

## Use of Time and Wong Kar-wai

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*Wong Kar-wai's films are analyzed and assessed according to their use of narrative film and how much of Time is appropriated and valorized in order to show its importance to Hong Kong as site of transnational capital exchange. This, in turn, is comparatively read against the background of Philippine cinema's unceasing use of social realism in films that implicate the country's status as a neocolonial state and the people's continuing struggle for greater opportunities. This essay argues that the use of editing and camera techniques and their implicative notion of time, speed, and progress are heavily anchored on the vicissitudes of a filmmaker's economic and political "time."*

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The liberalization of cultural products, although through copyright piracy, is nowhere more evident than in Quiapo - the mecca of Philippine poverty, ethnic hamletting and fetishized cinematic icons. There, amidst the heat and smells, you see the UP, middle-class prototype digging in for Hitchcocks, Godards and Kurosawas. Another name newly included in Quiapo's most wanted is Wong Kar-wai, a Hong Kong-based director whose widened popularity is much indebted to, despite the disdain of his Asian fans, Quentin Tarantino's Rolling Thunder Pictures and Miramax's canonizing release of *Chungking Express* (1994). More than the piracy connection, Wong Kar-wai and the Philippines have more attachments that bind them. Who would dare deny the secret delight one feels with Maggie Cheung's mention of the Philippines and its tropical storm in the Cannes-winning film *In the Mood for Love* (2000)? And the disbelief when Leslie Cheung (*Farewell my Concubine*, 1993) had to quarrel with one of FPJ's infamous *contrabidas* in the train station in *Days of Being Wild* (1991)? How about seeing Tita Muñoz and Alicia Alonzo, though without speaking lines, figure as key characters in the film? And Carina Lau's character strutting her bimbo ass in front of Binondo church? Or the San Miguel Beer logo in a bar in *Chungking Express* (1994)? Or Wong Kar-wai's often quoted admission that his use of Latin music in his films is part of the influence of the Hong Kong music scene in the 60s which was mainly comprised of Filipino *combo* bands (Chan 2001)?

Where must one place this obsession to magnify every detail and connect Wong Kar-wai's oeuvres with anything Filipino? There are many ways to answer this question. One is the inevitability of perceiving objects and signs inalienable from their identity as in the case of transnational trademarks and logos. Another is to acknowledge the affinity between Hong Kong and the Philippines in terms of the cultural and economic bridging by the Chinese in the country. The narrative that this connection creates must inescapably feature either the displacement of the Chinese in a (formerly) British territory or in the Philippines. Wong Kar-wai's depiction of whatever constitutes us remains furtively laudable; this is despite the inaccuracy of the portrayal of Filipino goons in the 60s and the (mis)use of Tutuban station as supposedly from that era.<sup>1</sup> It seems that any reference that points to identifiably Filipino signifiers is welcome probably until such a time that Wong Kar-wai decides to feature the massive employment of Filipino domestic helpers in Hong Kong. But the most plausible and relevant hypothesis regarding the secret delight upon Wong Kar-wai's use of anything Filipino can also be the source of our silent envy as to how another Asian director can shoot his film in the Philippines, win at Cannes and have his films released in Europe and North America, while we remain in the *cul-de-sac* of Mother Lily and bask in the glory of a few social realist art films being included in Directors' Night viewings in film festivals abroad.

Some questions this essay attempts to raise are how Wong Kar-wai's artistry, stylism and technique relate to Hong Kong's colonial and national history. What does his use of narrative time say about Philippine local cinema? The section that follows is an evaluation of Wong Kar-wai's films based on his use of time, the privileging and manipulation accorded to it to achieve certain philosophical effects. It will look into five of his films' deconstructive project to undermine logic while depending on comprehensibility as its narrative foundation to represent what can be termed as Hong Kong time. Another section that discusses Hong Kong's annexation to China in 1997 attempts to link Wong Kar-wai's filmography to its unique postcolonial history. It will also explore how global capitalism influences financial transactions of world cinema as in the case of Wong Kar-wai's ability to penetrate the international film market. The last section of the essay is a discussion of our national cinema and how it is in relation to Wong Kar-wai's trajectory in terms of its political limits and possibilities.

## Wong Kar-wai's Filmic Time

Narratology provides many explanations to the question how humans manage to convey a story and for the audience to actually understand what is being told. As it is, the structure of narrative-formation is the very groundwork of the way human beings perceive their universe and how they make meaning out of these cognitive contacts. Since its inception in the early twentieth century, the study of narratives has been able to explain the wonders of storytelling in varied ways, but there is one which remains prominent. The manner people recognize, consume, enjoy, and sometimes, censure narratives are all based on the fundamental principles of narratives as representational and chronological. The view that a narrative is but a representation of what happened in an external world is very much a part of the philosophy of the Enlightenment which influenced the structuralist division of wholes into units as rationally guided by what is being represented. Representationality creates an illusion wherein objects are originary and finite in terms of what meanings they can accommodate. The narratives, as representational, must therefore be truthful and absolute. On the other hand, the notion that a narrative must always follow the rules of time and logic is another principle of structuralist narratology. What is called narrative time is a narrative element that guarantees comprehension. The chronology or arrangement of a series according to logic of all narratives follow this; no text can do otherwise if it wants to be understood.

Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994), which catapulted his status as mainstream, and yet one of the most playful directors in Hollywood, is always talked about in terms of its use of time in the narrative. An explanatory reading of *Pulp Fiction* (1994) defends how a highly stylized breaking up of chronological narrative time yet still comprehensible cannot be a product of careless editing and whimsical episodic divisions (Buckland 2003). Had the elliptical time unfolded in an aimlessly random way, the audience would have had a difficult time to weave its logical gangster narrative. Remember, for example, how causative and functional it was of Tarantino to introduce his seemingly unrelated characters one by one, his use of associative objects and settings, and lastly, some furtive revelations towards the end of the movie. *Pulp Fiction* (1994), despite the initial shock of having to watch images that threaten the anxious viewer how these images could be forgotten sans fully understanding the film, emerges to become one whole, complete

narrative. *Pulp Fiction* (1994) is a success because despite its deceiving attempt to “postmodernize” narrative time, its backbone remains logical, causal and chronological; a show that has offered its audience logical, causal and chronological cognition. Edward Branigan’s (1992) study on narrative and film emphasizes that any narrative’s attempt at processing, assembling and molding of details is all about an attempt at comprehension. Rightly, because without comprehension, there is no appreciation; therefore, one can hardly declare whether a film is good or bad, or simply, whether a person liked it or not. Watching a movie, like reading a text, compels the viewers to comment on it as the indelible mark of comprehension. Appreciating a film and thereby understanding it entail the necessary participation of cognitive learning and how its narrative psychology and reception become a rich field in the unfolding of the mind’s processes.

