Thinking Straight: Queer Imaging in Lino Brocka's *Maynila* (1975)*

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The separation in so-called public political discourse and private identity issues attained recent cultural cutting-edge status in the articulation of gender issues. In view of the artificiality of disciplinary boundaries, this paper seeks to evaluate the potential of queer politics (focused on gay-male practice) within the exploratory terms provided by a major city film, Lino Brocka's *Maynila: Sa mga kuko ng liwanag* (1975), produced during martial rule. The area of application of this analysis will be Philippine popular culture, in consideration of the country's position as a post-colonized territory that had set up a dictatorial regime to facilitate neocolonial control by the US.

Keywords: Philippine cinema, postcoloniality, queerness, Marcos era, Maynila (1975)

Queer, or actually gay, representations of Filipinos in their own cinema can be seen in what may be the most significant gay-themed works produced in the country during the period of Ferdinand Marcos's dictatorship (the martial law period was effectively in place from September 1972 to March 1986, with a largely symbolic "paper lifting" in January 1981). The most prominent body of work has been Brocka's tackling of homosexuality at regular intervals: from his early *Tubog sa Ginto* (1971) to *Ang Tatay Kong Nanay* (1978), including the peripheral gay characters in *Maynila: Sa Mga Kuko ng Liwanag* (1975), *Mananayaw* (1978), and *Palipat-lipat, Papalit-palit* (1982) in his middle period, to *Macho dancer* (1988) (planned during but produced after the Marcos period) which also led to a few sequels by his associates after his death. The gay character assumed a more realistic, if not sympathetic, treatment in other filmmaker's treatments, scoring points in otherwise straight milieux in Peque Gallaga's *Scorpio Nights* (1985)and Marilou Diaz-Abaya's *Moral* (1982) and assuming lead-character capability (along with a

wide array of gender outlaws, including lesbian, bisexual, polyamorous and sex-professional Others) in Ishmael Bernal's *Manila by Night* (1980). Gay characters still managed to sustain high visibility immediately after the collapse of the Marcos regime, but at the risk of comic treatment bordering on ridicule, which culminated in the rise and fall of Roderick Paulate (his contemporary equivalent would be Vice Ganda, whose *Praybeyt Benjamin* has become the all-time local box-office hit as of 2011). Lesbians on the other hand also had their share of exposure, but in a different manner.

The depiction of female sexuality, even in its same-sex dimension, was vulnerable to the cynical exploitation of women's issues in order to justify graphic portrayals of female anatomies in near or outright pornographic conditions. Another, though less hell-raising, problem was the appropriation of feminist exigencies in the pursuit of reactionary-propagandistic ploys. Danny L. Zialcita's *T-bird at Ako* (1982) saw the lesbian converted by a casual encounter with an exponent of machismo, a treatment to be repeated immediately after the People Power revolt in Pepe Marcos' *Tubusin mo ng Dugo* (1988) and reveling in its inequity in various Roderick Paulate films that paired the star with Maricel Soriano – i.e., the lesbian turns woman while the gay remains gay in the end; the lesbian in *Moral*, though not condemned outright, is also accorded less significance than the gay male couple who interact with one of the major characters. This is the same for most other lesbian characters, including one in Diaz-Abaya's *Alyas Baby Tsina* (1984). Only in post-Marcos releases, starting with Mel Chionglo's Isabel Aquino: *I Want to Live* and Gil Portes' *Class of '91* (both 1991) do lesbians acquire recognizable dimensions and maintain their sexuality consistently throughout the film. In order to focus more squarely on the period in question, this paper will be looking at the country's most significant city film prior to the 1980s, Lino Brocka's *Maynila: Sa Mga Kuko ng Liwanag* (1975), which by at least one account (David, 1990) jump-started the so-called Second Golden Age of Philippine cinema.

Conditions of Production

Postcoloniality may be the only Marxist-based holdover that both retains its claims to liberationist ideals and stands to benefit from the interdisciplinary crossings-over of the "post" (-modern, -structuralist) era. Queer theory, on the other hand, can be seen, at least chronologically, as a permutation of studies in feminism, gender and sexuality. I take care to qualify these discourses as "theoretical" because the evidence of artistic practice – in filmmaking, especially – demonstrates the ease with which both queer and

postcolonial positions could enrich one another, not only by complicating the issues they raise, but also by supplying some needed sources of additional rage and humor.

This paper aims to reconsider the problematic terms of progressivity of the film whose impact effectively defined the cinematic imaging of the city of Manila; understandably, the film, along with Ishmael Bernal's *Manila by Night* (1980), contends for canonical ranking as the country's all-time best output, and both titles have been read comparatively since their emergence (see, for instance, del Mundo, 2001; and Tolentino, 2012). As an example, the first comprehensive reader, which came out in 1994, on colonial discourse and "post-colonial" theory, introduces the field by elaborating on the contributions of discourses on race and ethnicity, then adds in closing that "The dynamics of gender and sexuality are, of course, central issues" (Williams and Chrisman, 1994), all the while making references to feminist and gender writings and none whatsoever to non-heterosexual positionings. In the course of this paper I would also contend that even the most radical possibilities in queer writing, those deriving from arguments on lesbian "perverse" sexuality, stop short of making overt political prescriptions, thus effectively closing down certain avenues for transformative applications.

