

# The Experience of the Past in the Visual Nostalgia: An Analysis of Romantic Films Set in Baguio

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Popular romantic films create a dominant nostalgia for the spaces of Baguio (e.g, pine trees, vast mountains, Session Road, Burnham Park, Burnham Lake), a convention that continues to capture the consciousness of the masses. These films craft their own definition and narrative of the city. Stories of rest and recreation, escapism, and romance are spun, and are closely intertwined with Baguio's past: of how the Americans had transformed the mountaintop city into what they envisioned as an ideal, idyllic vacation place for the elite. But as a consequence of this "reality" portrayed in popular cinema, contemporary sociological, cultural, and ecological issues and problems that Baguio faces are pushed aside. Indeed, in these films resonates the power of American colonialism.

The convention and tradition of the idealization of the indigenous Igorots and spaces of Baguio that are seen in popular romantic films have their origins. It is but right, however, to note that these conventions are discursive and have a deep meaning regarding the personality and history of Filipinos.

Perhaps the conventions on romantic films set in Baguio were formed not merely to sate the popular taste of the viewership. The images we see are themselves continuation of the memories and of the people's interpretations of these spaces. Film also serves as the virtual medium to be able to see again and reexperience the part of Baguio's history that has been known and continues to be explored. As Elizabeth Wilson (1997) said:

[T]he fabric of a city is not only always in process of changing, and not only is this change normally visible, but even when it is not, it becomes part of collective memory both informally and in the written and written official histories of cities (p. 129).

It can thus be said that old memories or nostalgia and narratives produced throughout history are part of the formed representations regarding Baguio's spaces. The preceding history had already experienced various settings and scenes in film. These are rebuilt and recreated in films through scenes of mountains, parks, strolling along Session Road, and negotiating the zigzag road. The romantic interpretations of the city's sites persist in melodramatic (romantic) films. This paper attempts to examine how the space of Baguio is used in popular romantic films in relation to its deep historical experience that sets about changes in the issues of class, race, ethnicity, identity, country, and nation.

## **Melodrama and Romance Mode in Film**

The experience of watching movies is deeply rooted in Filipinos. Film is popular because watching it brings pleasure and entertainment to the viewer, a cultural experience that has become a hobby for many. It can be said that part of the popularity of movies lie in the love stories within these. The issue of film as a form of popular culture comes with themes having love as their subject.

The element of romance and drama is popular with viewers. This is a reality, especially if based on the production in the film industry and the reception or how it is accepted by the viewers. In particular, the genre of melodrama has made many artists and love teams famous precisely because of the trait it possesses, the emotions it transmits to the viewers. Actors are able to generate a surefire following, and viewers expect a film formula in relation to the artists they adore.

Melodrama made stars out of Tita Duran, Rosa Rosal, Gloria Romero, Nida Blanca, Hilda Koronel, Nora Aunor, Vilma Santos, Sharon Cuneta, Judy Ann Santos, and Claudine Barretto, to name a few. It will be noted that this particular genre is associated with women because the themes of the films are intimate with the life of a woman, such as familial issues, events inside a home, and also the use of emotion (Mulvey, 2009). This is why it can also be said that the primary patrons of these films are women.

If Guieb's definition regarding melodrama is amended, love stories (often love triangles), child abuse, the contradiction between the poor and the rich, and the dichotomy of the city and the countryside are common subjects in drama (Lanot & Tiongson, as cited in Guieb, 2009, p. 56). The hero's entire life is *via crucis* (way of the cross). After a smorgasbord of tragedies, the hero, usually a woman, will experience in the film's conclusion a redemption or realization of her dream, e.g., the man she loves, or a broken family reunited or rendered complete. Sometimes, the crying is mixed with slaps on the face and shouting.

Melodrama engraved the concept of suffering that has molded the psyche of the Filipino personality, such as the suffering mother, spouse, lover, or child (Guieb, p. 56). These themes are alive in films set in Baguio, and this particular genre is also valuable in forming the history and nostalgia of Baguio. These conventions molded the consciousness of the common viewer, which is why they expect to see these.

It bears remembering that behind the movies that cater to the masses are the producers who created and shelled out huge amounts of cash for these. The reality is, film is not only for art but it is commercial and needs to turn a profit.

The element of location or setting amplifies the drama in films. It has been the practice in popular movies to equate romance with places close to nature, far from the city, tranquil, and peaceful. One favorite location is Baguio. Most of the films are in the genre of melodrama, and this is also where the romance mode passed on to popular movies as conventions was intensified.

Films labeled as melodrama throb with stories of love, family, the have-nots and the haves, the exploiter and the exploited, and triumph. Conventions have been formed throughout history. Baguio occupies a significant role as a setting that has also sculpted meanings in relation to the issue of romance and love in films that have been manifested in the narrative and technical aspects.

### **In the Midst of Pine Trees and Vast Mountains**

For the indigenous Igorots the mountain range of Cordillera is the space of their lives. Here their daily lives are centered, here the customary traditions are practiced. In Maria Nela Florendo's (1993) research on ancient history:

In ancient times, Baguio was a sprawling and weedy place where moss called in the indigenous Ibaloy language as bag-iw grew. The place name of Baguio might have originated from this word....In ancient times, the area was composed of scattered settlements of the Ibaloy tribe. The entire place had a population of 629 "souls" according to the first census conducted by the Spaniards in 1885. Based on the ethnographic source, the aforementioned characteristic of their settlements and social organization follows their habitation and follows their livelihood; the natives resided in an area near their farms...(p. 60).<sup>1</sup>

We can glean from this ancient history the simple living of the indigenous Ibaloy and that the significance of spaces for them was a livelihood that was

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1 Translation into English by P.Y. Kimpo.

also centered on what is called a “rancheria” (small, rural settlement). The Spaniards were quite harsh on the natives, and the hoarding of the gold in the area emerged as the only goal.