Time, in many of its forms and manifestations, is very much utilized by Wong Kar-wai in his films.<sup>2</sup> The many instances how he carefully placed time pieces and indicators of time configure Wong Kar-wai’s passion for the ever-precious and yet bound to be wasted time. His repetitive use of the big Siemens wall clock in *Days of Being Wild* (1991) and *In the Mood for Love* (2000), the plastic date calendar, the Indian housekeeper dusting the mansion’s wall clock, the references of Ouyang Feng to events in the Chinese calendar, are only some of the few allusions to mechanical time. The concept of mechanical time is explained by physicist Alan Lightman’s (1993) take on Einstein’s theory of relative time which divided a world into two uses of time: mechanical time and body time. While mechanical time is for the people who think that “their bodies don’t exist”, body time is believed by people who “make up [their] mind as they go along”. Body time people “know that time moves in fits and starts...[t]hey know that time struggles forward with a weight on its back...”; on the other hand, mechanical time people count every minute of their lives so that their bodies “must be addressed in the language of physics. And if the body speaks, it is the speaking only of so many levers and forces. The body is a thing to be ordered, not obeyed” (24). Accordingly, these two times can meet but only with desperation, while there is contentment when they remain uncontaminated. Every man can make a world in either time, but not in both times. Wong Kar-wai’s cinematic choices lead him to mechanical time because his films are peopled by characters who either run after time or who defer their actions because of time. Take, for instance, the character of Yuddy in *Days of*

*Being Wild* (1991). A self-destructive, Hamlet/James Dean incarnate, young man who is seemingly spontaneous about his actions, ready to beat up a man at any time, and carefree enough to ditch a woman in exchange for the next one who would come along, is very much caught up by the issue of his unwanted birth - a fabrication of mechanical time. The traces of mechanical time are the same pathways he took to reclaim his originary Self which he belatedly realized as unredeemable when he had to die in a foreign land during a train ride, which incidentally moves along in the matrix of time and space. Even the pretty Su Lizhen's attraction to Yuddy was guided and formulated through mechanical time: at a minute before 3 in the afternoon of April 16, 1960, they were friends forever. Such a brilliant seduction can only be done by time's perpetual threat of disappearance. The narrative of Wong Kar-wai's *Days of Being Wild* (1991) is merely governed by the hours before April 16, 1960 and the days after it.

Another exacting example is *Chungking's Express's* use of mechanical time in the film's two narratives. The first narrative involves Cop #223 (Takeshi Kaneshiro) seeking and supplicating desperately for a re-appearance of his former girlfriend, a certain May, on the occasion of his birthday - May 1, 1994. The lost love who is untraceable will indefinitely remain unknown, faceless and without history, as punishment for breaching a contract of love. The only referent to her persona that is left among viewers is tinned sliced pineapple consumable only before its expiry date. The seeking cop would later be acquainted with a woman (Brigitte Lin) whose appearance ironically calls attention to others while basking in the anonymity that her trench coat, blonde wig and sunglasses provide. This woman is always on the run -giving the impression to spectators that either time is after her or she is after time. This enigmatic woman who is double-crossed in a split second by marginalized Indians in a drug deal was also seeking both her money and the security it represents. She, too, is waiting for *the* time that troubles would be over. The gathering of these two for a few hours did not benefit either party (apart from a "beeped" greeting after 6:00 am on his "quarter of a century old birthday") because while one looked for love, the other shunned it; while the woman sought money and security, the policeman as embodiment of it ignored it. Although the one-night companionship they shared probably brought solace to two tired souls, their coupling remained unsuccessful since the society oftentimes frowns upon the marriage of a deviant and a vanguard of the State wherein her crime is neutralized by the sanctity of love.

Meanwhile, these characters had to move on because mechanical time *requires* him to go to work and her to forge another drug deal.

The other narrative follows the same narrative schema except for a few substitutions of subject and their immediate goals. Cop #663's (Tony Leung Chiu-Wai) lost love in the second narrative was a stewardess - a vampish, promiscuous Sisyphus-like woman punished into a perpetual search for a lover - whose greatest symbol in his conscious past was the washed and dried airline uniform. This cop became another woman's obsession: this time a good person who sang while serving fish and chips (Faye Wong). According to Cop #223's voice-over narration, this woman would fall in love with another within the next six hours. What is rather curious here is not the number of hours it takes one to fall in love with another (some take even less), but the decision of Wong Kar-wai to translate in the language of countable, mechanical time people's actions and intentions. This repeated calculation of time somehow gives Wong Kar-wai's narrative a vigilant yet distanced and pensively philosophizing voice which is absent in "uncalculating", ordinary love stories. For while their acquaintance blossomed into a full-blown relationship wherein indications of permanent love and security were present, the woman in this narrative is punished to simulate the characteristics of Cop #663's former lover. Her habitual visit to the cop's apartment is a rehearsal, time and again, of her love's expression as if it is permitted by time for us to practice, and ultimately devour time, what we wanted to do in "real" time. Despite the time-precise deferral of action, one year of unused paper boarding pass, this coupling's narrative is successful since they were both looking for love and nothing else. Their union is allowed by narrative license since they both embody the productive citizen that strengthens society's moral fabric while it would have been a criminal's punishment to leave them lonely in the cruel hands of time. In the end, the "express" counter that served fast-food for those "on the run" ceased to be as it would be renovated and operated by two stable individuals who have found contentment in life. The express is but a metaphor as to how seekers stop when they have been found.