The aforementioned reader makes as clear an articulation as any about the increasing inadequacies of standard postcolonial approaches, particularly in its extended introductory critique of the standard source of contemporary views on race and ethnicity in postcolonial relations, Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). The authors argue that the notion of Orientalism, while helpful in bringing to the fore the manner in which Othering has entrenched itself in Western culture, also lends itself to a certain amount of containment (Williams and Chrisman, 1994), evidenced in debates on political correctness – i.e., respect as its own compensation – and aspects of multiculturalism, specifically those concerned with "alternative" lifestyling and canon-formations. Sara Suleri (1994), in "Woman Skin Deep: Feminism and the Postcolonial Condition," circumscribes these problematics by noting how these difficulties arise mainly in Western-centered discussions because of the intrusion of a third term in the race-ethnicity axes – i.e., that of (the theorist's potentially lucrative) profession (1994, p).

More recent studies of queer sexualities in the Philippines have emerged since the period covered by the aforementioned texts. Michael Tan inspected Filipino male sexual behavior (Tan, 1995), focusing at one point on sex workers with a view to effective implementation of safe sex (Tan, 1999); Martin F. Manalansan (2003) inspected how gay Filipinos negotiated a transition

from a developing country to a highly developed center (New York City); Fenella Cannell (1999) and Dana Collins (2005) provided close observational studies of homosexuality in rural and in urban settings, respectively; the problematizations of the bakla (an older and more abject conceptualization of male homosexuality) are presented by such authors as Mark Johnson (1997), J. Neil C. Garcia (2000) and Bobby Benedicto (2008); while studies on Filipino lesbianism, though comparatively more recent and therefore fewer thus far, can be seen in the output of Kale Bantigue Fajardo (2008) and Libay Linsangan Cantor (2012).

The preponderance of anthropological studies corresponds to the need for careful and accurate descriptions of conditions that are still in the process of discovery by global scholars; Fajardo, in fact, cautions against the heteronormativizing impulses in closely narrativizing any complex "alien" cultural phenomena (2008, p. 419). In pursuit of a more definite historical incident in Philippine queer politics, this paper will be inspecting the interactions of two texts, a film release and a lengthy article that bucked the then-prevalent trend of critical approbation. By way of moving from the theoretical to the practical, as well as from the general to the specific, two early examples of foreign (printed) texts, both gazing at Filipino sexualities from unexpected positions and understandably though hastily resisted by local scholars, will precede the presentation of the film release and the article in question.

The Feminist Imperative

The entry point for interfacing discussions of queerness and postcoloniality was and remains feminism, deriving from the observation that the (not-always-female) Oriental Other tended to be feminized in the West. The positive result of the intervention of feminists in postcolonial discourse can be seen as threefold in nature: the introduction of reverse discourse, as formulable in the admittedly simplistic polemic "What's so bad about feminization/femininity anyway?," the extension to the political realm of lessons in gender struggles, and the disclosure of the realities of oppression even among the colonized, in that women in this situation, to begin with, suffer the twin burdens of gender and political colonization. The Philippines as object of observation serves to further extend this articulation of the controversy via its historical circumstance of having been the United States' only successful attempt at (post-)colonization, with a narrative of resistance antedating and resembling that of Vietnam, minus the latter's advantages of having allies in the Cold

War superpower split as well as in liberal Western media and activist circles, suppressed and overturned for the most part of the current century.

A casual glance at two available contemporary sources of Westerners gazing at Filipino sexuality, both of which have been disparaged in standard Filipino queer scholarship, helps drive home the point of the disadvantage of working within a culturally alien framework of analysis. The first, an empirical study of comparative homosexualities in a number of national contexts including the US, lumps together the Philippines along with the other Third-World countries, presumably on the basis of their common experience of Hispanic colonization, as its way of explaining the fluidity of Philippine male sexuality (Whitam and Mathy, 1986). Although the study favorably compares the option of machismo, which justifies homosexual relations within the binary of masculine dominance and feminine submission, to that of American heterosexuality, the authors also acknowledge that the Philippines is unique in representing the erotic tradition "of Southeast Asia, the most tolerant area of the world with respect to variant sexuality" (pp. 144-145).

The other text, a tourism guide to gay Philippine life, avoids the pitfall of seeking explanations by way of analogous Western, specifically Latinate, tradition, but nevertheless resorts to basic still-Western categorizations in describing Filipino men thus: "'Straight' is gay and gay is gayer" – this as a chapter subtitle, immediately followed by the observation that "Filipino sexuality has many hard to explain (sic) aspects" (Itiel, 1989, p. 10). More knowingly, the guide differentiates between Philippine male sexuality and machismo by asserting that "Being 'straight' in the Philippines doesn't dictate one's sexual role play" (p. 11). The reason I insist that the text ultimately falls back on an even more basic and naturalized Western framework draws from the text's insistence on defining gay-available straight men as not straight, and therefore merely "straight." While I feel it is imperative to look further into a perversion of what is already "perverse" to begin with, it would also be helpful to see what the implications of such an insistence on Westernized categorizations lead to. Granting the feminization of the Other already imposed by Orientalism, the fact that such potentially gay men can still be called "straight," even with quotation marks, implies, if these men were Western, the condition of bisexuality, as valorized by Freud himself. But again, since these men are not men enough by virtue of their Otherness, then as non-men (and therefore, still within Westernized terms, women), their capacity for straightness marks them as lesbians.