The relationship between the Spaniards and the natives never ripened. And with the Americans’ arrival, a new interpretation and assessment were given to the space. During Worcester’s (as cited in Florendo, 1993) first visit to Baguio:

We found conditions as described in the Spanish report. The country was gently rolling, its elevation ranging from forty-five to fifty-two hundred feet. The hills were covered with short, thick grass and with magnificent pine trees, which for the most part grew at considerable distance from each other. While along the streams there were wonderful tree forms and luxuriant tangles of beautiful tropical vegetation. It took us but a short time to decide that here was an ideal site for a future city. (p. 60)

And from the varied perspectives of the social forces that have become part of Baguio, it can be said this same space has left behind images that, despite being part of the memory being revisited, express representations that are not really complete. The romanticization in films is vivid, just like the meanings that were tacked on by the Americans.

Let us look at images of the mountain and the meaning that film has ascribed to it.

The use of the panoramic shot of Baguio’s mountains can be observed in the movies. This shot is ubiquitous in films, possibly as an establishing shot that conveys and prepares the viewer that the scene’s location is in Baguio and possibly also as a background for romantic scenes.

The pine trees and mountains are also essential images associated with Baguio. The manner in which these trees are rooted to the earth suggests durability and age. Like the zigzag and tunnel, the pine trees serve as a record of the vicissitudes of history and culture (Crang, 1998, p. 22). They have gone through a lot of things. The pine trees on the mountainside seemingly stand witness to the experiences of characters such as Abby (*Don’t Give Up On Us*), Rocky and Gary (*Ngayong Nandito Ka*), and Emil and Laura (*Sa Init ng Apoy*). They have been there for a long time, a component of the natural environment.

Analogous to the inherence of the pine and the mountain is their compliance with Baguio’s system of space. In the case of Abby who was tarnished by Manila’s system, she returns to being a pure human, because the experience with the pines

is an experience of being intimate with nature. Akin to how it was also experienced by the foreign Americans which is not far from what Abby experiences among the pines and mountains in the space of Baguio and the Cordillera.

Take, for example, one scene in *Kung Mangarap Ka't Magising*, which greatly contributed to the element of the romantic background; the extensive mountains are seen here. Joey and Anna are enjoying a picnic, they are seated on the flat ground/grassland, and Joey even shares the song he is composing. He plays it on the guitar. It is also in this scene that the pair exhibits a momentary lapse, especially since Anna's child is with them.

Accompanying the acoustic playing is the exchange of looks between the two lead characters. The gradual opening up of emotions for each other can be inferred from this scene. We see the swapping of smiles and meeting of gazes. Even the milieu seems to run away with emotions. This as if the vastness of the mountains, the verdant pine trees, the clouds kissing the peaks provide the transient peace and freedom to the protagonists.

*Friends in Love* also has this scene. Sara (Sharon Cuneta) and her father (Vic Silayan) converse near the cliff with the view of the far-reaching mountains. A mood of relaxation, reflection, and contemplation is created. The darkness announces itself; it is twilight and the sun is setting. They have brought along chairs, and the car sits by the side as if they had purposefully gone there to talk about relationships and love.

Sara is being advised by her father. The shot of the mountain and trees also seems to hint that these provide a space, a generous space for the characters to ruminate and catch their breath. The spaciousness and vastness of the shot of the mountain (panoramic shot) is like the one being allowed to the characters' thoughts.

*Labs Kita Okay Ka Lang* also shows the use of the mountains as background to a date between two pairs: Budjoy and Xennon, and Ned and Mary Anne. This scene will also define and confirm the feelings Budjoy and Ned have for each other. Montage is used in this segment.

The mountain and pine tree likewise play a huge role in the relationship between Rocky (Jericho Rosales) and Gary (Kristine Hermosa) in the movie *Ngayong Nandito Ka*. It is in this space that the pair swear their love for each other. The same mountain and tree they frequent also bear witness to the dreams they promise to fulfill. Upon the pair's separation, Gary makes a painting depicting the image of the mountain and the tree. It's as if this serves as their private space.

The place is revisited upon their reconciliation, implying that their dreams have been fulfilled and that their joy is now absolute. This is the film's last scene,

which also leaves an impression of happiness, calmness, and peacefulness. The pair kiss against the backdrop of the grand mountain, implying the end of not only the movie but also the end of the problems they have faced. And while they are about to sit beside a rock, and Rocky holds the guitar, which also conveys they can now realize their dreams, the camera pans to the left so as to focus on the image of the mountain. This has been vital to strengthening their relationship. The mountain and the tree have been with them in the growth and deepening of their love for each other.

## **Burnham Park, Burnham Lake and Other Parks**

If we return to the history during American rule, the plan for Baguio included the placement of parks and man-made lakes so as to turn the area into a recreational place. Upon laying his eyes on it, Daniel Burnham became fond of Baguio right away. Burnham Park and Burnham Lake were named after him, who was also the designer of the entire city.

It can be said that in the 1930s Baguio had already ripened as a tourist spot. Burnham Park was one of the most frequented by tourists. Here was how Samuel Kane (who became governor of Bontoc and Kalinga, and supervisor of the Mountain Province) described it in his *Interesting Things to See In and Near Baguio*:

Burnham Park: This beautiful little park in the heart of the city must be included among the points of interest. It was named after the famous landscape artist, David H. Burnham, who visited Baguio and its possibilities that he gave his services free of charge. His plan has been closely followed in all improvements of the townsite Kane. (As cited in Tolentino, 2009, p. 53)

One of the conventions of romantic films is the depiction of Burnham Park/Lake as a setting of joy, recreation, relaxation, excursion, and time for one's love. The display of happiness and leisure by the two main characters is akin to the one in *Ngayong Nandito Ka* (part of a montage sequence).