Narrative time is not only important; there can no be a narrative at all without it. It is pertinent to point out and see the reverse relations of narrative as the mother of narrative time: that the space-time coordinates of narration merely accommodate the narrative. When Wong Kar-wai's camera started panning to create time and space captured in

celluloid film, he also dragged with it the persistent memory. For instance, the use of time in *Happy Together* (1997) engendered the cultivation of memories of a nation, a home, a lover, an ideal runaway vacation, of family and friends. The film is more than a narrative of gay lovers - a fact the director wanted to be ignored as it could have been a narrative of heterosexual couple and nobody would notice - but a story of the permanency of transience that always already clamors for the dependability of memory (Lebinh & Eng 1997). In this narrative, Lai Yui-fai's (Tony Leung) constant desperation over the threat of his lover's inconstancy Ho Po Wing (Leslie Cheung) makes him, on the one hand, blame time over their failure to reach Iguazu waterfalls together and, on the other, beg time to prolong their second chance trysting. The character has created for himself an oppressive cycle of fear and anticipation for time, thereby forcing him to despise the incursions of memory while thanking it for serving as time frozen in time. The scene where a drunken Fai headed to the motel of the philandering lover and fought him in a flirty arm wrestle, he cried, "my regrets could kill me!" While his intoxication prompted him to release his anger, this anger could only be mediated by the lingering memory of their good times together despite the obvious imbalance in terms of giving and misgiving in favor of the lover. The use of memory as agency of regret in lieu of the passing of time, both irretrievable and unforthcoming, is Wong Kar-wai's undying tribute to time's power to heal and to cripple. *Happy Together* (1997) is also a film that carries with it the question of global transit, or simply, time spent away from one's home, that is, one's nation. Why did Fai find it necessary to return to Hong Kong as home, as reward after his penitentiary existence in another city; while the ex-lover was portrayed as someone thrown into hellish Buenos Aires for his sexual and monetary excesses? This temporality when a national/citizen is uprooted, though, is time that is measured and describable as documented in one's passport. Why is it that no one really bothers to count the days and weeks when one is "at home" within the nation? That the hourglass only starts away from it. (This reminds us of Einstein's relativity theory: time is slower away from the center of the earth; as transients of global traffic experience how time passes much slowly away from the center of one's origin.) The film is also a story of alienation between two (gay) Chinese nationals who wanted rest from the high-density populated streets of Hong Kong; they wanted a time off the banality of their permanence in that city. It took four months to shoot *Happy Together* (1997) in Argentina's

Buenos Aires when the original schedule was only three weeks. One can see how Wong Kar-wai's film about alienation and impermanence had crossed at a perpendicular the same hostility of being misplaced and the unfriendliness of an unfamiliarly cold weather that his crew experienced. But this temporal alienation was solved with the prospect of going back home. One should only remember Fai's absolution from regret and memory as he started recollecting his father's (Chinese) (national) image, of Hong Kong as home, only to raise a set of new ones about Argentina as Other when he started his return. A technique used by Wong Kar-wai to cement this relationship between time and memory is time-lapse photography as exemplified by the scene in *Happy Together* (1997) wherein a huge shaft of a structure stands in the middle of the city encircled by blinking vehicular headlights. This image of change, when time appears to be remorselessly consumed and creates the illusion of speed without covering distance, is almost similar to the passing of time only to be recaptured in a blurry picture of memory.

The use of time in *In the Mood for Love* (2000) was described by Donato Totaro (2001), editor of *Offscreen*, as Dali-esque. This film, which tackles the unfortunate challenge of having to maintain a friendly, Platonic disposition towards the man who is the husband of your man's mistress, recreates Hongkong in the 1960s. Totaro describes Wong Kar-wai's handling of the material as a play of "emotions by manipulating what Andrei Tarkovsky referred to as the 'time-pressure' inherent in every shot... The images... do not narrate, they linger, describe, and emote. The time of the images does not slow down, it 'melts down' from the burning passion... These chance moments of physical proximity on staircases and hallways become 'what if' memory-images suspended in time and space and protracted to a level of pure character subjectivity, a consciousness of Time heightened by 'banal' moments that attain monumentality through the temporal 'melt down' of the filmic image."

Such an elaborate explanation of Dali's influence, on the other hand, is disputed by Stephen Teo (2001) who said that the dream-like effect of Wong Kar-wai's film would not "indulge in the kind of overt symbolism" of the painting *Persistence of Memory*. However, more than the usability of intertextual relations to Dali's painting, an observer might simply attribute dream-like texture, the slow-paced shots, the repetitive scenes only costume-altered, Maggie Cheung's silky cheongsams and Tony Leung's pomade-fixed hair, as only varied attempts to



reconfigure Time for an audience three decades younger down the spectrum of time. The exaggerated vivacity of Wong Kar-wai to capture the 60s for Shanghai migrants in Hong Kong as it were was proven by hiring a Shanghainese cook to prepare meals during the shoot because they “tried consciously to recreate the actuality” (in Rayns 2000). Now, Wong Kar-wai’s fetish to “reclaim” lost time can be interpreted as a mockery of Time’s capacity of expanding itself infinitely in Space. One can argue against this by saying that all these grand “reclamations” were done for the sake of a film’s artistry. However, the use of time in *In the Mood for Love* (2000) creates a historical voyeurism among its viewers, who are more than willing to absorb the verisimilitude of a historical past. This absorption of a “truthful” rendition of the past merely feeds the delusion that history was as beautiful as it was on a huge screen complete with musical score and oblique shots. Considering the feebleness of being trapped in a situation such as theirs, can anyone actually appreciate the “aesthetics” of narrow alleys, poor housing condition, tropical rainshowers, and to boot, marriages in futility? This picture tells its viewers that what is ugly today can be beautiful tomorrow. The unchecked condensation of memory fabricates a monster of nostalgia which is all the more susceptible to self-erasure since nostalgia is open to endless reinterpretation. It is always dangerous to quote Adorno for the possibility of misquoting, but at this point, he could be very right: “[e]very visit to the cinema leaves me, against all my vigilance, stupider and worse” (in McGee 1997: 3). Walter Benjamin, on the other hand, in finding the logic of this burgeoning popular entertainment, slightly defended the cinema’s public as “an examiner, but an absent-minded one” (in McGee 1997: 4).

