenemos?

Y el llevar los niños de muy corta edad a cines es insano, cruel, fatal porque el calor producido por el gentío, la luz vacilante de las películas y el incesante apagar y encender de las luces que iluminan el coliseo producen un afecto anormal en la débil constitución de los niños de

dicha edad. Estos, según los médicos, necesitan muchos paseos en los vastos campos y ejercicios saludables al aire libre para desarrollar su energía física. Si es así, ¿por qué se ha de enclaustrarlos en los cines y teatros en vez de llevarlos a la Luneta, al Jardín Botánico ó otros sitios sanos de paseo en donde el aire es más puro y en donde se podría respirar más desahogadamente? Y otro motivo grave por que no se debe llevar a los niños de corta edad a los cines: porque destruiríamos lo más conveniente para ellos, robaríamos el tesoro que tanto bien les hace y les quitamos sin compasión su fiel y mejor amigo, su bienestar, su frenesí, su vida, esto es: ¡el sueño!

Los cines son para los adultos, hombres, mujeres, jóvenes y niños ya más de tres ó cuatro años de edad.

Las películas que en los cines se exhiben son hermosísimas, interesantes, altamente dramáticas é instruyen muchas veces al espectador. También algunas son sensacionales como las reproducciones de drama policíacos que a la vez que despiertan un interés muy grande en el ánimo del público, demuestranle asimismo las artes de los grandes ladrones y le enseñan el modo eficaz de cojerlos en la red. Las representaciones dramáticas que encierran un romanticismo delicado, fino, responden acabadamente a nuestra psicología de filipinos que tenemos mezclada en la sangre el refinamiento latino. Por estas razones celebramos la afición pública por los cines porque esto indica gusto artístico, amor y familiaridad con la vida y los usos de los pueblos más avanzados y modernos.

Sigamos pues entrando en los cines, pero no llevemos de ninguna manera a ellos a los niños de menos de dos ó tres años ó sea a los párvulos en general.

M. REYES REVILLA.

Figure 2. "Los Niños en Los Cines." Source: *Renacimiento Filipino*, 14 October 1913.

Certainly, the image of mothers with infants in tow to the cinemas during these early days demonstrates an extreme example of how, "the cinema mixed ages indiscriminately, providing the same entertainment for adults and children alike" such that "the boundaries between children's films and adult films became blurred" (deCordova 2007, 234). In the same article, Mudarra recounts that, while watching *La Alquería de los Sauces*, in which an adolescent character commits an indiscretion and is later shown carrying a child, he hears a little girl in the theater comment, "*Ay, ya tiene un hijo!*" (oh, she already has a child). Mudarra notes the word *ya* (already), which to him means the little girl understood how the child had come to be, leading him to argue that children must not see seductive scenes because they do not escape "*la malicia de las espectadores infantiles*" (the malice of young spectators).

Ironically, in citing "*la malicia de las espectadores infantiles*," Mudarra affirms the possibility of agency and awareness on the part of the child at the same time that he denies the experience of these child spectators by placing their potentially transgressive *malicia* under the gaze of paternalistic reformation and censorship, to ensure its management and discipline (deCordova 2007, 242). In the words of Richard deCordova, "in a world of surveillance, the darkened movie theater afforded the possibility of escape, and, insofar as it intensified the spectator's power to see without being seen, even reversal" (2007, 242). In this period of unregulated moviegoing and continuous emergence of small and big theaters, this subversive potential was increased tenfold. Unfortunately, because of the preeminence of intellectual and cultural production during the period, this potential was not harnessed to any powerful degree, and cinema was left to be absorbed thoroughly into the global industrial film circuit and thus, also, into the global flows of empire, largely through the "monopolizing supremacy" of Hollywood (Deocampo 2017, 13).