This may be seen at best as tying in with recent queer discourses on lesbian "perverse" sexuality, but before celebrating such a discovery by delving into the

discourses themselves, what should also be pointed out is that this is perhaps the surest way of explaining another, and far more anomalous, phenomenon – that of virtually erasing real lesbians in Philippine sexual discourses. This is accomplished by any of a number of means: regarding women homosexuals as capable of heterosexuality since all it would take is for them to assume the passive term within a sexual encounter; enforcing masculinist expectations even within non-sexual contexts, thus depriving lesbians of the advantage of seeking communal support among themselves – a prerogative stigmatized, as it were, as feminine and therefore open only to gays and straight women; and suppressing sexual options by providing sublimational alternatives – single-women careers, the nunnery, old-maid aunthood, foreign labor (primarily as domestic help, secondarily as sex workers).

At this point the paper will be revisiting a now nearly forgotten circumstance in the production of a major Philippine city film, Brocka's Maynila: Sa mga kuko ng liwanag (1975). The specific case will involve possibly permanently lost footage and operate according to the terms, reminiscent of the archeological analysis prescribed by Michel Foucault (1972), that still-available traces can provide in order to approach as closely as possible the issues obtained during the period. In his comparative evaluation of major Filipino city films, scriptwriter Clodualdo del Mundo, Jr. (2001) opined that "Brocka's image of an exploitative city represents a social condition, a political problem; in the process, a growing consciousness of a need to change arises" (p. 93). Rolando B. Tolentino (2012) extended this insight by remarking that the film "can also be read as a derailing of the Marcosian project of image- and nation-building. Martial law and the dictatorship had … [only succeeded in] raising the question of who really benefited from the undertaking."

Manila and Masculinity

The highly contained controversy that emerged in the wake of Brocka's adaptation of Edgardo Reyes's novel can be inferred from some of the major reviews that greeted it. Bienvenido Lumbera, writing in the Philippine Daily Express, opined toward the end that "The insertion of the sequences pertaining to [lead character] Julio's involvement in the callboy trade does seem like an intrusion, for the characters from the story proper seem to have dropped out for the duration of the episode" (1975, p. 203). Another review, from the Times Journal, mentioned as one of the movie's memorable scenes that of "vicious callboys ganging up on a teenage homosexual prey inside the men's room of a movie house" (Hernando, p. 213) – a description that will be

unfamiliar to anyone whose familiarity with the film derives from either the international print or any of the several video versions.

The full controversy originated in a now little-known article, tellingly titled "A brief on Sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag (Or why Maynila should ever be masculine)" and published in a literary journal of the national university. The author, Ave Perez Jacob (1975), following the romanticization of masculinity and expression of casual homophobia still acceptable during the period, peppered his writing with derogatory references to "homos," "fairies," and "bakla" (Filipino for "faggot"), and criticized the film for "[emasculating] an austere masculine novel" (p. 70) which nevertheless ultimately managed to resist efforts "to sissify a manly novel about an ever masculine city" (p. 77). While agreeing with the adaptation's censoring of the lead character's possibly accidental murder of a man in a botched robbery attempt (p. 70), the author then mentions how the film's "palpably stale and run-of-the-mill" reunion between the narrative's doomed lovers was "a lousy mean way to culminate [lead character] Julio's search. But in the context of the protracted (almost a quarter of the movie's length) *bakla* interlude, that suits Brocka perfectly" (p. 75).[1]

The parenthetical description in the preceding quotation would be a puzzlement to people who had watched the film only since its original release. At 125 minutes, a quarter would constitute over half an hour, when the detour of Julio into the world of gay-for-pay sex work in existing versions would be 16 minutes, or about half that amount. The explanation is that the Julio-as-rentboy sequences were trimmed and the final scenes, where the brothel workers were brought to a seaside resort, were cut entirely after the movie's initial theatrical run in July 1975; the trimmed version was screened during the movie's reissue the next year, after it had swept the Filipino Academy of Movie Arts and Sciences (FAMAS) awards. The longer version, which would also have considerably lengthened the total running time, accounts for a then-publicized shot, actually a location still and now mistaken for an indeterminate soft-core glamour pose, of lead performer Rafael Roco, Jr., in bikini briefs (Figure 1).

Between the callboy sequences in the brothel (which is the only portion that remains in existing prints) and on the beach, the narrative follows Julio, who goes along with his mentor Bobby and the latter's circle of sex-work professionals. Following the then-prevalent terms of desire, the members, who at one point operate as a semi-underworld gang, are all straight-acting – which the film suggests is the reason for their ready acceptance of Julio, whose hesitation is read by everyone as confirmation of his heterosexuality.