Watching *Ashes of Time* (1994) for the first time gives viewers a debilitating feeling that the film was made to confuse, and behind that, to impress upon the unthinking that it is beyond comprehension. However, the difficulty subsides when one realizes that two sequences that follow each other on screen do not necessarily compose a cohesive narrative. Instead, the laws of causal and spatial order educate us on how to compose a logical narrative out of moving pictures. A story cannot unfold in one monolithic time; narration becomes the “overall regulation and distribution of knowledge” (Branigan 1992: 76). It is all about the control of material as to how when and in what manner must details be divulged and kept hidden until the “right” moment of revelation. If the control of knowledge and its hierarchical relations are carelessly handled,

chances are the audience would find the narrative unsatisfactory, as is the usual claim about anti-climactic plots. Wong Kar-wai's control of narration in this film is very much dependent on narrative time. His manipulation of it exemplifies that the seemingly deconstructive use of time and tricks that are played to undermine the chronology are hasty generalizations by postmodern fans. On the other hand, *Ashes of Time* (1994) is also an attestation of time's greater power that is causality. Causality - every effect is caused by another- that for every action is a reaction, has become so forcible that it is already synonymous with reason and logic. In postmodern literature or music video, no matter how schizophrenic a story is or how stylistically random it presents itself to be, causality rules the interstices of narrative. An erratic universe is not necessarily causal; because no matter how unpredictable an erratic world can be, people will still ask themselves what precedes this irregularity, and what comes after it. Balancing the roles of time and causality in narratology, Branigan (1992) arrives at this conclusion: "[w]e use hypotheses about time to search for causation; we use hypotheses about causality to establish temporal order" (48). Thus, this all-important temporal order, no matter how concealed, stylized and undermined by the use of continuity, ellipsis, overlap, simultaneity, reversal, distortion, retroactive techniques in modern cinema, is still, nonetheless, a Temporal Order. After all, the underlying rationality why people go to movie houses is a result of causation and temporal order itself.

The narrative time in *Ashes of Time* (1994) is divided among many characters whose appearances are equally fragmented and incoherent in terms of the many vignettes, as arranged, that tell their individual lives. It centers upon Ouyang Feng/Malicious West, an agent for paid assassinations whose personal saga remains hidden amongst his acquaintances except for Evil East, a warrior who sought his past from an enigmatic woman played by Maggie Cheung. The story introduces the Blind Swordsman who left his wife, portrayed as the woman by the grove, whose company is a stallion routinely aroused by her. In an elliptical narrative time, this woman was visited by Evil East and Ouyang Feng. On the other hand, Hong Qi, a skilled swordsman, was being clandestinely followed by his wife when he decided to help a young woman avenge her brother's death with only a basket of eggs and a donkey. This side story amazed and awakened Ouyang Feng from his mercenary outlook which later led to his return home. In retrospective narrative time is Murong Yang/Yin, a character whose schizophrenia created intrigue

among the swordsmen. Using the voiceover monologue, the spectators know that Ouyang Feng's journey home would be uneventful as he later learned of the death of the woman he loved.

Although the narrative time analysis above cannot capture or approximate the distortions and suturings done by Wong Kar-wai, the film shows that Time is a huge, continuous "stretch of nerve fibers" (Lightman 1993: 140). These fibers that send and forge messages to other nerve endings are disjointed as sponge-like skin that is microscopically gapped. Although discontinuous, these fibers of Time do not stop creating and segmenting action from one fiber to another. This imagery of theoretical Time is very much metaphorical of what happened between *Ashes of Time* (1994) and Wong Kar-wai. By cutting up the narrative time into many, seemingly disconnected segments, the creator tried hard to increase the spaces in between the fibers of Time. The initial cognitive reception of the audience, the film as Herculean, proves the effectivity of this butchering. However, in a universe where Time is an expanding sheet, these gaps are so tiny that "a single second would have to be magnified and dissected into a thousand parts and each of those parts into one thousand parts before a single missing part of time could be spotted" (140). The fibers of Time are arranged so perfectly that segmentation artists would like to operate upon Time, is hardly perceptible. The audience, after all the doubts, congratulates itself inside the theater. This successful practice in narrative comprehension, though troubled by the question of Time, is brought about by aptitude where men and women appreciate the beautiful pattern made by what Time has woven, instead of seeing the spaces between these disjunctions. In the eventuality of time, nobody really remembers what technique in narrative time Wong Kar-wai applied, or how many flashbacks were there vis-à-vis continuing time, or was the spinning cage prop the representative of Murong Yang/Yin's schizophrenia, or what music was used to foreground the sex scene with a horse. Comprehension erases narrative time techniques into memory.<sup>3</sup> A spectator continually cancels and discards images, sounds and linguistic exchanges into the bin which returns these as narrative memories. Without Time that is perfectly fit so as to accommodate disjuncture, there will be no memory, and without it, only chaos.

## Time in Transnational Hong Kong

A study of Wong Kar-wai's use of narrative time and his manufacture of meanings through constant allusions to time as mechanical, and time as philosophical leads to a compelling inquiry. This has implications as to whether his use of time is indicative of Hong Kong's specific colonial and national histories, or, is there such a thing as Hong Kong time?

The island remained limited to small traders and pirates during almost the entire reign of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), only to be resurrected when the British started to unload Bengal opium for Chinese distribution which then led to the Opium Wars (Lonely Planet 2000). It was 1841 when the British formally took control of the governance and defense of the island which later included the surrounding territories. Only on the first of July in 1997 did PRC officially reclaim the territory as its international financial city under the Special Administrative Region following a *one country, two systems* political philosophy. According to the Basic Laws of SAR, China's "socialist system and policies shall not be practiced... and Hong Kong's previous capitalist system and life-style shall remain unchanged for 50 years" (SAR 1997). This shift in governance, from a colonial set up to a Beijing-led handling of affairs, was feared by millions of Cantonese-speaking Chinese and anticipated by those in the mainland. For many political analyses, such as those featured in *Asiaweek* in 1997, the Hong Kong handover was "a curse as well as a blessing" because it could only mean more interdependence between the mainland's market and natural resources and the territory's financial and investing capacity (Reyes & Law 1997). All in all, opportunities and prosperity abound for the Chinese in both boundaries.

However, this vision is not shared by everyone in Hong Kong especially before the actual handover. Pre-1997 Hong Kong's political context was very much a scenario of paranoia and anxiety about the impending communist take-over. During this time, much intrigue and controversy raged regarding how much democracy PRC would be willing to extend, which depended on how much money Hong Kong must make for the entire nation. Nonetheless, a few years after the handover the Chinese in the territory are well satisfied with the manner Beijing has maintained the handling of two systems. This is according to Stephen Lam, the territory's constitutional affairs secretary (in Krlev 1997). Asked in an interview about the circumstances of releasing his "gay" film in post-97 Hong Kong, Wong Kar-wai himself expressed his

optimism about the handover: “it’s been three months since the handover and we didn’t see anything which is quite different from before...I think the whole process will be very slow,” referring to the PRC’s SAR governance of the territory (Lebinh & Eng 1997).

