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Filling the Void:

The Anarchive as a Postcolonial Resource in the Cinema of Raya Martin and John Torres

RENATO LORIGA

Abstract

Despite being one of the largest cinematic industries of the first half of the 20th century, the Philippines did not have a national film archive until 2010, an absence that led to the almost complete erasure of its cinematic heritage. But to what extent does this lack of images influence the way in which today's filmmakers view the past? Is it possible to work beyond the archive? To fill the gaps left by an erased memory, which still bears the scars of colonial ruling? Taking its lead from these lines of enquiry, this paper will focus on the work of two Filipino filmmakers: Raya Martin and John Torres. With reference to the concepts of the anarchive and the subjectile, it will explore the possibility of reading their work as performative gestures rather than 'just' movies.

Introduction

To speak of the archive in relation to Filipino cinema is to speak of a void whose origins can be traced back to before cinema was even born. Loss prevails over memory. A first attempt to produce a 'proper' national archive occurred in 1982 whilst the country was under Martial Law, but this only

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lasted until 1986. The current national archive for Filipino cinema did not exist until 2010. As a result, archiving was undertaken by academic or governmental institutions, such as the University of the Philippines Film Institute and the National Commission on Culture and the Arts; private companies and film studios, like LVN Pictures, the Mowelfund Film Institute and the TV studios ABS-CBN; as well as volunteer-based associations like SOFIA (Society of Filipino Archivists for Film), which was founded in 1993. The other difficulty of preserving films in the Philippines stems from the heavy humidity and the constant threat of typhoons to the islands. Indeed, this is why, for many years, the only locations able to preserve movie reels were TV networks. Yet, despite their fundamental contribution to this process of preservation, their commercial nature adheres to a different logic to that of a national film archive.¹ As a result, much of the Philippines' cinematic heritage has been lost forever. Of the 350 movies produced from 1919 to 1944, only 10 have survived till today, and almost none in their original format.²

Archival loss, at least within this context, is strictly bound to colonial violence and therefore symptomatic of historical amnesia towards said colonial past.³ Replacing collective memory is what Ruanni F. Tupas describes as a "historical forgetting [...] [that] is collective, structural, and socially practiced [...] Forgetting is located within broad structures of relations whose continuities expose the permeability of the colonial/postcolonial dichotomy."⁴ The practical and theoretical implications of this void have been explored by Bliss Cua Lim, who takes her lead from the figure of the anarchive, a term used by Jacques Derrida and, more recently, Akira Mizuta Lippit.⁵ For Filipino cinema, Lim argues, the archive and its destruction are inextricably linked:

[I]n the context of impending loss (a screen text has deteriorated or failed to be preserved; it no longer circulates, it can no longer be accessed, retrieved, watched or enjoyed), the unavailability for consumption that archival loss entails is itself registered as a lived experience of time. Anarchivic periodicity is that of an awareness of ephemerality that is registered as anxiety, nostalgia, or an increased demand for historiographic reckoning of the media object before it decays. [...] Archival loss poses the threat that certain commodities – whose loss would be recognized and felt as a loss – will soon no longer be available for consumption or critical reflection, raising the stakes for "poor theory" and "poor history" in very temporally-circumscribed ways. [...] How should we understand the temporalities of archival loss, the loss of history on celluloid and video?⁶

Taking its lead from Lim's work, this article will explore how filmmakers Raya Martin and John Torres use archival images in their feature films in order to investigate postcolonial identities and the history of the Philippines. In order to pursue these lines of enquiry, it will take its lead from two terms. Whereas the concept of the 'anarchive' provides a framework through which to discuss an archive built on missing images, debris and ashes, as well as an anarchic way of treating actual archival images, the 'subjectile', in contrast, refers to a moment in which the materiality of film stock is imbued with meaning as its decay has overthrown the original content in its entirety. By engaging with these two terms, I will seek to demonstrate how, in the cinema of Martin and Torres, there is a need to fill the void left by the absence of a recorded past and a cinematic memory, that is, a need to create new images and fantastic visions that embody the postcolonial identity of the Philippines.

Anarchival Fantasies: Four Films by Raya Martin

The eclectic and ever-changing cinema of Raya Martin frequently deals with the archive. Refusing to settle on a genre or style, Martin's anarchic and meta-textual approach to cinema uses archival materials as a resource for posing unanswerable questions about his own postcolonial identity as well as the broader ramifications of Filipino colonial history. Broadly speaking, however, two different types of archival images can be found within his oeuvre: the 'real' archival image, which is often a ruined residue—the ashy trace of what is left in its destruction; and a fabricated one, conceived as a postcolonial fantasy to fill the void produced by archival loss. Each of these images, I argue, constitutes a personal anarchive, one that is shared and imbued with a series of postcolonial meta-reflections when met with the audience's gaze.