Aside from Burnham Park, many other well-known parks and places can be seen and have been used in the movies. In *Labs Kita Okay Ka Lang*, Lion's Park is used as the meeting place of a company of friends. It is also their place to practice and to sing. This space becomes important in strengthening the camaraderie of the young friends.

The use of Baguio as a romantic space is shown in *Kung Mangarap Ka't Magising*. Baguio's ambience or milieu proves crucial to the development of the

love story of the two lead characters. Many of the pair's strolls and conversations are essential to their relationship. One of these is their walk in the rain. It is good to analyze the dialogue in this segment.

Anna: It's OK here. I actually like it more here than in Manila. It's just that I can't really get contented with things.

Joey: The weather's great today. Do you want to take a stroll?

Joey: Can you do this in Manila? You'd just end up in the flood.

Anna: But we're always stuck inside the car in Manila.

Joey: No, it's really different here. There's no hassle, it's clean, there's no...

Anna: Dust.

Joey: Yeah, that's it. It's cool. Not...

Anna: Hot?

Joey: What I'm trying to say is...

Anna: It's okay even if you don't take a bath? I wish there's really such a place. Where everything's already there, where it's clean, cool, without dust and without someone to meddle in your affairs. I wish there's really such a place (De Leon, 1977).<sup>2</sup>

Anna's personality can be inferred from the pair's exchange of words, which also suggests the desire for freedom. It's as if she is saying that she is free in Baguio. The film eventually reveals that she has a husband and she is being smothered by their relationship. It will be exposed that her husband is controlling and that Anna is not happy anymore with their marriage. She is on a search to complete her self. And Baguio plays an important role, particularly the space of Baguio in order for her to realize that she already wants to break up with her husband and lead her own life. Her experience in Baguio, together with her friendship/relationship with Joey, paves the way to gain her freedom as a woman. Maybe an escape in the beginning but in the process it became her liberty.

Anna's journey to UP Baguio sets off a journey to discover the self. Her search for and visit to her friend can be read to mean as her search for her own self. The entire experience in Baguio is a search for the self. Not only for Anna but also for Joey whose path has also gone astray. Becoming close to Joey's friends and the stroll, the mapping of Baguio's space is the mapping of her self as well.

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2 Translation of the dialogue into English by P.Y. Kimpo.

Anna longs for freedom, even if only for a time. And in Baguio she is the master of her time. Like the tourists who temporarily escape the tasks and work in Manila and go on a vacation in Baguio. Like the transient residence of these tourists in the various transient houses in Baguio.

Meanwhile, Joey is going through similar issues in fixing one's life, searching for one's self. Baguio serves as the haven and the space that gives refuge to Joey in his wayward time. It will be revealed that Joey's lover died in an accident and that Joey was the one behind the wheel. He blames himself; his conscience bothers him. His attitude toward his college studies is a manifestation of him not getting messed up by his thoughts and not taking life seriously. The movie begins with a shot of the sunrise over the mountains, hinting at a new day. The radio serves as an alarm clock, saying, "...the American military community in the Philippines..." It is Baguio that shelters and takes him in while he escapes from and heals the wound of the bitter incident in his life.

Joey is distant from and avoids his family and previous life. It will be known that his father holds high expectations for him. His father's call also serves to interrupt and sever the romantic mood between him and Anna. The call brings Joey back to reality. The escape and romance are never total; problems always rear their ugly heads or follow them wherever they go.

This also happens to Anna. In the first part of the film, Anna utters the line, "I have all the time in the world." But this is cut short with the arrival of the husband she is hiding from and just after the romantic scene of the picnic on the mountain. Anna is being fetched and being brought home to Manila.

Anna's arrival in Joey's life cues the gradual return of his strength and opening up of his self. It's as if Joey is rejuvenated. It begins with an invitation to Anna to go out, at first with his friends. Joey also brings Anna home to where she is staying. And while inside the car they begin to get to know each other. And they begin to convey their feelings for each other. Their mapping of Baguio's space also happens simultaneously. As Joey's Volkswagen roams the terrain of Baguio, their feelings sail across the sea.

Also effective are scenes by the fireplace used by films located in Baguio. This has become a convention and a hallmark that the scene is indeed in Baguio. This suggests that warmth is needed in chilly Baguio. This also intensifies the romantic mood. Take, for example, the movie *Kung Mangarap Ka't Magising* wherein Joey and Anna are discussing their respective relationships. Anna is talking about her husband, her exhaustion, resentment, and disgruntlement with the relationship.

If Baguio serves as the space of escape for Joey and Anna from the relationships they have gone through and are going through, it also cannot



be denied that the space of Baguio also provides the opportunity and time for reflection and reacquaintance with one's self. Both families, the persons dear to the pair's lives, place onerous requirements on them. For Joey, it is his father; for Anna, her controlling husband. Their conventional obligations as woman and man are expected of them. It is also in the space of Baguio that a firm decision on improving one's life and becoming happier is formed. This unlocks to them freedom.