Although known for his abrasive reaction towards those who complicate interpretations of his “simple” films, many critics do not stop at pointing out Wong Kar-wai’s films, especially since they were produced during the height of the handover anxiety from 1989 to 2000, as indicative of Hong Kong’s fragile encounter with identity, colonialism and nationalism. Take, for example, Wright’s (2002) discussion that “[t]he identity of Hong Kong is perpetually marked by its closeness to the motherland China and its Western link as a British colony... Hong Kong has duly created its own culturally specific identity, one that inevitably combines both elements of the West and Mainland China. The cinema of Hong Kong reflects this notion of a dual identity, combining to create a third, localised identity.” This truly marked historicity of Hong Kong’s perpendicular meeting of colonialism (at a time of “postcolonial” discourses) and nationalism (not its own but as appendage to another) has caught the attention of the world as highly progressive despite its multiple identities as its unifying and identifying characteristic. Although this problem is not unique to Hong Kong’s transitional stage as “Chinese” people who wanted to remain British subjects, the reality of Hong Kong’s decolonialization is only seven years old. The fate of Hong Kong is rather curious as it has formed a Janus-split in the modern political arena. While the territory remains a source of national pride for its important role in buttressing the mainland’s economic strategies, for many Hong Kong residents, it will be helping a motherland whom they barely know as motherland. The territory’s memory of China is non-existent, so to speak, as there is nothing much to remember about the severing operated by the British to the Chinese people. Amidst all the materialism and political confusion, who would like to muse about the Opium War as an act of “national” significance nowadays?

Pertinent questions about Hong Kong’s identity always implicate how it copes with the collision between transnationalism and postcolonialism. A century and a half’s colonial rule is a good time of practice in kowtowing to British governance now intersecting with PRC’s long-term plan to decontaminize Hong Kong of its unruly customs. However, the situation of Hong Kong, and whether it will move towards state-controlled socialism or not, might be seen in terms of Koichi

Iwabuchi's (2002) "third space hybridism" in transnational discourse and its participation in exemplifying what global culture looks like. Hong Kong's transnational experience had been outward, as evidenced by pre-97 migration of its subjects to Canada in the study of Audrey Kobayashi's (2000) "Transnationalism, Citizenship and Social Cohesion Recent Immigrants from Hong Kong to Canada", and inward, as proven by South East Asian labor force and mainland migration in the 1950s. This constant movement of peoples, and with them capital and properties, is highly perceived in Wong Kar-wai's treatment of theme and narrative time. In sum, for Ackbar Abbas, "Hong Kong cinema can intervene in political debates more effectively by problematizing the visual than by advancing direct arguments about identity" (in Bautch 2003). This filmic intervention as exemplified by Wong Kar-wai's oeuvres can only be understood as Hong Kong's ambivalent reaction towards its blurry national participation and incapacitated political action that is all the more highlighted by its affluence.

In *Happy Together* (1997), filmed during the monumental handover, Wong Kar-wai dealt with romantic (homosexual) love amidst transnational alienation. The characters' search for emotional peace and sexual contentment only led to problems greater than international tourism such as labor exchange in a hostile environment in order to afford a one-way plane ticket. An interesting reading regards *Happy Together* (1997) as Hong Kong's attempt to subvert its colonized subjectivity by imagining Argentina as its Third World Other (Kaldis 2000). Wong Kar-wai reinvents Argentina to become a land of renewal for Chinese nationals seeking refuge from their materialistic realities. This reading is prompted by the role Hong Kong has taken as one of the finest financial cities of the world that has given its people much opportunity to accumulate the way First World citizens have. Inclusive of this opportunity is the voyeuristic and penetrative eye of touristic perception. *Happy Together's* use of time greatly renders this reading obvious because the film neatly boxes finance, transnational mobility, and the prolonging of time through speedy lifestyles into one negotiated package.

Wong Kar-wai's treatment of narrative time as fragmented, his speed-thrill camera shots, his references to consumable mechanical time as transient yet traceable, are all indicative of Hong Kong's anxiety and obsession about time. Hong Kong's colonial history and its subsequent re-attachment to China are both characterized by "waiting time" and "deferring time"; waiting for freedom from British rule for Chinese

nationalists and yet mentally deferring time for its citizens wary of how it means to be Chinese (socialist) nationals. This so-called Hong Kong time is informed by the city's space and landscape as it continually affords to tear down residential buildings only to build taller ones with more human-absorption capacity. Although the government leases land very selectively and slowly, Hong Kong's 6.8 million population is still managed because of its national budget (Erikson 1997). The image of Hong Kong with its thriving people going to and fro in all sorts of businesses and engagements, its dimsum fast food take-outs, and the city's bright lights amidst all the shopping and selling, all intensify the belief that Hong Kong time is Wong Kar-wai's use of time.

### Philippine Narrative Time

Reading Joel David's (1990) articulations on contemporary Philippine cinema leaves a reader with a good survey of Brocka and Bernal films, a nuanced interpretation of what "Golden Age" must mean, an Aunor-worship, and a manageable film vocabulary courtesy of the glossary. His question as to whether Philippine cinema is still a "national pastime" remains compelling today. Could it possibly be that the sickening jealousy one feels of Wong-Kar-wai's success in appropriating Philippine panorama and resources is but an extension of what the Philippine film industry has been about all these years: a pastime?

This regurgitation about Philippine cinema, how it has been analyzed as inert and commercial, in the middle of a discussion about another director and his use of time is, admittedly, all about envy and day dreaming. Watching familiar places in a Wong Kar-wai film provokes that irrational sense of territoriality and misplaced "nationalist" sentiments as if a film by a Filipino using the same resources would yield the same effect. Hence, it is not true that films are products for global consumption without national boundaries. The genial feeling as one watches award-winning films by other Asian directors such as Ang Lee, Zhang Yimou and Wong Kar-wai, is, conversely, engendering that gnawing nostalgia for Lino Brocka while wondering how it will be for our national cinema.

One can always cite *Magnifico* (2003, Maryo J. de los Reyes), *Munting Tinig* (2001, Gil Portes), and *Babae sa Breakwater* (2003, Mario O'Hara) as proofs of the unceasing attempts of our local directors to seriously come up with good films worthy of attention. These films participated in major film festivals such as Brussels, Berlin and Toronto,

while rounding up those of lesser stature. On the other hand, one can always blame the too-often-blamed greedy capitalist/studio set-up, the inability of local directors to solicit governmental funding, the limited Philippine market, the dying film industry because of media piracy, the *mestiza* star system, the state's lack of intervention in terms of subsidy and protection, Hollywood's incursion into Third World markets, value-added taxes, and so on and so forth.

