

From Opinion to Method

Filipino Film Criticism beyond Communicative Capitalism

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Abstract

In the light of Barthes's failed assassination of the author, this essay will tread on the plane of film criticism's practices of resuscitation of the author. Looking at the current phenomenon of the explosion of quantification in social media space, this essay considers the way communicative capitalism and neoliberal psychopolitics regulate points of view, analyses, and criticism in the internet, and funnel them into a single unit, which is in the form of opinion. This essay will look into three reviews of *Citizen Jake* (2018) which, as will be argued, often function in double: not only as reviews, but also as consumer guides, which come from the individual opinion of a privileged member of the audience, the reviewer. As a recommendation to resist these reductions, it is suggested that the film critic must practice a self-conscious theorization by looking at the social practices governing the production of the film, the subject of criticism. Dialectically, this will also resolve the failed modernist projects of defacing the author, defacing capitalist subjectivities, toward a materialist conception of film.

Keywords

death of the author; reviewing; film production; functionalism; communicative capitalism; psychopolitics; Emotional Design

This essay seeks to provide a functionalist approach to film criticism. In light of the practice of “film criticism as consumer guide,” we will look into how this is deployed in the light of current historical realities: the coming of communicative technologies as main channel of exchange and the entrenchment of neoliberal economics, which has intensified the market’s drive for profit through the use of such technologies. We are looking at the exchange between market and technology in the light of Jodi Dean’s concept of *communicative capitalism* and Han Byung-chul’s model of *psychopolitics*. It is suggested here that a communicative form of capitalism captures all kinds of messages and reduces them to commoditized contents as contributions. These contributions further emphasize the highly individualist and personalized mode of exchange which is prevalent in the current social-media space. These elements then affect film criticism, in a way that they reduce film criticism to a mere “difference in opinion.” Such function, I will argue, necessarily leads to the reiteration of the importance of the director as auteur and the reproduction of the critic through the auteur.

The perceived current functions of film criticism will be contrasted with Edel Garcellano’s view of the task of the critic as a partisan articulator of ideology and Patrick Flores’s reconceptualization of film, which should look for the methodical and ethical task of answering what film is. The opposition of the function and proposition noted above will be situated in the metacriticism of three reviews of the film *Citizen Jake* (2018) produced by Cinema Artists Philippines (see Figure 1).

A proposition for the insistence of the work of the critic as analyst is posited as a recommendation. For this to happen, a balanced, necessarily dialectical, weighing of social practices producing a film and the film-image, which involves the rules of its production, must be taken into consideration by would-be critics. Not that this is not always the case in any available film criticism, but a call for a more self-conscious theorization is needed to detach film criticism from the infantilizing ways of communicative capitalism.



Fig.1. Jacobo Herrera Sr. (Teroy Guzman) argues with his politically committed son, Jake (Atom Araullo) in Mike de Leon's *Citizen Jake* (2018). (Publicity still from Cinema Artists Philippines)

A Crisis in Contemporary Film Criticism

In 1968, Roland Barthes wrote a two-pronged attack on both the author and the traditional critic: proclaiming the former's death, and exposing the latter's job of resuscitating the former (142-48). Literary criticism at that point had confided its trust to the author as the "person" whose "voice" is of utmost importance in a literary text. Barthes noted that this positivism for the author is "the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology," which brought about the modern conception of the author along with the "discovery of the prestige of the individual" (142-43).

Unlike literature, which historically locates itself in the figure of the singular author, cinema, being a technology of spectacle, locates itself among circus attractions: a commodity for simultaneous mass consumption. In this sense, we can see another inverted relationship between literary criticism and film criticism. In current practices of literature, the written piece's production and distribution (as an object of consumption) is often affected by the critic through advanced review copies and award-giving bodies. Films, on the other hand, are meant to be seen by more than one person. In a movie theater, the audience and the critic are at the same end of consumption. With Barthes's critique of the author as a figure, we can see how in the production of literature, the reader is not within consideration: the production of the literary work is more or less a dialogue between the literary infrastructure, the author and the critic; readers are meant to be at the consuming end. With cinema, the studio is meant to be on the producing side while the audience is still consuming: the dynamic does not place the critic as essential. The film critic is born after the film audience.