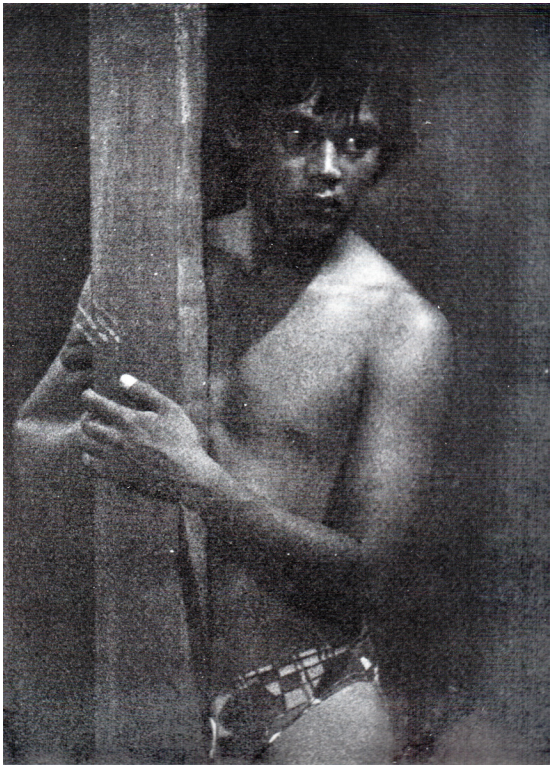

Figure 1. Rafael (Bembol) Roco, Jr. as Julio Madiaga in now-missing sequence in Lino Brocka's *Maynila: Sa Mga Kuko ng Liwanag* (1975). (Cinema Artists publicity still)

Although his first customer in the brothel (who utters the last line retained from the originally extended sequence) complains about Julio's passivity during love-making, the movie appears to assume that Julio continues to be welcomed in the "life" despite his lack of inclinations (and concomitant skills) because of the greater degree of manliness bestowed on him by his working-class experience.

The highlights of Julio's queer detour include a depiction, per an older colleague's recollection, of "the real-life Tambakan alley in Santa Cruz [the squalid residential section of a low-end retail district] where an elderly half-blind pimp named Cleopatra ruled over his harem of hustlers. At the top floor, the laundry line of briefs hanging outside the window signaled interested gays on the street below if there were available men upstairs" (Bernardo, 2012). Another major sequence took place, as adduced in the aforementioned *Times Journal* review, in a movie venue along Rizal Avenue, the Ideal Theater, then known as the venue for MGM releases. Since MGM specialized in musicals, the Ideal screen was framed as a proscenium arch, with the illusion of a stage platform extending from the curtains, which were in turn of two types: horizontally parted "travelers" (opened only before the first screening and closed after the last) and vertically lifted drapes. In this sequence, Julio agrees to be set up by Bobby and his friends as bait for any closeted homosexual cruising in the darkness of movie screenings. The group, posing as undercover vice cops, would then pounce on the victim and shake down the latter in order to extort quick (though rarely hefty) profits. [2]

During the final extended beach sequence, the longest single setting in the film, Julio (still consistent with his hesitant responses in the initial brothel sequence) continues to reject a series of effeminate yet increasingly illustrious clients, until he turns violent against some of them, occasioning stereotypical "screaming-fag" hysterics among the supporting performers. Fired on the spot by the brothel manager, Julio then turns to drink and lies on the sand, seeking sympathy from Bobby, the man who, claiming heterosexuality, had befriended him in Liwasang Bonifacio (formerly Lawton Plaza) and introduced him to sex work, strictly as a means of income; the sequence, as I remember, also contains possibly the most impressive of the film's several beach scenes, shot during magic hour, with color saturation intensifying along with the emotional tension in the scene. When Bobby, no longer able to control his same-sex desire, plants a kiss on him, Julio responds with disgust, says something to the effect of "I thought you were different from them but you're also just another bakla," and abandons him. The next sequence (recognizable to viewers of still-existing copies), where Julio calls on Pol, a former construction co-worker, then follows.

Recriminative responses

The aforementioned series of sequences, apparently now permanently lost except for the first (brothel-set) extract, incited more negative responses than the film as a whole. This may have come as a surprise to the filmmakers, especially the director, considering that martial law had been declared only three years earlier and its repressive effects would have become increasingly evident by then; in fact in a few months' time another film, Behn Cervantes's *Sakada* (1976), would be banned after its initial run; in the same year, a soft-core potboiler, Danilo Cabreira's *Mga Uhaw na Bulaklak, Part II*, would serve as justification for militarizing the Office of the President's Board of Censors for Motion Pictures.

One possible explanation for *Maynila's* exception from initial harassment (although years later its export permit would encounter difficulty) is that the director had just realized the ultimate cinephiliac pipe dream: a self-produced epic project that turned into a blockbuster and swept the industry awards. Although highly critical of political authority and traditional values, the 1974 film, titled *Tinimbang ka Ngunit Kulang* (translatable as the biblical book of Daniel's *shekel* [Chapter 5], or "You were weighed but found wanting"), was actually – by virtue of its rural setting and heroic male figure – containable within the terms of moral and economic reform espoused by the New Society of the martial-law regime.