That Philippine movies should breed Wong Kar-wai copycats, or to demand auteurism amidst all filmic impediments in the country is not the argument of this essay. It is not even the point of this study to ask why we cannot produce something like "Baclaran Express." The fact that *Magnifico*, *Munting Tinig* and *Babae sa Breakwater* gained the attention of film critics worldwide only means the country's cinematic state is not entirely in a black hole. What seems to be surfacing in this discussion is not respectability and attention between Filipino directors and Wong Kar-wai, but the very apparent difference in use of narrative time and references to time of these films as opposed to his. Maryo J. de los Reyes, Gil Portes and Mario O'Hara, the directors of said films respectively, utilized narrative time as compact, chronological and (social) realist. These films are linear in their temporal and spatial order as they do not pose difficulty in narrative comprehension. What is very telling in these narratives are their underlying thematic similarities that are unmitigated poverty in a young boy's concern for his grandmother's impending burial expenditures, the inadequacy of public school education in the countryside, the serious whoring and housing problem of the urban poor, in general –the economic and cultural alienation of the poor. It is no longer necessary to point out how social realism in film is not tendentious towards a more experimental, non-linear and playful use of narrative time. Social realism's agenda of audience catharsis towards progressive action cannot warrant the use of time that would impede the flow of tear-jerker moments. How can anyone imagine jump-cut editing, time-lapse photography, oblique shots and the slow-paced camera of Wong Kar-wai with material like *Magnifico*? This contradiction can produce the kind of delay and deferring of reading common in literature called modal difficulty.<sup>4</sup> It happens when an audience cannot readily adjust to a newer mode employed by an artist such as T. S. Eliot's irreverent modernist poetry. In literary theory, both Derrida's and Lacan's prose in the beginning proved to be troublesome for they were written in a mode not accessible to everyone. Although this kind of difficulty in



reading is solved through practice and careful study, James Clifford suggests that a deep translation is a necessary step towards understanding and interpretation of something that initially seems to be modally inscrutable (in Davis & Schleifer 1994). On the other hand, in the process of translation of any kind, some things are meant to be lost. Take, for instance, the modal difficulty a Third World film about poverty and vigilantes poses to an audience not trained to watch non-linear, playful narrative. It might prove to be distracting to viewers whose foremost concern and attention are towards a suturing of the fragmented, highly stylized plot. Although interpretation and the production of meaning are open to dispute, a (Third World) film's immediate appreciation is measured by its efficacy in informing and educating the people's need for national struggle and consolidation. It is an imperative that a (Third World) filmmaker's objective, whether his propensity is to experiment cinematically or not, is to unmake this worlding. This unmaking is made possible by choices that he pursues. Considering the nationalist agenda of decolonizing colonized mentalities, filmic education in the Third World is for those who need it: the dispossessed, the marginalized, the alienated.

The absence of symbols and signifiers of mechanical time in these Philippine movies as opposed to Wong Kar-wai's manifold and calculated use of it suggest that local directors are not passionate about it. The manner in which Filipino directors ignore time could only mean the lack of motivation to repetitively philosophize about time. Films engaged in the portrayal of neo-colonial reality and Third World poverty are a contradiction from the lethargic brooding about the loss of time and the passing of memory. In the context of 80 million Filipinos' struggle for a piece of the world's economy, it is superfluous to meditate on questions of existential time and space when time is measured as job opportunities missed or space measured in terms of rented rooms. While Wong Kar-wai's films fetishize time for Hong Kong dwellers moving to and fro creating capital and begetting profit, time in the Philippines is characterized by the laboring class' encounter with foreign investments and capital flight. Despite jeepney rerouting now and then, the abjectness of Brocka's Miserecordia street in *Maynila: Sa Mga Kuko Ng Liwanag* (1975) retains the dead-end immobility it is remembered for. Philippine time is very much the kind that is frozen; a time halted by stagnation and unforgiving lack of progress. This is the time which allows agricultural nineteenth century landscape to persist today: Romblon's coconut monopoly, Masbate's cattle industry, Batangas' *azucarera* de Don Pedro,

peasant labor workers in Laguna lining up for wages handed by the *contratado*, farmers turned *aparceros*,<sup>3</sup> among the many. Benigno Ramos' Sakdalista peasant movement active in Central Luzon and Southern Tagalog from 1930-34 asking President Quezon for radical agrarian reform has found its reincarnation in Hacienda Luisita's workers' protest today. The sugarplanters' violent dispersal on November 20, in turn, reminds one of the many class-based confrontations in Philippine history such as the 1932 Tayug rebellion (Terami-Wada 1998). This cycle of struggles defines the kind of time that has impeded genuine land reform for over a century since our policymakers cannot devise a program given our "unique agrarian structure" that is different from other Asian models (Hayami, Quisumbing & Adriano 1990). Philippine time is a few blocks of high concrete buildings in Sta. Cruz and the newly erected, peach-painted Hellenic columns in Quiapo church, while the city's intestines of roads and roadblocks have remained untouched. The peopling of the city continues to flow in the manner of a Julio Madiaga seeking shelter among its dead-end streets and a Ligaya more than willing to leave the idiocy of rural scarcity. This is similar to the domestic invasion, as dramatized by Nick Joaquin (1998), by the South (Visayan folks) when the "culture of *barong-barong*" contaminated Intramuros after the Pacific war. The railroads and the breakwaters of Manila are zones of human stench, hunger and desperation. Philippine time is when the national deficit of this Third World nation bloats and its unemployed adults multiply, so that transnational migration is the only access to social justice and mobility. Hong Kong time is unlike ours, for, while it nurtures its fledgling nationalization after its long stint in the global economy, the other problematizes how the nation can survive amidst the onslaught of trade liberalization.

In an "era of multinational capitalism" (Jameson 1986) where corporate capital goes against national economies, the people must synchronize time to keep pace with the dictates of capital movement. In a society like Hong Kong that is moved by corporations that are "nomadic", "fluid" and "efficient" (Ackland 1999), demographic behavior reconfigures its cultural consumption in order to psych up the vicissitudes of time. This includes their films' use of narrative time. Although broadly defined as multilateral links among nations that range from transnational communications to labor diaspora, transnationalism has paid more specific attention to international economic relations especially with the ratification of Uruguay Round of Talks of GATT

(1986-1994). GATT-WTO exemplifies the capacity of transnational policies to penetrate national boundaries. Founded to serve as a panel of rule-based system of trade based on the principles of non-discrimination, reciprocity and transparency, GATT was backed up by 118 member countries and comprises 90% of world trade under its scope. (Canlas 1994). Although this transnational economic alliance is provided with its quantitative restriction measures, removal of tariff rates, aggregate measure of support, among others, in order to help developing nations to cope with the predicted ravages of First World surplus products, it cannot guarantee the survival of small countries in the scheme of things. Transnationalism bogs down at the level of theorizing by critically reviewing its principles of non-discrimination, reciprocity and transparency: national signatories such as Hong Kong and the Philippines are simply not equal in terms of their domestic economies' strength to produce capital for export goods and services. The implementation of this global policy created greater disparity in the sense that Hong Kong is able to continue its light manufacturing industries while the Philippines intensifies its warm body export. Although Michael Mann's (1993) analysis of transnational relations leans towards the privileging of the nation by extending its properties – “diversifying and developing” – thereby arguing against the death of the nation, nonetheless, capitalism figures as the only imaginable stable mechanism wherein trade and migration are possible.