There's a historical reason for this: literature, the practice of writing, was not intended for mass production as objects, and it took a long time for it to be commoditized with the coming of the printing press. Cinema, on the other hand, being born as a spectacle, is already a commodity: its use- and exchange-values were born almost simultaneously. It should be noted that the earlier forms of what passed as "film reviews" showcased the quality of the spectacle one can see.¹ Even at the birth of cinematic narration, what its reviews were essentially saying was that these motion pictures were "telling stories." This is closer to a consumer guide or review.

Decades of film reviewing, even when it reached the point of reviewing "film as art," still were unable to escape the function of the consumer guide. In the Philippines, film criticism was born out of attempts to balance these contradicting desires. Rolando B. Tolentino noted the birth of contemporary film criticism in the Philippines back in the 1970s, when academics from literature and mass communication tried to critically engage with the consumer-driven medium from the perspectives and theories of their own fields (xi). These engagements of academic perspectives and theories

open an attempt to reconfigure film criticism as a process which is autonomous from film practitioners. Joel David's polemic on the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino's (MPP) framing of their cited films in their annual awards highlighted this attempt, that the MPP's mode of citation necessarily distorts consumerist prerogatives in film criticism "to the point where film is perceived as something that's intended to further the welfare of its patrons" (45). But this attempt for autonomy does not seem to sit well with most film practitioners, including film critics themselves.

An interesting case of "anti-theory" in film criticism can be best demonstrated in the case of Patrick Flores's 1993 critique of Lino Brocka, which was not taken well by a number of influential and budding film practitioners and film critics. For those who were offended, Flores's (and his then-colleagues at the short-lived periodical, *Bongga*) critique, whose theorizing transcend from the work to the person/author, was arrogant and unfair, as noted in a manifesto published against Flores.² On his contribution to the roundtable talk on film criticism organized by the University of the Philippines College of Mass Communication's Office of Research and Publication on March 19, 2014, Flores notes in his paper, "The Elusive Film Criticism" the same observation in our contemporary reality: "in these parts, theory poses a threat to the cherished comforts among some readers and practitioners, and curiously among peers, too" ("The Elusive Film Criticism" 159).

In light of the 1993 incident, Edel Garcellano responded to one of the signers of the manifesto against Flores with a defense of Flores's theoretical approach. Garcellano highlighted the need of a self-conscious theorization on film criticism and review in this note:

A critic . . . is by definition a partisan to his own truth. As such, he/she desires to cleanse the perimeter of discourses whenever language, for instance, manifests itself as the signifier of this unconscious, the ideologized signifier itself. . . .

All reviews are admittedly limiting, and delimiting, we agree; but some are more forcefully argued than others. And it is with these limitations that we strike combative poses. (140)

Garcellano sees how these combative poses can be found in the theories the critic deploys which serve as its partisan stance: a critic's assessment of any film provides his own theory of what film is. Flores, in his roundtable talk, affirms this take on criticism in a more guided tone, with his questioning of the conceptualization of film criticism which is distinguishable to common opinion:

As we revisit the question of film criticism, so do we need to revisit our conceptualization of critique. What to our reckoning is critique? And for sure, we need to reevaluate our conceptualization of film that is intertwined with our conceptualization of critique. What is film? This is a fundamental point. . . . Here, we discern a shift: from film criticism to critical practice in film. Instead of asking what film criticism is, we can ask instead: What does it mean to do film criticism? What does it entail? What is at stake? ("The Elusive Film Criticism" 158).