Likewise significant is the pair's journey to Sagada—still part of the mountains of the Cordillera, but farther and higher than Baguio. Baguio, already a space of escape, still proves inadequate. Perhaps what they were fleeing from still caught up to them. Sagada is more isolated and more out of the way. It is not yet a city unlike Baguio. On view is the panoramic shot of the peaks of the Mountain Province while Joey's Volkswagen negotiates the zigzag road to Sagada. Here Joey and Anna get completely carried away by their emotions, but greater than this, we can also interpret this as the expression of their feelings for each other. Back in Baguio, their feelings had remained restrained and only partially expressed because of the restriction of Anna being already married and perhaps also because of the fear of society's mockery. Despite Baguio being Joey and Anna's haven from family, spouse, and problems, they did form friendships with people who could possibly obstruct their relationship.

Which is why Sagada became the pair's sanctuary. The two are seen walking along the embankment of the payyew (rice terraces). They also pay a visit to the church. Anna remarks, "I can't understand their place. It's too quiet. Just a few more days and I'll become a nun" (De Leon, 1977). This can be construed to mean that their stay there is only temporary. There is discontentment in the tone of Anna's statement. It suggests that they are merely transients in the place. In the church an indigenous Igorot woman garbed in traditional clothes is offering unthreshed rice at the altar.

After Sagada, Joey continues his studies in UP Baguio. The events in the characters' lives can be interpreted that the space of Baguio has become pivotal to their development as individuals. The pair's acquaintance in Baguio triggers their discovery of their selves. Anna earns an awakening, the guts, and the courage to face the problems with her husband. Their ruminations and interactions in Baguio, the availability of time for one's self and time to contemplate paves the way for the improvement of their respective selves.

## **Along Session Road**

Present-day Session Road reflects the progressive commercial trade in the city of Baguio. Along this road are assorted establishments such as bars, restaurants,

bookstores, banks, and malls. If we revisit the past, the road started as a space for business. In the 1920s stores of Japanese and Chinese were the pioneers along the road; there were stalls for those who wanted to get photographs of themselves, silversmiths, drinking joints, bakeshops, and tailor shops. The pathway was narrow then, and the small buildings were lined up on one side (Reed, 1999).

Session Road also plays a vital role in the love affair between Rocky and Gary in *Ngayong Nandito Ka*. The pair can be seen walking along Session Road in a scene after the wedding and surprise performance of their band in the nuptials of Rocky's sibling. Medium long shot of Session Road. It is already evening with only a few souls passing by. The buildings and establishments lining the length of the road can be seen. Only a few vehicles motor past. This image simply sustains what the space had begun earlier.

The pair are talking about the wish of Rocky's family to marry him to Angela (who comes from a rich family that can aid their business), and how this worries Gary. Until Rocky crosses to the island/middle of the road and stands there and shouts his love for Gary. It is also here that he proposes. They kiss in the middle of Session Road. Noteworthy is their attire: leather jackets that are uncommon in Manila yet ordinary in Baguio precisely because of the climate there.

The scene communicates freedom and romance. Here, it's as if they are wholly carried away by their emotions, nothing will get in the way of their being together, and there is nobody around them. It's as if time stands still only for them and that the people who witness and hear their love for each other are likewise seen in agreement of it.

In one montage sequence we see the happy moments of the pair of lovers. They are seen on Burnham Lake, in the *ukay-ukay* (flea markets), in the night life of Baguio. Of note is the pair's participation in a ritual of the natives held at Wright Park. Canao. A ritual for marriage. The scene lays out the role of Baguio's space in its substantial contribution to the pair's consolidation, deepening of relations, and further understanding of each other.

The mountain also bears witness to the growth of their relationship. As if it becomes their shelter and guardian. They often return to a place with a view of the mountains, serene, and with a single pine tree. Similar to another scene in *Kung Mangarap Ka't Magising*.

When the pair gets separated because Gary needs to go to Japan and Rocky is left behind due to obligations to family and business, Gary takes with her to Japan the collage she made with the image of the mountain and tree that they frequented. This is her sole remembrance of her aborted

relationship with Rocky because it is also the symbol of the depth of their love and companionship—Baguio where their beautiful and happy experiences took place.

The two will part ways and will have their own lives. A few years pass and Gary is now a successful interior designer in a relationship with Derek, a rich hotel owner. On the other hand, Rocky works hard to support his family by being a furniture maker. (This was how they ended up after the collapse of their logging business.)

The pair's paths cross once again through their respective businesses and activities. And their affection for each other is renewed when they have to go to Baguio by only their twosome. Here reenters the role of Baguio in the pair's love affair. The Baguio that harbored, nursed, and sheltered their relationship will once again be felt by the pair, and they will let themselves be carried away by it.

In a bar the friends will talk about their past relationship that, according to them, seemed like that of husband-and-wife because of its great intimacy. This will be the spark of the sharing and softening of Gary's feelings after quite a long time of intransigence, along with other things or factors in this space that draw out the true feelings of Gary for Rocky. And it is Baguio that does it to her. It is Baguio that weakens her. She is defeated by her emotions and forgets for the moment her relationship with Derek.

Derek is faced by a different Gary upon her return to Manila. This can be read to mean that her hidden and true feelings still manage to win out in the end. It is still Baguio that remains in her heart, and Rocky or their relationship can be equated to Baguio. Baguio appears to be a mother awaiting the return of the child gone astray. We see Gary's infantilization, her restoration to her mother. Baguio keeps her arms open, ready to receive and take care of Gary and her relationship with Rocky.

Here begins the confusion in her mind. A loss of the rational when going to Baguio, and after returning to Manila, a loss of one's marbles.

Derek finds out that the two were ex-lovers and in the end he yields and himself finds a way for the pair to meet again.

The last scene shows the freedom of the pair, Gary and Rocky. There they are in their mountain. Just like old times. They kiss. Dressed in Baguio clothes, in jackets and bonnets. This also marks their "happy ending." The mountain and tree that stood witness to their promises are once again witnesses to their reunion. Present once more is the space of Baguio that accepted them and will nurture them once more.