Transnationalism has permeated film production and consumption. But more so in the manner transnational concepts, visuals and movements are pervasive in films. An example of this is Wong Kar-wai's demonstration of the Chinese migration between Hong Kong and the Philippines. Caroline Hau mentions that in the 1960s, affluent Chinese families in the country sent their wayward children to Hong Kong; whereas today, they send them to Xiamen, supposedly a more “punitive” place than the cosmopolite, luxury-friendly territory.<sup>6</sup> In *Days of Being Wild* (1991), Yuddy's upper-class Chinese *mestiza* mother in the Philippines decided to give him up for a paid-for adoption to a loose woman in Hong Kong, while Carina Lau's character decided to follow Yuddy, though without the guarantee of finding him, in relatively progressive Manila. This comparison clearly takes note of how time has virtually stopped for nations that cannot provide the velocity that global capital needs as it is in the nature of faceless multinational corporations to settle, construct, fold, and then keep on moving (in Ackland 1999). In

*Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai (1996) analyzed the way Filipinos sing American songs better than American artists do as part of his study on the “disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy” (27). For him, what is appalling is not only the parodying of foreign cultural products but the fact that “the rest of [Filipinos] lives is not in complete synchrony with the referential world” of American affluence and dominance (29). Multinational capitalism has created these gaps that cannot easily explain the imbalance of living in a fast-paced world with means that pitifully cater to a slow, unfinanced Philippine time. This lacunae is further exemplified by the manner Wong Kar-wai had to deal with time and his variables in filming *Days of Being Wild* (1991). The Hong Kong director who benefited from and witnessed the mercurial economic growth of the island was forced to shoot in the present day Philippines – immured within the rottenness of a weak, neo-colonial state – in order to showcase the milieu of the 50s and the 60s, a relatively progressive period for the Philippines compared to its East Asian neighbors. Such a paradoxical equation creates an imbalance in the film as shown by scenes taken in unswept Manila with its prostitutes and thugs; in other words, Philippine time in the 1960s was not captured by Wong Kar-wai simply because of the vicissitudes of the economy and local ramifications of global patterns. However, this disproportionate portrayal of Philippine time is somehow cancelled out by the reality of gangster violence in the city during the 50s and 60s as played out by hustlers and thieves in the Tutuban train station, coincidentally located in the Tondo area which is highly known for its petty criminals. This generalization is made concrete by John Sidel’s (2000) study on the Filipino gangster’s sociology which also mentions the attention given by the media to Nicasio “Asiong” Salonga of the 40s and 50s, Arturo “Boy Golden” Porcuna of the 60s, and Benjamin “Ben Tumbling” Garcia of the 70s.<sup>7</sup> The so-called Philippine time then that is gripped by inaccuracies of filmic enterprise is clearly explained by Hau:

the nostalgia that suffuses Wong’s films – the sense that the world he is keen to memorialize no longer exists – is a strange chimera in which both past and present coexist yet also displace each other. We can only view this past through the lens of the present, but the lens of the present always already distorts that past yet also presents certain truths about that past.<sup>8</sup>

The (ir)retrievability of past events presents both difficulty and challenge to a filmmaker whose camera is equipped to record “reality” while being confronted by the freedom to imagine the “reality” of that exact same past event. This (ir)retrievability is further compounded by the question of time and space especially in the case of Philippine time in the clockwork of Wong Kar-wai that is much plagued by the ravages of our feudal and neo-colonial entanglements.

Clodualdo del Mundo (1998) discusses how this colonial experience molded how Philippine cinema would take its shape; “why is [it] the way it is” (7). He argues that native resistance is an inevitable consequence of colonialism which negates the common perception that colonial cultural products came down to us in an unfiltered, unadulterated manner. In the case of cinematic art, American incursion was negotiated and thereby contaminated by *moro-moro* and *sarswela* elements that eventually “indigenized” the borrowed form. This borrowing can be both liberating and choking. As a result, the Filipino cinematic eye is trained in the way of “looking as bondage”, a perceiving that is historically attached to our colonial visual mind. Also, this “looking” is open to ensuing political confrontation that is engendered and possible as a result of native resistance against foreign and native comprador subjugation. This “looking”, both of the filmmaker and the consumer, is the site of struggle wherein meanings are formed and readings rewritten. A film becomes an arena of encounter which permits powerful and repressive ideas and images, in the political and cultural spheres, to be contested by the intelligent choices the director makes. In fact, the connection between films and their capacity to challenge powerful images of “national bodies and sexualities” is argued carefully in a paper that reads Brocka’s *Macho Dancer* (1989) and *White Slavery* (1985). Roland Tolentino says that these two films, social realist as they are, “inform us [that] state strategy for control and subcultural tactics for subversion necessarily go hand-in-hand to fill in the lack of actual national development” (77). In other words, by juxtaposing Brocka’s directorial choices of images with Marcos’ and Imelda’s political machinations as metaphors of great health and virility, a Third World film engages its audience in a discourse of power and knowledge that provokes questions of consequence for a nation crucified by the results of the couple’s excesses. In this light I reiterate the mapping Philippine colonial history did in locating the urgency among its filmic practitioners to make choices in seemingly innocuous dilemmas such as “fast” narrative time or “slow” narrative time, time as philosophical

or time as contingent, social realism for the masses or experimentation for the intellectual elite. Far from claiming that Third World films cannot be fast, non-linear, technically sophisticated the essay does not generalize that First World cinema is incapable of producing slow, linear, technically backward films. It is a tradition it knows so well. Social realism, the slow and pedagogical kind, remains potent within the context of our colonial and national confrontations.