American film critic Simran Hans noted, however, that "more than ever, criticism is seen as a publicity tool" (Donaldson et al.). Hence, a retrogression to the theoretical aims of criticism present in Garcellano and Flores. This is more or less true with the advent of Filipino film websites such as *Cinema Bravo*, *Film Police*, and *Unreel*, where writers provide both PR as well as reviews. The reason for this, as Hans would observe, probably comes from some (unconscious) anxiety: "Critics who don't have the benefit of a media name like the *Observer* attached to them can be concerned that their access might be limited if they say the wrong thing." But as practices of contemporary film reviewing would show, this element of "wrongness" tends to pass in what Flores calls the contemporary times as having an atmosphere of the "cult of the amateur, the autodidact, the putatively witty, entrepreneurial self-taught, self-promoting reviewer." These kinds of reviewers, for Flores, turn for the worse when

the self-styled commentator becomes a groupie, a glib byte maker, a hype-meister, a trigger-happy blogger, sometimes even a film producer or a bit player under the ambience of a wider creative industry of design, music, festivals, writing workshops, and other minor spectacles ("The Elusive Film Criticism" 160).

What Flores has noted of contemporary reviewers in the internet echoes what Byung Chul-han noted that digital platforms seem to be operating more with a power which is “smart and friendly [but] does not operate frontally” and are quite tolerant of these amateurish aspects (14). This smart power, which Byung refers to as *psychopolitical*, “is constantly calling on us to confide, share and participate: to communicate our opinions, needs, wishes, and preferences—to tell all about our lives” (15). Contrary to Garcellano’s and Flores’s formulation of the critique as partisan (and therefore political), contemporary forms of film reviews seem to fall into something which is negotiable and open, but always concerning the power holders themselves. At most, the general practice of film criticism, especially in the advent of blogging and web media, seems to fall more generally in the realm of public opinion. Jodi Dean noted how this reduction of the necessarily political into an opinion gives way to the consumerist aspect of what she refers to as communicative capitalism. For Dean, communicative capitalism morphs politics into consumer choices (11). But being just one of the choices, film criticism, in the sea of opinions, falls into debates, from time to time, as a “plural confrontation of opinions without truth” (Badiou 16).

Interpenetrating implications of the technological developments from film production, through consumption, to film cultures have been cited as sources of crises in contemporary film criticism. This new breed of film critics grew alongside contemporary venues of exhibition. Flores notes the effect of new venues on the practices of film criticism:

There can be no compelling artistic production without a compelling culture of critique. While there is in our midst intense celebration of new works in festivals, there is virtually zero production of critique. A case in point is Cinemalaya, which has festivalized independent cinema but has not created a lively ecology for criticism to flourish, as if film were merely a form of content to be provided in the market of the creative industry, or that it could only be acknowledged through an awards scheme not so far away from the Famas.

Quite sadly, practitioners bask in this festivalization of so-called independence, seeking validation from festival organizers who cannot hold still, take

a pause, and engage in a critical discussion. It is basically a circus masquerading as culture, with aspirants waiting in the wings for a berth, like bloggers wanting to become bureaucrats. (“Plea for Policy, Cry for Critique”)

Flores’s observations highlighted Alexis Tioseco’s position on the lack of critical culture in the Philippines: “Many filmmakers, especially filmmakers in the Philippines, have a problem with the word critic. We have little to no culture of healthy polemics in the country, as any attempt to consider fault is taken as a personal attack. Rare are those [who] are able to deal with it properly” (“The Letter I Would Love to Read to You in Person”). The sources of these effects of the new technology and film culture on film criticism will be traced to the current dominant economic and cultural base within which the Philippines situates itself over the next sections.