Yet all is not lost. As Deocampo notes, in the aftermath of World War I, "[c]olonial cinema and the cinema of the colonized coexisted, although not without their difficulties and tension but also not without rewards" (2017, 13). The nation would likewise remain in-process, in cinema as well as in various other expressions of life-production. Mojares cites Dr. Jose Rizal's analogy of the nation as a nervous system to reiterate that, no matter how blindsided our early nationalists may have been, much can still be revalued from the ways that they struggled to activate an agency of the nation "*from, of, and for* which they tried or pretended to speak" (2006, 504):

As in the case of the human nervous system, a nation cannot be self-sufficient. It is nourished by a constant flow of impressions from the outside world, otherwise, deprived of contact and starved of stimulation, the body falls disoriented and prey to hallucinations. It is not only turned outwards but inwards, alive to what goes on inside the body, parts sensitive and interconnected, alerting the body to what dangers lie within or may sneak in from the outside. (Mojares 2006, 504)

This revaluation is particularly relevant in view of the current study's aspiration to reinvigorate the relations between sensation and cognition in the examination of discursive productions of cinematic knowledge. While overall cautionary in tone, it also refuses to surrender the possibility of speaking about ourselves amid and despite resonant echoes of colonial voices.

Filadelfo's November 1913 piece articulates this poetically in a cautionary discourse about cinema that manages, surprisingly, to be both materially grounded and prophetic:

[N]os da la sensación gráfica, panorámica y epidémica por decirle...de la realidad, pero al faltarle la palabra le falta el pensamiento. Por eso el cinematógrafo por muchas maravillas de científico esfuerzo que se acumulen en su perfeccionamiento, jamás podrá suplir a la representación oral de una obra escénica. Siempre llevará ese sello de material inercia, de impotente ficción, que caracteriza a la mecánica puesta al servicio del arte aunque esa mecánica empleo por auxiliar prodigioso el más etéreo o inmaterial de los recursos físicos: la luz.

[Film] gives us the graphic, panoramic and epidermal sensation, so to speak, of reality. But when the word is lacking, there is no thought, so the film, by many wonders of scientific effort that accumulate in its perfection, can never replace the oral representation of a scenic work. It will always carry that stamp of sluggish material, of impotent fiction, which characterizes the mechanics put at the service of art, although these mechanics use for prodigious aid the most ethereal and immaterial of physical resources: light.

The basing of the limitations of cinematographic representation here on its lack of words and the ethereality of the very material that produces cinematographic images places the production of cinematic knowledge within the sensory experience of cinema and its correspondence with the audiences' bodies and corporeal senses. This recognition of cinema's rootedness in technologies and infrastructures emphasizes the material bases of cinematic knowledge, and drives at the fundamental materiality of cinematic visuality.

In the Philippines where even a preliminary perusal of archival materials reveals vibrant and mixed exhibition modes and unruly audiences during the early period of cinema, alternate trajectories that local cinematic production and cinema audiences could have taken, and might still pursue with greater political awareness and force, emerge. Filadelfo's anxieties transform, in this study's materialist historiography of cinematic knowledge, into an affirmation of cinema's political potential as a medium that gives potency and substance to fictions and desires, with the power to "make real" imagined futures, unrealized revolutions, and still the dream of genuine freedom and emancipation.

TOWARD NEW SENSES OF CINEMA

Susan Buck-Morss (1994) writes that “[c]ognition is a physical as well as an intellectual function” (55). This cannot be truer than in cinema, in which viewers experience “[o]n the one hand... an extreme heightening of the senses, a hypersensitivity of nervous stimulation” and “[o]n the other... a dulling of sensation, a numbing of the nervous system that is tantamount to corporeal anaesthetization” (Buck-Morss 1994, 55), uniquely produced by the simultaneity of confronting sensory images on the screen and of regulating and disciplining one’s body inside the theater due to the collective nature of mass viewings.

The danger of this unilateral confrontation with the film screen becomes all the more intensified in the context of audiences coming into the technology from conditions of abjection, oppression, and miseducation in a nation twice colonized. Precisely, the vulnerability engendered by such conditions along with the propulsion of capitalistic opportunism during its upsurge at the beginning of the 20th century³ allowed for the people’s “compelling urge toward new social opportunities [to be] clandestinely exploited in the interests of a property-owning minority” (Benjamin 1936/2008, 34). Consequently, this much is apparent: “the expropriation of film capital is an urgent demand for the proletariat” (Benjamin 1936/2008, 34).