## Stories of Respite, Reverie, and Romance

Like the other films, how the space of Baguio becomes important in the issue of romance and love is apparent in the movie *Sa Hiras at Ginhawa*.

Arnold (Gabby Concepcion) and Cecille (Sharon Cuneta) are lovers. They both live in Manila but regularly get parted when Arnold needs to return to Baguio, for he is a student of UP Baguio. Cecille, on the other hand, is slated and is expected to study abroad. Manila is an impediment to their relationship. First of all, their families obviously live here, especially in the case of Cecille who has a strict father. They only have little time for each other, probably only during weekends because Arnold is a student in Baguio.

Cecille visits Arnold in Baguio one day. Cecille is seen riding the Victory Liner, a popular and already prevalent bus liner with trips to Baguio. The image of the bus suggests the journey, the going away, and the separation. This serves as the transportation that will bring the character to a different world detached from the previous. Cecille finds Arnold's residence. She locates an A-house whose attic is being rented by Arnold. The attic can be interpreted as another small space for the solitude of the two lovers. In truth, the space of the attic will become crucial to their companionship. It will become their tiny nest.

Because they do not want to get separated, their decision to get married is abrupt and immediate. It is held in Baguio. The distance of Baguio probably gives them the liberty to carry out and obey the surge of emotions. Baguio paves the way for their dream of living together. The series of shots shows how their wedding is hastily done: from applying for a civil wedding, the forgery of their ages, the search for the rings, and up to their eventual wedding, and of course, the subsequent honeymoon. Baguio becomes their hideaway.

But it is important to mention that Baguio serves as the space for them to confront the reality of living together. This, so to speak, also lectures them regarding their relationship. In the attic of the house of Miss Amor (Nida Blanca) begins the marital life of Cecille and Arnold. While still a student, Arnold needs to find a job, especially upon learning that his wife is pregnant with his child. He manages to work as a bellboy at Hyatt Hotel. Furthermore, as a male, he does not allow his spouse to get a job. Thus, Cecille is left in the house and entertains herself by striking friendships with the landlady and the bread vendor near their dwelling.

Cecille aspires to go to school. Bringing food to her husband in the university, her attention is caught by a lecture and she listens to it from outside the classroom. From this, Cecille's status as an outsider is understood, for she is not enrolled and she is indeed a spouse already. This is one of the indicators of the shortcomings and discontentment of the characters in their situation as a married couple.

The beginnings of the problem and predicaments and consequences of their untimely and impulsive marriage are becoming evident. That their personal dreams were nipped in the bud is palpable. For his part, Arnold is having a tough time juggling his time between studies and work; even time for his friends get sacrificed. Add to this the parents who oppose their living together. In short, they will go through ordeals.

The scenes of their tours and strolls around Baguio propose a newfound deeper understanding of each other. As with the title, they are able to stay together through thick and thin. This is another aspect of what they faced and experienced in the space of Baguio. It can be said that their tackling of the reality of living together, or more particularly of marriage and raising a family, became part of their Baguio romance. This is part of the pair's entire romantic experience.

There are only a few scenes of Baguio in *Laro sa Baga*, but it can be emphatically understood that the role of Baguio in the film is that of escape and encounter. In the story, Dee is sent to Baguio to keep her away from Ding as well as to study high school. Baguio appears as a distant place, one that is hard to reach. Despite this, Ding tracks down Dee. They meet there, and it is also in Baguio that their first intercourse takes place. And it needs to be done in a faraway place like Baguio, far from the people opposed to their relationship. But they are still caught, suggesting that the isolation of the place does not dispel the danger of them being caught.

Nevertheless, despite their having been caught, Ding keeps visiting Dee in Baguio. In a park, at Wright Park, and at the Botanical Garden they even have intercourse among the plants. This particular kind of act again suggests a sensation of liberty. The closeness to nature, the presence of many trees and plants perhaps bestow the sense of freedom or letting loose that is not seen in congested Manila. In general Dee and Ding are given a temporary, brief, ephemeral union and encounters and expressions of love for each other. It is also in Baguio that Dee's pure, innocent, and genuine love for Ding is demonstrated.

As with the other aforementioned films, the significant role played by Baguio is observable in the movie *Friends in Love*. Sara and Jessica and Raffy and Walter are students of the Brent International School in Baguio. Alongside their studies are the stories of their friendship and their love affairs. Within the space of the school it is shown how the pairs warm up to each other. They go through a range of experiences in the secluded space of the school. From their encounters in their classes in theatre, photography, painting, and music, everything is anchored on the arts, and the interests will deepen and the friends

will get to know one another better. The space of Baguio and even their love affairs appear to be a playground for the young characters. It is also Baguio that affords them the freedom to play without parents watching over them, and thus it is up to them to set their own rules in their games.

It can be also deduced that the characters have a liberal sensibility, which might stem from the culture of the Brent International School where they have foreign classmates. Serving as their only parents who guide them a bit are their teachers (who are the ones seen being married in the first part of the film). There is freedom compared to the other ordinary grade schools or high schools in the country. The American culture of education installed in Baguio can be sensed here. And the potency of the Americans' influence over this place cannot be really removed. The plan, building, and practices remain even though the Americans themselves have already departed.

### **'I'll Go Up to Baguio'**

We have this idea that going up connotes evasion, escape, leave-taking, isolation. This is partly because contained within this concept is Manila as the lowland. We also hear the line, "I'll go down to Manila." This can be read as dealing with reality once more. We have seen in films this kind of idea regarding Baguio. The city is associated with a place or a space where one is able to rest, take a vacation, escape work and problems in Manila. It is also a romanticization and idealization of the place seen in the movies.