Film Criticism as Consumer Guide

Joel David wrote in 1989 a general observation between audience desire and the film critic:

we come around to the vicious cycle where most moviegoers couldn’t care less about aesthetics to begin with, only with entertainment values, and so the film reactor committed to working within a journalistic grind gets reduced to selectively evaluating films (only the praiseworthy ones), or compromising her or his criteria to conform to the less antagonistic aspects of film appreciation. This presumes that the film critic-aspirant possesses the minimum of an academically acceptable sensibility to begin with, but in practice the entire setup is so pervasive and aggravating that beginners in the craft of writing on film rarely even acquire insights on possible areas of exploration and development. (44)

This observation thus explains the inevitable reversion of film criticism into consumer guide-writing in the print medium. Capitalist ideology brought to cinema contradictory problems even during its genesis: being inherently a spectacular commodity, cinema premises its sustainability on profits from a mass audience; on the other hand, critics evaluate the film either through the unique “signatures” of the author as individual,³ or any

other mode of aestheticizing, leaving aside the industrial elements of the film production. Both concerns, however, focus on the consumption end: only the studios are concerned with mere profit, while the critics, also functioning as consumer guides, suggest which studios, signatures, or styles are worth buying/seeing.

Neoliberalism seems to resolve the conflict produced by capitalism by embracing cinema's commoditization as its reality with its recent campaigns of blurring distinctions between the arts and the market.⁴ This supported the validation of the "reviewer" as a critic, not in the same line of analytical practices of the visual art and literary critic, but by via value-adding quality as an extension of marketing. The fact that this very journal itself defined the "practicing critic" as one "who wrote three or more regular-length commentaries, each comprising 800 words or more, published during the past year" in its call for entries acknowledged the historical role of the film critic more as a commentator on films than as an analyst.

Looking at what passes for film criticism in the twenty-first century, it's not hard to see how the practices of writing an "online film critique" is not any different from any product reviews. We can see, for example, screening schedules at the *ClickTheCity* website with the accompanying reviews of its resident critic. Or on film writings such as *Cinema Bravo's* Antz Cabrera in his review of *Citizen Jake* (2018):

The film had a lot of symbolisms involved with it and when examined closely enough can be understood really well. The film's use of colors and chiaroscuro was very creative as well. I thought the story needed this kind of flavor. The use of flashbacks was on point to make people understand the story even more.

Setting fiction aside, what happened in the film is actually plausible in real life. There are rampant killings that are never resolved because of the abuse of power which is relatively common among Filipino societies. Whoever has the money can easily hide the truth and get away with it.

Power is a good thing, but when abused can have repercussions which may not be favorable to the majority. Will we ever survive this dog-eat-dog

society that plague [sic] our country? That is a question that warrants a clear answer. (“Movie Review: *Citizen Jake* [2018]”)

The marketing aspect of the writing can be observed from the concluding paragraphs of Cabrera’s review of the film. What is pointed out is less of actually “reviewing” the film but merely rewriting the film narrative and what the film is actually selling. The review, however, is not particularly concerned with whether what the film tries to sell or say has been sold or said well or not. It is content with mere repetition.

The repetition of the film’s sloganeering was done by Tristan Zinampan from *Film Police* in the conclusion of his review:

In the end, *Citizen Jake* posits that our fight should never be selective nor [sic] myopic. Corruption and oppression are like The Mind Flayer from *Stranger Things* season 2 to which everything is connected.

We cannot kill the beast by just chopping [off] one of its arms. For those stuck in apathetic slumber, it is time to wake up. For those who are awake but have eyes set in the distance, look down, look down around, for evil encroaches and surrounds. (“*Citizen Jake* Is a Wake-Up Call for Both the Asleep and [the] Woke”)

Although Zinampan’s review has a considerable amount of aesthetic analysis to it, his writing is often framed with a specific audience in mind to whom he’s trying to sell the film with the *Stranger Things* references he mentioned.