Hence, the emergence of the article constituted a potentially upsetting challenge to a film whose director had aspired to bring radical (because critical) thinking from the countryside into the capital city. Maynila set itself within defensible limits by providing a period title, "1970" (deleted in the international version, with the initial run in Paris using the title *Manille '*75), at the end of the opening credits, but nevertheless retained a provocative edge by featuring a workers' protest march toward the end, coinciding – and potentially conflicting – with Julio's increasingly murderous fury over the murder of his recently rediscovered childhood sweetheart, Ligaya. What may have been surprising was the excessive nature of the dissenting commentary, focused on a narrative detour that Brocka had earnestly believed lay in the spirit of strengthening the moral ascendancy of the lead character; as he stated:

> I was accused of sensationalizing the homosexual episode. But that's a misconception. I have two reasons for including it. First to reconcile the material with the demands of the industry and second to give a context in which Julio understands the despair of Ligaya. The story is the dehumanization of this man and I know of many students who enter into prostitution.... When Julio finally meets Ligaya and sleeps with her in a motel room, he understands her travails thanks to his homosexual experiences. He understands what it is to sleep with Ah Tek. The two know what it means to be dirtied. (Sotto, 1993, p. 225)

The several problematic pronouncements in this interview excerpt – the judgmental attitude toward sex work, the assumption of the validity of homophobia, the acceptance of the weak nature of a "good" woman, and the expression of disgust toward an Asian Other (whose name cannot even be authenticated, intended as it was to resound with "atik," slang reversal of the Filipino word for profit) – should entirely be taken in the historical context in which Brocka outgrew each position and reflected his perspectival shifts in his succeeding film projects, all the way until his untimely death in a car accident in 1991.[3]

Per the account of the scriptwriter Clodualdo del Mundo, Jr., Brocka may have erred in neglecting to clear the additional episodes with Edgardo Reyes, author of the source novel; Del Mundo also accounts for the fact that the movie's literary handling of recognizably 1960s Tagalog slang undergoes

a linguistic shift into more contemporary modes of expression, including "swardspeak" or gay lingo, which began emerging in the '70s:

> When Lino made the suggestion to add the excursion into the gay underworld, I asked him and Mike [de Leon, producer and cinematographer] to clear it with Edgardo Reyes. I doubt if they did. Anyway, Lino and I talked about his ideas. Finally, I scripted it myself. The dialogue would naturally differ from the rest of the film. The character of Bobby belongs to a different group. The dialogue separates him from the world of the construction workers. (Del Mundo, email interview, 2012)

In this context, Jacob's article provides an impassioned, personalistic and extended denunciation of the aforementioned episodes. It opens with a lionization of Tondo as the proper masculine representation of Manila, embodied in the author's selection of an unnamed ideal resident:

> Of larger-than-life figures, there was a man living alone in a working-class house.... One would knock timidly, respectfully, on his door and be overwhelmed by a rare presence. He was of the stuff that made Tondo muscular and masculine, stentorian and great. Across a coffee table or from an improvised platform, his voice vibrated with visceral and intellectual conviction. (Jacob, 1975, p. 64)

This tone of ironically unexamined homoeroticism, redolent of all-male cultures such as the priesthood and the military, typically requires hysterically homophobic declarations in order to assure the reader that the author's love of manliness does not extend to feminized penetrative desire. At one point the article recounts an account, worth quoting extensively, of an incident that recalls the first scene where Bobby befriends Julio, as well as the now-lost Ideal Theater scene:

> The homos (poor creatures!) haunted the ruins of Intramuros like vampires in search of fresh blood. They were mostly *mestizos*,... the products of Ermita and similar *ilustrado* enclaves. An expert blow-job they would demonstrate on anybody in need not so much of perverted sex as fare money

> or a free meal. Instances there were when a guy or two of one's company would play the decoys while the rest lay crouched and hidden in the tall *talahib* grass. At a given signal, as the fairies gathered round moaning and squealing in vulgar admiration of succulent Tondo meat, the ambushers would jump at them yelling like demented maniacs. And the homos would scamper away shrieking hysterically, disappearing as ghosts in the shadowy nooks and crannies of old Intramuros. (Jacob, 1975, p. 66)

Desire and its Discontents

The queer-baiting story just quoted exhibits more than just an obsession with the idea of homosexual sex, the same way that religious fundamentalists tend to focus on the protocols of sexual intercourse with a view, articulated by Michel Foucault (1990), toward regulating rather than repressing them. While demonstrating a token concern by referring to "homos" parenthetically as "poor creatures!" and the homophobes as "demented maniacs," the passage also implicates the author himself, either as voyeuristic participant or as over-invested researcher, in its detailed recounting of an event pregnant with symbolic retaliation by Tondo's "real men" against the as-it-were aptly effete and exploitative exemplars of the ruling class. Yet the colorful word choices and the SOV (subject-object-verb) construction of phrases like "Instances there were" (before being more popularly termed "Yoda talk" since the 1977-1983 *Star Wars* film series) – these actually evince a poetic affectation that discomfortingly aligns the author with his much-derided Ermita and *ilustrado* circles. In the standard psychoanalytic terms of projection bias and reaction formation, the apparent femininity of the loverly appreciations of masculinity as well as the self-consciously literary stylistics would provoke a strong degree of homosexual panic in the author, in the same way that closeted persons are currently understood to be even more anti-queer than genuine heterosexuals, or that the most vocal homophobes are suspected of harboring same-sex desires.