Take, for instance, Brocka's *Maynila: Sa Mga Kuko Ng Liwanag* (1975) capacity to embody our national cinema's earnest effort to use film as corrective, decolonizing medium. Although Brocka did experiment as a director appropriating both film noir aesthetics and *cinema vérité*, he embedded these techniques within the framework of the naturalist tradition in adapting Edgardo M. Reyes' 1986 film *Sa Mga Kuko Ng Liwanag* (David 1995). This essay's focus on the question of Wong Kar-wai's use of time also gave rise to the occasion to assess how the Filipino figures in his (Chinese) films. Our inferior economic relations with Hong Kong and the rest of the developed economy tells us that the political project of Third World film production will always precede the (im)possibility to manufacture globally-marketed films. In turn, the question as to how the Chinese figure in Brocka's film *Maynila* can also offer a reading that delves into our national cinema as constitutive of the identity and nationness we are all compelled to forge. On the one hand, the Filipino figures in Wong Kar-wai's films in two ways: one as an Othering paradise of the mother whose wealth and influence drew the Chinese son towards it; and two, as a nation-state Othered by its more progressive Asian neighbors not only in politico-economic terms but also in the filmic race for transnational recognition. On the other hand, the Chinese figures in Brocka's film *Maynila* in two ways: one as an alien whose ethnicity is bound to the role it has taken as merchant capitalist; and two, as an alienated section of a nation whose presence defines Filipino national life against what it is not (Hau 2000: 152-165). Brocka's film, applauded by Bienvenido Lumbera (2000) as the "landmark movie that was to stand as the ultimate measure of the New Filipino Cinema", has come to signify what our national cinema should be as it dramatizes how our neocolonial entrapment is rightfully within the nationalist discourse (348). Although *Maynila* has served its pedagogical purpose of initiating the audience to the class violence experienced by Julio and Ligaya, it nonetheless simplifies the discourse of the nation as it locates Ah Tek, the Chinese husband of Ligaya, also a capitalist and an alien

amongst native characters, as the enemy of the people, as the enemy by which nationalist discourse has identified. This demonizing as explained by Hau (2000) through the bisecting of merchant capitalism, wherein the disappearance of money rather than the production of goods and services is marked, and the fact that Ah Tek, and the rest of the Chinese community in the country, is racially delineated not only as different but as alienating the native majority. The final scene in *Maynila* when Julio (played by Bembol Roco) killed Ah Tek not only as the final vengeful act to redeem Ligaya (played by Hilda Coronel) from “slavery”, also read as his last attempt to consummate their love, but as Julio’s (national) obligation to slay the Othering signifier of his people’s oppression – the Chinese and the capitalist as one. The scene is sealed by a *coup de grace* that shows how the unthinking native mob pursued Julio in no-exit Miserecordia: a triumphant muffled cry from Julio signifies the nationalist angle of the film which expressed the Filipino as “an imagined community of fellow sufferers undivided by social difference” (Hau 2000: 164). The national action that consolidates our attempts to progress is derived from the painful exclusion of groups who have shared our struggles through centuries of colonial occupation. Brocka’s *Maynila* therefore facilitates the understanding of relations between our national cinematic tradition and the nation-as-native discourse as reflective/reflexive of our imagined unified struggle against feudal and capital powers. The contradiction though does not elide the fact that *Maynila*, by virtue of it being a national representation of our aspirations, is also a symptom of our struggle *for* (more) transnational capital today. Brocka’s 30-year old film fuels our collective remembering that despite the ravages of time, Philippine time and cinema are bound to struggle against the repercussions of history.

The unreadiness of Philippine directors to experiment with their camera is not entirely symptomatic of the general mediocrity ascribed to it. The commonly accepted rule that local films only make it to foreign circulation and discourse if they tackle hunger, *riles*, Payatas, *tubugan* and other sexual excesses, illiteracy, incest, among others, is part of the inescapable cinematic tradition that was engendered by the very historicity of this nation. Whether the local industry, considering the parallel relations between national development and film production, can breed directors who will be subsidized by global film capital like Wong Kar-wai, is not only a question of economic limits but of self-defeating political inefficiency. The cultural production of this nation as predominantly

social realist is not because of the poverty of our imagination but due to the necessity for a kind of radicalizing cultural critique. Social realism is a direct confrontation against the underlying commodification of visually attractive films ala-Wong Kar-wai. The cinematic and political intervention that *Munting Tinig* (2001) invites often collides against the need to sell at the box office unlike the more experimental, visually engaging and upbeat rhythm of, say, *Chungking Express* (1994). Besides, in Philippine film practice, as Edel Garcellano (1987) succinctly puts it, “the rules of film art must perforce be determined by historical processes, and cannot exist on their own terms” (105).

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Many thanks to Caroline Hau of CSEAS in Kyoto University for pointing out this observation in an email dated October 20, 2004.
- <sup>2</sup> Although Wong Kar-wai’s futuristic film, *2046*, was released before 2004 ended, this paper does not cover a discussion of that particular film.
- <sup>3</sup> Branigan’s original statement is “Comprehension erases words and sounds into memory.” This difficulty in reading literature and literary criticism, together with other three (contingent, tactical and ontological) is discussed by Con Davis.
- <sup>4</sup> This difficulty in reading literature and literary criticism, together with other three (contingent, tactical, and ontological) is discussed by Con Davis.
- <sup>5</sup> Share croppers which inquilinos hire to work on their own small-scale haciendas.
- <sup>6</sup> This discussion is very much indebted to Hau’s commentary on Wong Kar-wai’s *Days of Being Wild* shared in an email dated October 20, 2004. For her, the filmmaker “refers to the Philippines as a source of modernity... and erases that reference by exposing the seeds of present-day neocolonial Philippines in the violence and decay engendered by capitalism even during the supposed golden years.”
- <sup>7</sup> The discussion on Filipino gangster sociology and its connection to the country’s neo-colonial set up that reinforces the practice of bossism between classes and its adoption of violence carried out by lower class thugs is also heavily discussed by Alfred McCoy in his study of the Lopez family’s hiring of Manuel Lamadrid, Simeon Valiente and



Jesus Astrologo to protect their businesses. This is found in “Rent-Seeking Families and the Philippine State: A History of the Lopez Family” in *An Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philippines* (1994).

<sup>8</sup> From Hau, personal communication, October 20, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> My discussion of Brocka’s *Maynila* is very much indebted to Hau’s articulation of the Chinese as racially depicted in Reyes’ novel found in *Necessary Fiction*’s Chapter 4 “Alien Nation”.

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