Some writings on *Citizen Jake* conform more to the classical trope of reviewing, similar to how Philbert Dy does in his posting in *Rogue*:

Citizen Jake is pretty rousing by the end, the clarity and sharpness of its ideas likely to inspire some much-needed discourse about media, class, and the history of our sad republic. It says some things that probably need to be heard in these troubled times, even as it admits its own limitations. There are elements that don’t quite succeed, a lot of the dramatics coming off strangely cold, and the reflexivity [sic] only creating more distance. But overall, there is plenty of merit in what the movie is attempting, and there is something to be learned from its point of view. (“Though Uneven, *Citizen Jake* Is Properly Rousing”)

In this concluding statement from his review, Dy repeated the things the film tried to sell, along with his assessment. In fact, he even insisted on a conclusion which was contrary to what the film invested in: Dy is convinced that there is something to learn from the film, while *Citizen Jake* insists that it has something new to tell you. While Dy scrutinized some of the forms, most of his conclusion made the same repetition of popular discourse surrounding the film, as Cabrera and Zinampan's reviews did. Dy's review did not question which elements did not quite succeed and how these unsuccessful elements meshed with his other conclusion about *Citizen Jake's* discursive potential. What Dy did in this review was not much in terms of encountering the film, but rather comprised his insistence on and consideration of the director's supposed genius, as he noted in his piece written in *Rogue* magazine in 2017 on de Leon's "genius" (Dy, "We Need to Talk about Mike" 54-57).

The way Cabrera, Zinampan, and Dy went about their pieces complies with the practice of film criticism since the beginning. They express the tendency of having their assessments mainly considerate of their consumerist ticks, which can reduce their view of cinema and writings close to the level of a shopping guide. Only this tendency of reviews to become consumer guide-like is amplified by another layer of capital expropriation on the internet.

Jodi Dean noted how the modes of producing value in the internet through communication channels contributed to the blurring of lines between any activity's boundaries with those of commerce. Dean suggested a feature of communicative capitalism: it "morphs message[s] into contribution[s]" (26). On the internet, the efficiency as signifiers to specific signifieds of the words "review" and "criticism" declines as they begin to be accessible on a singular platform/medium with a certain leaning on the former. In the sea of opinions, a "critique" is just another good or bad review. Film criticism, in the time of "content creation," places the filmic analysis to the "occlusion of antagonism necessary for politics." The critique becomes mere data circulating and "trying to catch and hold attention, to push or sway opinion, taste, and trends in one direction rather than another" (24). It is not to say that criticality is impossible on the internet, it's just that the platform

makes any message disappear, so to say, along the barrage of information that users encounter. A critical post or comment, in the end, is just another post or comment in the news feed, no different from the sponsored posts, shared memes, and your friends' travel photos.

Film Criticism and Neoliberalism

It is often that one takes a film's criticism (or any criticism for that matter) as a mere sign of the critic's insecurity. Edel Garcellano, writing in the 1990s, noted of an incident of how people in the film industry themselves see film criticism and theorization as personal attacks. Garcellano described this incident:

for some quarters [of the cinema complex] to insist that criticism of its products (which include films as well as actors/directors/writers/etc.) adds to the burden of an enterprise that needs all the compassion it must have—a baby that must be protected even from the harsh light of the sun—certainly mistakes film theorizing as a discursive supplement that has nothing to do with film itself, as though filmmaking does not have any theory to begin with. (142)

This denial of theory and theorization and aversion to critique came to fruition in what Han Byung-chul, coming from his critique of Eva Illouz, described as the making of an emotional capitalism. To appeal not to the intellect, but to the irrational sentiments with which people identify, is a consumerist project named Emotional Design, which “molds emotions and shapes emotional patterns for the sake of maximizing consumption” (45). For Han, emotional capitalism is part of what he sees as a *psychopolitical* project under societies of control (in contrast with Foucauldian biopolitics under disciplinary societies). Psychopolitics, as a replacement for biopolitics, becomes important under neoliberal economies where there is a perceived overabundance of “individual freedom”⁵ which psychopolitics banks on and “hails emotion as the expression of unbridled subjectivity” (Han 46). Han's treatise agrees with Dean's model of communicative capitalism: psychopolitics concerns itself less with the control of the neoliberal subject's psyche,

than with the control of the capital that can be extracted from emotions which “provides ‘raw material’ ... to optimize [for] corporate communication,” forming “the pre-reflexive, half-conscious, physico-instinctual level of action that escapes full awareness” that neoliberal psychopolitics “seizes ... in order to influence actions” (Han 47-48), actions which are often in the form of consumption.