The exact role played by the article in the decision of the film's producers to shorten or outright delete these sequences may be difficult to ascertain by now, although we may find some confirmation in Del Mundo's confirmation that he and the producer, not Brocka, took responsibility for the trimming inasmuch as "it was unnecessarily long" (2012, email interview). (In the existing version, Julio visits Pol right after his first night in the brothel, where a lapdog-cuddling customer scolds him for failing to "sing-and-dance" –

i.e., engage in oral and anal homosexual sex; the ellipsis suggests that Julio immediately abandons the prospect of surviving as a rentboy.[4]) Yet what remains is that the article demonstrates a highly homoeroticized concern for Julio, the novel and the city (with Tondo, the squatter district, as its idealized center); and yet, ironically, the sequences in their entirety unequivocally conform to the article's excessive and unapologetic homophobia, the underside of its unabashed celebration of a masculinity ascribed in a series of synecdochic links to the Tondo tough-guy worker --and therefore to the Manileño, and therefore to the Filipino. (One further way of arguing that *Maynila* upholds traditional normativity is in its casting judgments: the lead couple are relatively fair but not Asiatic, while the performers selected to play the foreman, the aspiring yuppie and the fake recruiter are darker-skinned; the recruiter, a hoarse-voiced woman, is repeatedly described by Julio as swine-like and is depicted as always unpartnered and independent, and thereby possibly lesbian or at least non-heterosexual.)

A larger overlooked problematic in this exchange is the fact that, like the article, the extended gay-hustler sequences (still perceivable from the short scenes that remain – see Figure 2) are arguably anti-queer; the film,

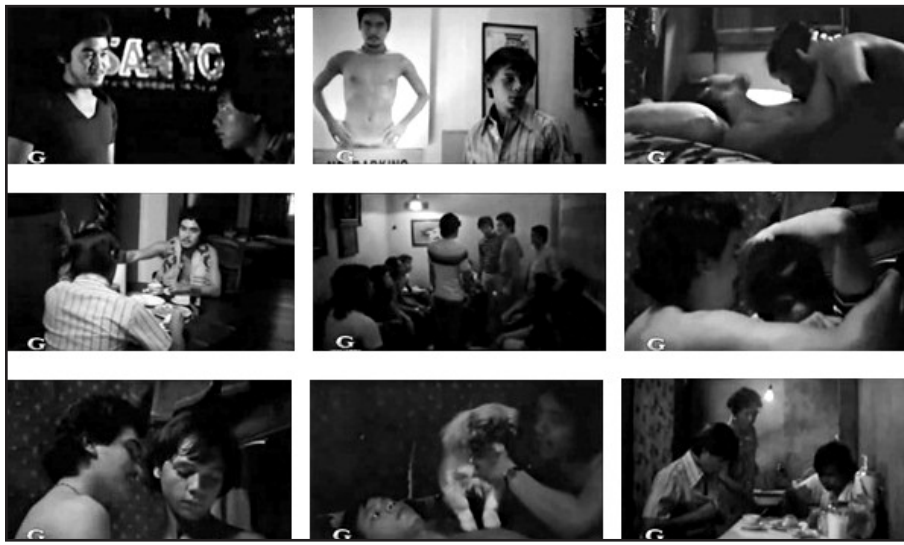

Figure 2. Top (l-r): Bobby befriends Julio, who's spending the night at Mehan Garden; Bobby brings Julio to his well-furnished apartment; Julio discovers a friend in bed with Bobby. Middle (l-r): Bobby explains his profession during breakfast and convinces Julio to try it out; Bobby introduces Julio to other people at the gay brothel; Cesar, the brothel owner, undresses Julio to "sample" him. Bottom (l-r): Julio evades Cesar's attempt to kiss him; Ricky, a brothel regular who selects Julio, scolds his dog Bullet for interrupting his session with Julio; after Ricky expresses disappointment in Julio, the latter calls on an old friend, Pol, next morning. (Cinema Artists, frame captures by author)

like the article, is consistent in its sentimental protectiveness toward Julio Madiaga. Possible proof of this is that the film, unlike the novel, dispenses with an episode wherein Julio, entirely by accident, attempts to rob a stranger at night – in Agrifina Circle, incidentally another area for locals cruising for sex partners – and winds up killing his victim; and in defiance of the novel, the article approves of this potentially romantic instance of censorship since Julio's motive would allegedly be "definitely mercenary and utterly condemnable, patently not in keeping with his character as a poor but decent young man" from a far-flung provincial island (Jacob, 1975).[5] Yet an acknowledgment within the article of the novel's autobiographical nature also raises the possibility that, in contending over Julio, each side in this debate – film and article – is struggling for the ultimate romantic quest: the right to represent not so much the body, but rather an embodiment, of the author.