But while the revolutionary struggle for the mode of production remains in-process, the imaginative labor of reconstituting our film knowledge, and rebelling against established rules of engagement, if necessary, remains an urgent and foremost task. Indeed, the contradictions between film knowledge as it is produced in texts (in the context of discipline and punishment, to borrow from Michel Foucault) and film knowledge as it can be culled from a historical anthropological reading of these texts (in view of a real audience that exceeds the discourse of regulation and surveillance) underscore the need to recognize and reconfigure the material conditions of cinema and, perhaps more immediately, the material conditions of critical practice in order to extend possibilities of expression, conversation, and subversion.

Theorist and media scholar Neferti Tadiar (2004) writes in her incisive examination of people’s material dreams and fantasies, of which cinema is seen as both product and producer:

If we understand imagination as a form of work, we must see that it is work that is incorporated into a system of production of universal value. In this aspect, that is, in its role in a global system of production... Inasmuch as the Philippines is [...] a constitutive part of the world-system, its material dreams are the consequences of – as well as bear the consequences for – that international order of political and economic dreamwork [...]. (5)

The present study's investigation of the historical process of knowledge-production during the period of early cinema has emphasized how this process is implicated not only in the production of knowledge but in the production of audiences and, ultimately, the production of a people. With this view, it has hopefully established greater ground upon which we might begin to reassess our notions of how and in what ways cinematic knowledge have been produced, how else and in what other ways cinema can be imagined, and in whom and in what ways we might incite the responsibilities of critical practice within the socio-economic, political, and cultural conditions of Philippine society.

Realist historiography produces cinema as both a readable text and corporeal experience, comprehended as much through intellectual critical practice as through sensory stimulation and sensorial assimilation, implicating any changes one might wish to make in how cinema constructs its spectators/audiences in necessarily multimodal and dialectical engagements. This assertion gives value to considering how, for instance, we might imagine, in Jonathan Beller's (2006) words, "a revolutionary sensorium" that could "viscerally perceive the direct connections between, for example, spectacle glamor and debilitating poverty" (262) – in other words, a cinema that embodies an "ocular appropriation of reality" but activates the viewer so that he/she no longer "relinquishes all power of corporeal response" (Buck-Morss 1994, 57).

Within this view, this study thus culminates in generative propositions toward (1) *new modes of historiographic inquiry*, in which we contend with the scars of colonial trauma, not only through mythopoetic cultural practices of reorienting historical narratives in our favor, but by reclaiming our material histories from material archives, however "corrupted" by colonial assimilation they may seem to be, and implicating these discourses in material structures of oppression and exploitation that we continue to contend with to date; and (2) *new modes of cinematic spectatorship*, in which we reimagine the ways that self-affirmative criticism and critical historical insight cannot only be known intellectually but perceived, interrogated, and reconfigured sensorially and experientially by a greater number of people, beyond critics and filmmakers, to propel material action and subversion against hegemonic structures of knowledge and power.

Indeed, corollary to these arguments is a revaluation, and re-evaluation, of the ways that, going forward, we might begin to re-envision our sensorial and intellectual relationship with the cinematic apparatus: What modes of expression become available to critics and audiences if we are to convey how we make sense of, i.e. interpret, cinema through sensations? What are the possibilities for critique through performance, and criticism through curation? What other methodologies in film scholarship and film historiography can enrich our understanding of cinema despite an absent film archive? How else can we understand cinema outside of its aesthetic representations, so that its imbrication in political economy is foregrounded, more rigorously interrogated, and more effectively changed? How can current and future film scholarship reinvigorate its relationship with real film audiences, so that it

might participate more actively in producing, not only intellectual ferment, but material conditions of freedom and emancipation? Because the struggle to define cinema continues, and in the Philippines where the modernity that introduced us to the medium bears the indelible imprints of colonial trauma and violence, the critical tendency to assess films within the rubrics of resistance and capitulation, nationalism and revolution, can be understood as only circumspect, even inevitable, and always urgent.

NOTES

¹ All Spanish-to-English translations by the author.

² One cannot discount, however, that local filmmaking might have also begun in regions outside Manila – the possibilities of which can and must be further explored in future studies.

³ Significantly, this is a condition that has since culminated in the corporatization of media, the formation of media monopolies, and the rampant exploitation of media workers and filmmakers under the auspices of these big businesses.

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