Because most practices of current “film criticism” on the internet refuse self-conscious theorization, two things are being done: one is the reproduction of the auteur, and the second is the reproduction of the critic through the auteur. The three reviews of *Citizen Jake* cited earlier often repeat this aspect of the auteur. On Cabrera’s review: “Mike de Leon never failed to deliver. After an eighteen-year hiatus, *Citizen Jake* certainly is a gem we Filipinos could all be proud of” (“Movie Review: *Citizen Jake* [2018]”). On Zinampan’s: “Often a trope in movies is when a hermitic, wise—often, cranky—veteran is brought out of retirement to school the youth when the times have turned most trying (especially when the villains they once faced in the past have re-emerged from the ether)... In this instance, it is Mike de Leon that has rejoined the fray and his weapon of choice is *Citizen Jake*” (“*Citizen Jake* Is a Wake-Up Call for Both the Asleep and [the] Woke”). Dy’s review has the preview sentence: “Mike de Leon’s return to cinema is smart, if not always dramatically engaging”—often citing this filmmaking hiatus of the director within an auteuristic lens (“Though Uneven, *Citizen Jake* Is Properly Rousing”).

With the aversion to theory, the resuscitation of the author and its reproduction both found also the resuscitation of the prestige of the individual in the work of art. But as pointed out earlier, this really is not to the benefit of the individual herself as what is being reproduced are the relations of production. Contradictorily, the neoliberalization of the cinematic enterprise brought about the demise of the most personal forms of cinema: “the neoliberal restructuring of media production began slowly obscuring noncommercial imagery, to the point where experimental and essayistic cinema became almost invisible” (Steyerl 34).

In the age of communicative capitalism, the auteur found its reinvigoration: as a commodity being consumed at the same time as the film. The individual auteurial concept found itself “degraded into the genital organs of Capital,” genitals which are necessary to the reproduction of capital (i.e., of the reproduction of existing relations of production). In the context of more recent historical realities, the reproduction occurs in the film-image itself: “the first time as commodity, the second as art” (Beller 23). It is as we may observe that in the second instance of the occurrence of the image, the film director as the auteur is located, foreshadowing the complex network of labor power, labor relations, and political economic framework responsible for the production of the images.

In this reproduction of the auteur in the image, the audience, from which the film critic emerges, is part of the assembly line. Beller’s thesis of the cinematic mode of production looks at cinema as value-producing: “Cinema and its succeeding (if still simultaneous) formations, particularly television, video, computers, and the internet, are deterritorialized factories in which spectators work, that is, in which we perform value-productive labor” (1). This factory reproduces existing relations of production through “a projection of a public, which is not public after all, and in which participation and exploitation become indistinguishable” (Steyerl 74). The expansion of the cinematic mode of production to social media platforms, not just simply the internet, further alienates the difference between participation and exploitation and places everything into what seems to be a channel of singularity found in the *Facebook* news feed.

A Space for Film Criticism?

In light of communicative capitalism and neoliberal psychopolitics, the social media-dominated internet is becoming less and less ideal for a democratic-critical space. As mentioned earlier, criticism in the time of communicative capitalism is merely tantamount to the presence of content on a website. The optimistic promise of a democratized space has become a virtual market in which what is considered criticism is that which supplements capital.

The flattening of the meanings between criticism and opinion begs for a re-evaluation of the concept of criticism itself. The role of the critic in this sense was called into question: since communicative capitalism captures feedback not just from the critic but also from the consumers with equal weight, criticism requires more functions than the reproduction of capital. To reclaim its autonomy, criticism would now need to look for a way out of the *auteur-as-reproduction-of-capital*. While postcapitalist production is still beyond our current conditions, we are compelled to look at the other aspects which criticism produces.