Going up might also be interpreted as going up or rising to another level of emotion. Ascending the mountain is synchronous with entering another world. The experience is transcendental. Even though the experience is only temporary, it confers something deep and immense to the individual. A transformation is effected on the individual, the character, which is often helpful in the aspect of his or her love and improvement of the self. A world detached and distant from weariness, chaos, following the norms, problems, concerns, and realities of life.

In Baguio, we can observe in the experiences of the characters how they faced their selves, as with the cases of Anna, Joey, Abby, and Vince, if we hold as basis De Certeau's words as well as James Donald's assertion regarding the definition of a primitive city and fasten it to the city of Baguio. Donald (1999) says:

[T]he primitive city is the product, or projection, of a symbolizing kernel that continues to be marked by its infantile origin. It returns as a force that defies all calculation, the arhaic force that can suddenly shake

a great city built according to all the rules of architecture. On the cusp of terror and absurdity, these films (referring to *Batman*, *Metropolis* and *Blade Runner*) tell of conflict with the claims of authority and the bonds of community, and also of the unfixing or uncertainty of identity. They play on fragile, shifty boundaries between human and technology, between human and nature, or between adult and infant. They remind us of that ineradicable unease about who we are and where we belong that also haunts the very way we walk the streets of the modern city. (p. 89)

The notion of the primitive city mentioned by De Certeau can be linked to films that have employed Baguio. There we find the issue of the characters' infantilization. Let us revisit the protagonists who have displayed vulnerability such as Abby, Anna, Gary, and Vince who all faced their true emotions in Baguio. These characters are the signification and indication of the city's primitiveness. Even though Baguio can be described as a modern city or undergoing the process of modernization and urbanization and is being controlled by social institutions, we can still see the return to and the traces of the ideal Baguio—close to nature, freedom, and stimulators of the individual's true feelings.

Baguio has also served as a place of escape. This is common in the movies. Anna purposefully went to Baguio to get away from her husband, and Joey, to escape the past tragedy of the death of his lover. Abby, too, went at first to look for a friend, but eventually found herself seemingly escaping her work back in Manila. Dee was brought to Baguio from Manila to get her away from Ding. Emil and Laura likewise escaped the heat of Manila in the time of Lent. Cecille escaped her family and its desire to have her study abroad.

On one hand, the space of Baguio has served as a retreat, a backrest, and a place to convalesce. Anna's days in Baguio were also her days of rest and reflection. During her strolls and her perceiving of the place with Joey, she gained time for her self and was able to ponder upon things that would help her personal growth. The same goes for Abby, even though the characters' stay was only temporary or transient and there was the matter of going back down to their place of origin (usually Manila). Romantic because it was in these moments of their respite that they found love. An ephemeral love for Anna and Joey, the strengthening and deepening, nascence and fulfillment of the longed-for love for Abby and Vince.

In revisiting films we can see how the element of nostalgia—which can be described as part and parcel of their being romantic—is intensified. As Wilson (1997) said:



Nostalgia is part of legacy of the romantic movement, and is an effect of change, and the massive changes that take place in cities induce this emotion to an intense degree. Calls for urban regeneration or for some kind of city that is different from what we actually have are also, of course and paradoxically, calls for change; although sometimes the change that is desired is a return to the past. (p. 137)

It is clear that the movies do return to the city's past. Even though the city's transformations are currently being felt such as urbanization and commercialization and the problems attached to these, Baguio remains in an idealized image. This is how the space of Baguio is vividly represented in popular films. But Wilson makes a good point about this idea of nostalgia. This paper will use this in relation to the criticism of the other problems in spaces aside from those in films. Wilson (1997) says:

[T]o look back at the past, to look back at that is not, to indulge in nostalgia, but to experience grief and anger at the devastation. These are emotions very different from nostalgia. (p. 137).

These emotions should be also affixed to the manner of looking at films set in Baguio, which is a space that continues to change and continues to face many social issues. Alongside these is the laying down of reactions and criticism on connected issues that are the reality and are part of the significance of the space of Baguio.

### **Nostalgia that Ensnares**

The romantic and ideal memory of what had been created by the powerful force of colonialism is vividly depicted in films. Such a perspective and ideology can be associated with the relationship between America and the Philippines, as to how the general idea of occupation has been made idealized. Contemporary to this is the ensnarement of the Filipino mentality and how American imperialism is justified, and the coverup of the narrative of exploitation and abuse that it entails. Such a belief has prevailed over and penetrated into the Filipino consciousness.

It will be known from studies how such ideologies are transferred and translated into popular films. A visual nostalgia has already been crafted. From the pastoral and rural images: mountainous, trees of pine, parks, verdant surroundings we can deduce that these nostalgias are all deceptive nostalgias on our history and more particularly on the space of Baguio.



This can be linked to the issue of class. The elitism of the characters and of their way of living is observable in the romantic films analyzed. This can be seen in Joey and Anna (*Kung Mangarap Ka't Gising*). It can be deduced that Joey comes from an affluent family based on, first of all, his speaking in English and his lackadaisical approach to life as a student of UP Baguio. His quandaries stem from personal struggles—to recover from the trauma brought about by the death of his lover. In addition, his family could afford to sponsor his constant shifting between courses in college. He has his own car and has a company of friends to go out with in Baguio. On the other hand, Anna also exhibits elitism in the problem she is facing, similarly personal and a search for the meaning of being an individual particularly in being a woman. The protagonists do not face any economic predicament.

It is also good to note the lives of the characters of Sara, Jessica, Raffy, and Walter (*Friends in Love*). All of them are wealthy and study at the Brent International School in Baguio. The protagonists are English-speaking, and their problems are focused on their personal relationships with family, friends, and lovers.