In the light of these mutually problematic responses to the queer potential in a major entry in contemporary Philippine film culture, as manifested in this circumscribed example, the larger concern of what would be acceptable within the Philippine cultural context may be as good a starting point as any. In terms of queerness informing postcoloniality, what can also be made clear is that the finessing of radical principles using the earlier articulated concepts of lesbian "perversion" calls for grounding within specific and necessarily postcolonial contexts of struggle. Certain end-goals could be propounded for the moment, and in the spirit of thoroughgoing "perversion," one may advocate for the realization of a post-patriarchal and post-phallic order, impossible as these may be within existing psychoanalytic theorizations. Post-patriarchal practice may, as Teresa de Lauretis (1994) has suggested, confront the incest taboo, but from alternative horizontal sites – among siblings, for one thing – rather than the still-patriarchal observation of either parent as partner. Post-phallicism may take on the different suggestions of a number of authors – the anus in Guy Hocquenghem's text (1993, pp. 97-100), the hand in De Lauretis, the lesbian phallus in Butler, even the pen in Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge's "What is Post(-)colonialism?" (1994, p. 283). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's clamor for willful perversion in "How to Bring Your Kids up Gay" can perhaps serve as the provisional call to arms:

> ... the wish for the dignified treatment of already gay people is necessarily destined to turn into either trivializing apologetics or, much worse, a silkily camouflaged complicity in oppression – in the absence of a strong, explicit, *erotically invested* affirmation of some people's felt desire or need that

there be gay people in the immediate world. (Sedgwick, 1993, p. 79; emphasis in original)

Sexuality as resistance

The foregoing study had begun with a textual panorama of queer-film texts in the Philippines. After introducing basic studies written on queer sexualities in general and focusing on the Philippines in particular, it then presented some left-field texts that suggested that queerness in traditional Philippine culture did not always require a liberatory effort from the repressions wrought by religion. Tradition, or certain crucial aspects of it, ensured that native society would guarantee a space of tolerance. Hence the homophobic treatment of gay male-oriented sex work that stands in stark contrast to the presumed openness of Philippine cultural toward queer difference.

The standard narrative of Second Golden Age Philippine cinema is that *Maynila's* "other" city film, Ishmael Bernal's *Manila by Night* (1980), provided a corrective balance to the earlier film's weaknesses. Manila by night had strong gay and (anti-)heroic lesbian characters, casually polysexual men and women, and consistently ambiguous dramatis personae rather than the class-based dualist presentation of *Maynila*. The later release also utilized a multi-character framework that served to overturn the heroic linear mode of the Brocka opus. This derives from certain aesthetic associations that have been made with attempts at periodizing the history of the city. Gavin Shatkin (2006), as an example, marks out the city's years as colony as distinct from the Marcos years as its period of modernism, and the post-Marcos era through the present as the global-capitalist period. This teleological arrangement would be useful in understanding political and economic dynamics, but it also endangers cultural evaluation by presupposing that certain approaches associated with earlier periods would be inferior to those of later ones – hence the linear dualist narrational design of *Maynila*, by being associable with Classical Hollywood (which began and flourished mostly during the years of the US's colonization of the Philippines) would have had to yield to the superiority of the relatively more modern multi-character and open-ended presentation of *Manila by Night*.

This however would be an inadequate estimation of Brocka's output, partly because it conflates a development specific to US culture with Philippine history (i.e., Classical Hollywood actually persisted in the US beyond the end of the colonial occupation in the Philippines); more significantly, the focus on singular film-texts delimits the appreciation of artists who actually had extensive and prolific careers. In this regard, a major

factor in the misunderstanding of the role of Maynila in its filmmaker's auteurist development lies in the manner in which it is perceived by his appreciators. Having started as the resident blockbuster director of Lea Productions, one of the more stable independent studios to have emerged in the 1960s, he undertook a self-imposed absence from film activity, then returned triumphantly with a series of self-produced titles, Maynila among them. Rather than regarding this phase as his symbolic liberation from the strictures of studio production, we may just as well argue that this period extended his studio association, even if the studio happened to be one where he could call the shots. After this phase, in fact, he neither attempted to set up any stable long-term production outfit nor allowed himself to be exclusively contracted with any single company.

From this perspective, it would be possible to observe that after the series of films by his production outfit that included Maynila, Brocka then had the luxury to reconsider whether he could resolve any gaps and weaknesses in his earlier output, especially in light of how other Filipino filmmakers were able to articulate their vision of and for Philippine society. With Maynila as the peak of an earlier stage in his development, rather than the start of a new stage that extended all the way to his final films, we would be able to trace not only how he managed to sharpen his faculties in terms of politically committed filmmaking, but also how he reconfigured (with varying degrees of success) his views on the role of female, queer, and racial Others. Toward the end of his prematurely interrupted career, after an intervening stage of production geared toward foreign release via the festival circuit, he had rediscovered the fulfillment provided by his peak output during his studio-based years: "a commercial project with social content. In fact, before he died, he was doing a lot of work with this third type, and he was very excited about it," according to Ricardo Lee, one of his most active scriptwriters (Dalisay, 1993, p. 76). This is probably the likeliest reason for the massive public turnout for Brocka's wake and funeral – his audience's celebration of his reconnection with them, their mourning for the long list of projects intended to bear serious messages while providing sufficient entertainment, and their appreciation of the attention he had devoted to his own growth and development as an artist for the people.

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End Notes

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[1]The film's scriptwriter, Clodualdo del Mundo, Jr., responded in an interview to Jacob's critique that "I was not familiar with the setting of the novel so much so that I had to 'visit' the places like a tourist. I visited the places to help me visualize the scenes." Del Mundo also pointed out that at the time of the controversy, the presumably progressive-minded article writer was working in a Marcos agency (e-mail interview, 2012).