First of all, what is being described when one refers to “criticism”? Raymond Williams located the word, yes, on the correct assumption of anti-critical minds: “[criticism’s] predominant early sense was of fault-finding” (47). Williams, however, does not really see anything wrong with it, since for him fault-finding is in fact criticism’s most useful aspect. He suggested, however, that we dialectically configure these processes of criticism between fault-finding and conscious response, which will thereby place criticism on a theoretical plane of activity:

the elevation to “judgment,” and to an apparently general process, when what always needs to be understood is the specificity of the response, which is not an abstract “judgment” but even where including, as often necessarily, positive or negative responses, a definite practice, in active and complex relations with its whole situation and context (49).

Flores reiterates the same from a film specialist’s viewpoint:

Film criticism assumes a level of specialization. I am committed to this requirement, to this moment of a specific intelligence. There should be a method and style of argumentation that underlies it and alongside it, a disciplinary accountability, a latitude for speculative thinking, and an academic desire (“The Elusive Film Criticism” 158).

Williams’s suggestion negates *auteurism*, which has always been the most conservative of film criticism practices since it repeats how hermeneutics processes religious scriptures to arrive at a “correct” interpretation. Flores’s

specialist view can capture Williams's suggestion. Williams's recommendation necessitates a criticism that looks at how a certain configuration was performed in consideration of the properties which allow the piece being criticized to come into being. Film criticism then is less concerned with interpretation: criticism should be looking for a method. It is here that we look at criticism as an inherently theoretical activity.

As cited earlier, Garcellano's note on the personalization of cinema will also inversely prescribe the acknowledgment of the existence of theory in the aspect of filmmaking, and therefore, the object of analysis of criticism is not merely the film-image/object itself, as it would cover only a phenomenological reading: the experiential, therefore, is something which is incomplete when considered as analysis or criticism. Perception needs to be rationalized and only needs to return to the material as an act of practice. This practice, after rationalization, however, does not entail a cycle or a repetition. It is necessary to imagine a step forward: a step which changes the material, for it will not change by itself. The return to practice, after rationalization, must take into consideration also the corrections and revisions of the errors seen in the rationalization of the material, or what Mao Tse-tung calls "revolutionary practice."⁶

The sources of theory, which is practice—social practice—is not "confined to activity in production" alone, but also takes other forms such as "class struggle, political life, scientific and artistic pursuits" (Mao 296). This leaves purely formalistic and purely "political" readings on the erring side for they do not envelop a holistic look: those methods do not produce an actual critical analysis. Mao did not place a criterion of importance on the categorization of the forms of social practices. The knowledge anyone acquires does not just come from her interactions with the material (scientific and artistic activities) but also from her political and cultural life.

Criticism as theorization looks at these diverse aspects of life as the film, whether as a commodity or as art, will not exist on its own and therefore cannot be taken "within its own terms" as if these terms do not stem from the social practices of production. A criticism "cannot rise beyond the ethos of capital ... and the earlier this primacy of polemical index is observed,

the better would be the understanding of the conditions of our existential ironies, the rationale of relative containment (in consonance with the relative autonomy, of base and superstructure, mode of production and culture)” (Garcellano 138). Production practices have theory and history. Earlier semiotic approaches in film analysis acknowledge this reality: that a signified is one which has been constructed from a specific location over the course of history. The film image then does not serve a “universal” function, but a particular social function.

Resolving Contradictions: For a Self-Conscious Theoretical Criticism

A problem arises when the thought of self-conscious theorization in criticism is to take place: what is to be done with the auteur? With web criticism? The answer lies not in their abrupt abandonment, but in paving the way for their necessary abolition.