And although Cecille and Arnold did suffer in *Sa Hirap at Ginhawa*, there remains their foundation of being offspring of the rich. And their financial suffering seemed to be mere lectures on their early marriage. Their problems were resolved quite quickly with the birth of their twins. Their parents did not allow their children to suffer for long as well.

Abbey (*Don't Give Up On Us*) is also well-to-do, and her ascent to Baguio is only prompted by her desire to fix the problem in her relationship with her sibling. While Vince, who is a musician, is several rungs lower in the issue of class, the issue of money never did become a major concern for him. His way of living is also very middle class, with his own vintage car and with his career as a musician being his only problem.

The same goes for Rocky and Gary (*Ngayong Nandito Ka*) who have a prosperous life in Baguio. Rocky, the son of a businessman in logging, suffered, but he faced his trials in Manila, and not in Baguio. It's as if such a fate ruins the ideal of Baguio. Hence, he only returns to Baguio when he fixes and he recovers in his business.

Even in *Labs Kita Okay Ka Lang*. Even though Ned is poor—his father is a miner and he has many siblings—this problem is not even a big deal to him. The more severe and pressing problems are issues regarding relationships with friends, lovers, and his interest in music.

The discussion of issues of class in films is thin. Meaning, the film does not tackle profoundly or realistically the sociological, economic, and ecological

conditions of a society—particularly Baguio. The problems besetting Baguio are pushed aside or, it can be said, expunged. Issues such as crime, population explosion, pollution, garbage, traffic, denudation of trees, and even the indigenous Igorots' lack of space in their own land are deliberately left unexposed in the popular romantic movies.

These are not the concerns given attention to, because the film needs to satisfy and not deviate from its romantic convention and needs to fit the taste of the popular viewership. The medium of film maintains and conforms to the nostalgia formed by the former occupiers of the space of Baguio. Shirking such types of issues again underlie the idealization and romanticization. The aspiration of the middle class is evident in films and Baguio is always associated as a vacation and rest place. This is the concept of the good life. With the ascent to Baguio one forgets for the time being the suffering caused by the city of Manila.

This is still part of the colonial mentality, for Baguio is American-constructed and is so close to American culture that its visitors seem to have arrived in America as well. There we find the experience of wearing a jacket or sweater, boating across Burnham Lake, and sipping coffee along Session Road, of residing in a house with a fireplace. The craving to reach America is attained through virtual images—because to reach America in the colonial mindset is a mark of progress.

It can also be remembered that along with Baguio's construction was the plan and its promotion to encourage Filipino citizens to visit it. In the journal of W. Cameron Forbes as Baguio's planner and promoter in the years 1907-1913, he states his intention of getting the affluent Filipinos interested, because of his belief that they will be the ones to sustain the security in Baguio due to their connections to the government. The presence of lands of the rich will ensure that they will safeguard these and that they will not let the plan for the Hill Station end up stillborn (Reed, 1999).

This is the taking root of elitist tradition and convention that remains in the movies. This kind of image, that Baguio is for the wealthy, is still being nurtured in film. This is the ideal, and this is different from vacationing at the beaches for these are still pictures of the tropical Philippines. The images of the sea still remind us that we are in the Philippines. Here Baguio gains the advantage, for the viewer is elevated to a nostalgia that will bring them to the world of America.

The popular film is not authentic in crafting the image of the city of Baguio. The image in the movie does not intersect with the city's realistic experience. The film thus becomes an instrument of imperialism and the ensnarement of minds is sustained with its creation of a pro-colonial imagination.

And the present image of Baguio today is proof of suiting up the city according to the commercial requirements of tourists and visitors there. Currently, there are too many establishments erected on the mountains of Baguio. It is obvious along Session Road—the restaurants, coffeehouses, bars, flea markets, convenience stores, banks sitting side by side and aligned in rows. Here the old establishments and also the new fuse together. It is a picture of a space that has passed through a long history: from the traditional equipment products, architecture, American design of the buildings up to the modern architecture.

Like the average city, it is immersed in many transformations and is accepting of the reality of modernization and commercialization. There is a need to measure up to the standards of being a city in order to provide the needs of tourists from whom the large income of Baguio is sourced.

SM Baguio stands along the Upper Session Road. Along its length are businesses such as Kenny Rogers, Porta Vaga Mall, Greenwich, Star Café, 7-Eleven, Pizza Volante, Luisa's Cafe, Chowking, Yellow Cab, 456 Café and Restaurant, Session Delights, McDonald's, Sky World, Rumours, Mido Inn, Jet Bookstore, CID, Teahouse, St Joseph Drugstore, Andok's, Don Henrico's, La Azotea, Sizzling Plate, LBC, RCBC, BPI, stores of pirated DVDs and CDs. These are but some of what can be seen along Session Road, which actually never runs out of people walking and inspecting and looking for where they can eat or what they can buy.

Observing the stretch of this road further reveals the traces of history, the time when the Americans once ruled over and possessed this space. And if we further add, the celebration of the Panagbenga Festival which flocks of tourists visit should also never escape mention.

Accompanying this commercialization and urbanization, however, is the marginalization of the indigenous Igorots who are the rightful owners of the lands of Baguio. In film and even in reality they are the ones often pushed aside; there exist exoticization and condescension. In film, the issue of exoticization as the representation of the indigenous is raised. Substantial chunks of meanings, aspects of personality, context, and culture lie missing. Also, these kinds of misrepresentation originate from the perspective of the dominant force and sector, which can also replace or succeed the colonizer's perspective.