[2]Having only seen the initial run as a college freshman, I could not accurately reconstruct the missing sequences. An open query I posted on the Cinephiles! group page of Facebook resulted in several threads' worth of interested responses but extremely few actual first-hand recollections. Traces of these sequences may still be gleaned from several sources, however. The Internet Movie Database as of the present (September 2012) lists several cast members whose roles suggest other forgotten scenes, including the owner and customers of a discotheque. Jojo Abella, the performer who played Bobby, the complex sympathetic-yet-sinister character who introduces Julio to this liminal existence and also eventually causes him to reject it, was described by another performer, Bernardo Bernardo (star of Ishmael Bernal's city film, Manila by night [1980]), as having subsequently "migrated to the US and from what I hear was a victim of a road-rage shooting" (2012). Brocka also alluded to more footage that was unused even in the initial cut: "It's a pity that we had to set aside the scene wherein [Bobby] visits his parents in Bulacan. It's a family with modest means. The parents do not know that he is in the flesh trade. Many of these male prostitutes have this background" (Sotto, 1993, p. 225).

[3]The closest that Brocka had come to a single-text repudiation of these early positions may have been in Gumapang ka sa lusak (1990), ostensibly a thematic sequel of his 1980 Cannes Film Festival competition entry Jaguar (locally released in 1979). Gumapang ka featured a kept woman challenging her lover, a town mayor, who with his wife decides to silence the mistress because of the liability the latter poses to the mayor's political ambition. She is helped by a fan of hers, a naïve provincial (suggesting a more realistic update of Maynila) who calls on his better-off friends for help; the one who provides them with money and shelter is the scion of a Chinese businessman. A more extensive discussion of the problematic imaging of the Chinese villain in both novel and film is provided in an entry on the film in the blog Film, Eyeballs, Brain (Vergara, 2010). The glaring absence in Gumapang ka though is that of any queer character; this may be explained by the fact that Brocka had already revisited the gay-hustler episode of Maynila in Macho dancer, to be further expounded in a later endnote.

[4]Two years after Maynila, Christopher de Leon (an earlier Brocka protégé) starred in an adaptation of Paraisong parisukat (originally 1974), directed by Elwood Perez from the play written by Orlando Nadres, whose earlier gay coming-out play, Hanggang dito na lamang at maraming salamat (1974), originally featured Brocka and Maynila lead actor Rafael (Bembol) Roco, Jr. Titled Masikip, maluwang: Paraisong parisukat (1977), the film version featured a virtual blow-by-blow recap of the lost beach sequence in Maynila, with de Leon playing the Roco role; whether this suggests that Nadres had been involved in the lost Maynila sequence, or Perez was performing an homage, has not been determined. In Brocka's Macho dancer (1988), a post-Marcos film that reprised several themes of Maynila including male prostitution and white slavery, the now-secondary character who searches for his kidnapped sister (rather than the childhood sweetheart of Maynila) re-enacts the deleted sequence of Maynila, in the sense that he introduces the main character to the world of

urban male prostitution, now revealed as sensationally sordid; also, depressed after discovering the circumstances in which his sister had been sold as a sex slave, he seeks sexual comfort with the main character, who responds with wonderment (rather than the homophobia in the deleted sequence of Maynila) – possibly as an overdetermined reaction to sympathizing with his friend, wishing to provide comfort, and discovering the possibility of an emotional connection in sexual contact. For a more detailed exploration of the configuration of male sexualities in Macho dancer and the sequels made after Brocka's death, see Reuben Ramas Cañete (2011).

[5]Among film critics, Noel Vera has made the most extensive commentary on the film's revision of Julio's character as an already-guilty murderer even prior to his attack on Ah Tek: "Julio's crime colors our perception of him, makes him less passive, less of a victim or innocent; it makes our feelings for him more ambivalent and complex.… The advantage [in the film's excision of the murder scene] is that Julio's destruction is made all the more dramatic…. The disadvantage is that the film is more simplistic in its treatment of Julio. Brocka has streamlined and intensified Reyes's novel, but at the cost of emotional complexity" (2002). Despite making the unfounded claim (possibly from adopting the dated Western idea of contamination, whereby the nature of sexual contact defines the person) that Julio "has homosexual tendencies," the review provides a convincing argument of the film's romanticized reconceptualization of the lead character. Brocka, for his part, had earlier been asked about the accusation of racism and provided a surprisingly cavalier disclaimer thus: "It could have been an Indian national or an American. But in the Philippines, the Chinese have servants whom they turn into their concubines. I have nothing against the Chinese. A year after the film was shown, they were still protesting" (Sotto, 1993, p. 226). Vergara mentions certain consequences of such nonchalance, including a once-prevalent "ugly spate of kidnappings of Chinese Filipinos" (2010, n.p.) that took off after Brocka had died. Yet insiders were fully aware of Brocka's self-critical responsiveness: Jo-Ann Q. Maglipon reported not just his about-face from an anti-Left to a Left-sympathetic position (1993, pp. 131-132) but also his spirited defense of Chinese producers against an openly anti-Chinese censors chair (p. 124). It would have been reasonable to speculate that, if the kidnapping-for-ransom trend had started while he was still alive, Brocka would have been one of the first to openly denounce it, even at the expense of his personal security.

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