Considering social practices in criticism also entails working under the conditions it wants to abolish. Conditions of communicative capitalism and psychopolitics in the internet, and also remnants of semi-feudal and semi-colonial legacies at least in the Philippine socio-political terrain, are temporally situated where the critic in the twenty-first century is writing. The task might be big, but the weight to bear is necessary for the abolition of these very conditions. To finally mark a death for the author, it is necessary for the critic to also participate in projects which aim for the death of the conditions which necessitate the production and reproduction of the author.

While the critic’s activity is relatively autonomous, carrying a theoretical project necessitates an acknowledgment of the oppositional relationship between the task of the critic and the subject of criticism. Self-conscious criticism does not merely repeat this relationship: the product must be of a transformative nature.⁷ But the formula for transformation can never be in a neutral sense if we are aiming for an abolition: the dialectical relationship must be antagonistic.

This theorization will be antagonistic also toward the merely aesthetic approach (that is, of a vulgarly formalist one) which begs to judge the film

according to qualities of “good taste.” Vulgar formalism is yet to be criticism: such readings are merely calibrations according to a certain standard and do not reach any kind of critical level. Formal analysis must be raised to a certain extent of theoretical abstraction: abstractions which are conscious of their own history and sources. It is only then that theoretical generalization can be made possible.

In the case of the errors committed in the *Citizen Jake* reviews cited above, it may be possible to process from this method a synthesis between the perceived auteurism and the conditions which brought forth the images analyzed. Questions can be raised: does the form correspond properly with the conditions in which it was made? How does the form fare with general contemporary filmic practices and conventions? It must be pointed out, however, that in this method, to reiterate Garcellano’s view on criticism, the “message” is limited by the form and the conditions of its production which are both determined by the ethos of capital.

The theoretical line of criticism outlined above subjects the critic reflexively to the method of dialectically looking at the opposition between the film commodity and social practice. While we view critique this way, in the sense of a developing project-in-progress, this follows what Flores suggested earlier, that it necessitates a reconstruction of our understanding of film. These reconstructions necessitate the abolition of an older notion for a construction of a new one. It is in the same vein that we plot here for a successful assassination of the author/auteur. In line with this assassination plot, the theoretical approach to criticism should also lead to the effacement of the critic which enables the resuscitation of this very author.

Notes

1. James Battaglia's senior honors thesis noted the function of earlier film reviews from the late-1890s onward highlighting the qualities of either cinematic equipment or films merely according to their spectacular qualities. His historiography of film reviews and criticism provided the changing dynamics of the shift toward the "film as art" approach, but is still rooted in the qualities of film as a commodity. See Battaglia's "The Past" from "Everyone's a Critic."
2. Flores archived the whole coverage of this incident including his response in one of his anthologies. See the section in Patrick Flores, "Manifest/o Destiny" (177-84).
3. It should be noted that this has not always been the case and practice of film criticism. However, post-1968 practices of auteurism, after the political turn of *Cahiers du Cinema* and the debate between Andrew Sarris and Pauline Kael over auteurism, brought upon a kind of restoration of the critic as the locator of the auteur in the person of the film director.
4. Regarding the non-division between independent and mainstream film practice, Liza Dino-Seguerra, the chairperson of Film Development Council of the Philippines, claims that the criteria are "the films that [Filipinos] make. It will separate the good ones from the not-so-good ones. Films are films" (Lago n.p.).
5. "Individual freedom" which is always expressed as capitalist free competition. Karl Marx noted that this kind of freedom does not relate itself to any person at all and is "the most sweeping abolition of all individual freedom and the complete subjugation of individuality to social conditions which assume the form of objective powers, indeed of overpowering objects—objects independent of the individuals relating to one another" ("Economic Manuscripts of 1857-58" 40).
6. "The active function of knowledge manifests itself not only in the active leap from perceptual to rational knowledge, but—and this is more important—it must manifest itself in the leap from rational knowledge to revolutionary practice" (Mao 304).
7. "All contradictory things are interconnected; not only do they coexist in a single entity in given conditions, but in other given conditions, they also transform themselves into each other" (Mao 340).

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