In film there is also the preservation of the image of perfection. As Wilson (1997) said,

This hankering for perfection may have something to do with the long tradition, the utopian literature on cities which, as Francois Choay

(1980) has demonstrated, bears such a close resemblance to the writings of architects. This must have influenced our perception of how cities ought to be, or what we have a right to expect. This as if we have internalised a collective perception of the perfect city, and deviations from it become extremely threatening. Perfection, moreover, seems to be located either in the past or in the future. We rarely if ever accept, let alone embrace the present. (p. 132)

The ideas mentioned with regard to being chained to and ensnared by the perfect nostalgia are effective. They are exact matches for the images being shown by films about the space of the city of Baguio. Perhaps the colonizer serves as the architect for they are after all the symbol of power, wisdom, and institution that has imposed its own perfect image of a city. It should also never be forgotten that the cityhood of Baguio was realized because of the colonizer and that the plan was suited to his own taste.

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## Filmography

### Kung Mangarap Ka't Magising

1977

LVN Pictures

**Director** Mike De Leon  
**Screenplay** Rey Santayana

#### Cast

|                     |                      |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| Christopher de Leon | <i>Joey</i>          |
| Hilda Koronel       | <i>Anna</i>          |
| Laurice Guillen     | <i>Cecile</i>        |
| Moody Diaz          | <i>Mrs. Laguitan</i> |
| Danny Javier        | <i>Jojo</i>          |
| Boboy Garovillo     | <i>Mike</i>          |
| Bibeth Orteza       | <i>Nanette</i>       |

### Friends in Love

1983

Viva Films

**Director** Eddie Garcia  
**Screenplay** Soxy Topacio

#### Cast

|                   |                      |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| Sharon Cuneta     | <i>Sara</i>          |
| Jackie Lou Blanco | <i>Jessica</i>       |
| Rowell Santiago   | <i>Raffy</i>         |
| William Martinez  | <i>Walter</i>        |
| Vic Silayan       | <i>Sara's Father</i> |

### Sa Hirap at Ginhawa

1984

Viva Films

**Director** Leroy Salvador  
**Story** Connie Angeles  
**Screenplay** Jose Javier Reyes

#### Cast

|                  |                        |
|------------------|------------------------|
| Sharon Cuneta    | <i>Cecilia Ventura</i> |
| Gabby Concepcion | <i>Arnold Zaragoza</i> |
| Nida Blanca      | <i>Miss Amor</i>       |
| Leroy Salvador   | <i>Ben</i>             |
| Vic Silayan      | <i>Abe Ventura</i>     |
| Cherie Gil       | <i>Karen</i>           |
| Sandy Andolong   | <i>Tessie Ventura</i>  |
| Ronnie Ricketts  | <i>Joey</i>            |

### Labs Kita Okay Ka Lang?

1998

Star Cinema Productions

**Director** Jerry Lopez-Sineneng  
**Story:** Enrico Santos, Tammy Bejerano

#### Cast

|                  |                |
|------------------|----------------|
| Jolina Magdangal | <i>Bujoy</i>   |
| Marvin Agustin   | <i>Ned</i>     |
| Hilda Koronel    | <i>Marissa</i> |
| Gina Pareño      | <i>Cora</i>    |
| Ronaldo Valdes   | <i>Canor</i>   |

|                    |                 |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| Meryl Soriano      | <i>Mayo</i>     |
| Gio Alvarez        | <i>Cenon</i>    |
| Vanessa del Bianco | <i>Mary Ann</i> |

## Laro sa Baga

2000

Regal Films

|                         |                  |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Director</b>         | Chito S. Roño    |
| <b>Story/Screenplay</b> | Edgardo M. Reyes |
| <b>Cast</b>             |                  |

|                |                     |
|----------------|---------------------|
| Ara Mina       | <i>Dee</i>          |
| Carlos Morales | <i>Ding</i>         |
| Angel Aquino   | <i>Carmen</i>       |
| Monique Wilson | <i>Emy</i>          |
| Marita Zobel   | <i>Nanay Coring</i> |
| Maila Gumila   | <i>Maiba</i>        |

## Ngayong Nandito Ka

2003

Star Cinema Productions

|                   |                      |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Director</b>   | Jerry Lopez-Sineneng |
| <b>Screenplay</b> | Henry Quitain        |
| <b>Cast</b>       |                      |

|                  |                           |
|------------------|---------------------------|
| Jericho Rosales  | <i>Rocky Rodriguez</i>    |
| Kristine Hermosa | <i>Gary Cruz</i>          |
| Onemig Bondoc    | <i>Derick Cervantes</i>   |
| Jaime Fabregas   | <i>Federico Rodriguez</i> |
| Pinky Marquez    | <i>Leony Rodriguez</i>    |
| Carlo Muñoz      | <i>Kent Rodriguez</i>     |
| Toby Alejar      | <i>Efren Cruz</i>         |
| Sandy Andolong   | <i>Nadia Cruz</i>         |

## Don't Give Up On Us

2006

Star Cinema Productions

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| <b>Director</b>    | Joyce Bernal  |
| <b>Screenplay:</b> | Enrico Santos, Dindo Perez, Carol San Pedro, Artemio Abad |
| <b>Cast</b>        |   |

|                   |                      |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| Piolo Pascual     | <i>Vince</i>         |
| Judy Ann Santos   | <i>Abby Trinidad</i> |
| Hilda Koronel     | <i>Abby's mother</i> |
| Tommy Abuel       | <i>Abby's father</i> |
| Marjorie Barretto | <i>Aleli</i>         |
| Cheska Garcia     | <i>Sabrina</i>       |
| Marco Alcaraz     | <i>Samuel</i>        |

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