The first example of a fabricated archival image I want to discuss comes from *Maicling pelicula nañg ysañg Indio Nacional* [A Short Film about the Indio Nacional (or The Prolonged Sorrow of the Filipinos)] (2005), the second feature directed by Martin at the age of 21. Composed almost in its entirety of silent vignettes shot on 35mm film, it mimics the style of early movies shot at the turn of the century (Figure 1). Cinema was brought to the Philippines at the end of 1896, a period when the local anti-Spanish revolution was reaching its climax, thus ending three centuries of European colonialism on the islands. Soon after, however, the Filipino-American war began, which ultimately led to the US occupation of the Philippines and the inauguration of yet another kind of colonialism—social, cultural and economic. It is for this reason that it was considered that no 'proper' Filipino movie was shot before 1919.⁷

FIGURE 1: *Maicling pelicula nañg ysañg Indio Nacional* [A Short Film about the Indio Nacional (or the Prolonged Sorrow of the Filipinos)], Raya Martin, 2005.

The events of *Indio Nacional*, which draws heavily on Reynaldo C. Ileto's seminal book *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840–1910*, recounts the events of the Filipino revolution in an often dreamy and feverish fashion. By adopting the style of early silent movies but setting his narrative prior to the proper birth of Filipino cinema, Martin creates a cinematic and political fantasy in this project, since early Filipino cinema is not technically lost, but could never have existed then in the first place, with any possible cinematic ambition smothered in the blood of a failed revolution and yet another colonial occupation. Several years later, in his one-minute short *Ars Colonia* (2011), Martin takes the same strategy even further.⁸ By replicating the style of early silent movies, which were often hand-coloured, in a far more accurate manner, he restages the transient moment of a conquistador fixing his gaze on the island that he is about to conquer (Figure 2). Moreover, the decision to emphasize the use of hand-held cameras allows the images to be viewed as if they were found footage, that is, as a type of pre-colonial phantom. What if conquistadores had cameras in the 16th century? In this respect, the power of the anarchic is not only to create plausible images, but also anarchic, anachronistic, and nonsensical ones too.

FIGURE 2: *Ars Colonia*, Raya Martin, 2011.

Another instance of fabricated archival image can be found in the far more ambitious *Independencia* (2009), which is set in the 1930s during US military occupation. During this time in cinematic history, the Philippines were a leading force in Southeast Asian cinema, producing hundreds of movies per year within a system that was largely inspired by Hollywood. Martin, however, does not simply set the plot in the past, but also tries to replicate technologies from that era, using 35mm film, a crew of almost one hundred people and in-studio shootings with hand-painted backdrops and artisanal special effects. In this respect,

The act of realizing an independent movie with the means of a mainstream one is thus a political gesture in itself. It indicates an awareness on Martin's part of being a director involved in the system of international film festivals, a system that sustains and dictates the so-called arthouse or independent cinema, and the will of confronting this reality by questioning what is expected from a Third World director such as himself.⁹

Independencia ends with a hand-colored film scene which not only anticipates the style used in *Ars Colonia*, but also links the three movies together through their common creation of an anarchive. On each of these occasions,

the fabricated anarchival image functions as a type of postcolonial time machine: the plausible images of *Indio Nacional*, the technologies used to recreate an accurate period piece and the absurd images of *Ars Colonia* are all shadow archives which exist only as a postcolonial fantasy production.¹⁰ As Neferti X.M. Tadiar argues, freedom of imagination for the once colonized is not only directed towards the present or the future, but more importantly towards their own past:

To inquire into the imaginations of postcolonial nations [...] is to probe into the immediate and still living pasts of this hegemonic global present in order to find the forgotten creative labour of other dreams. More, it is to free this forgotten creative labour in our own presents so that we may imagine the world differently.¹¹

Not only does Martin interrogate the Philippines' colonial past, he does so by exposing his means of production.¹² In other words, he engages in a meta-cinematographic analysis of both fantasy images and the way in which these images are created. The political charge of his cinema not only relies on the content of his images, but the nature of the images themselves: they are the ghosts of an anarchival, images that could and should not exist, but through a process of mimicry reclaim their place in the history of cinema. Martin's images do not possess a single layer of meaning nor are they deemed to be believable, because their true artificial nature is always revealed through the juxtaposition of different media. Whereas the 35mm film exists alongside the digital video in *Indio Nacional*, the hand-coloured film of *Ars Colonia* explodes in the visual cacophony of a ruined VHS tape.

Similar strategies can also be found in *Autohystoria* (2006) and *Now Showing* (2007). Both works are composed of images shot on different media, albeit in a more layered and intertwined way. In each case, Martin juxtaposes actual archival images with other images and media. *Autohystoria*, in this respect, is one of his most experimental works so far. Set in the present, the movie depicts the killing of Andres Bonifacio, leader of the revolutionary group Katipunan, and his brother Procopio, on the order of Emilio Aguinaldo.¹³ Indeed, this controversial episode is still one of the most discussed by historians and in many ways constitutes a link between Spanish and American colonialism.¹⁴ But although the film is comprised of various types of images—low-resolution DV, high-quality digital and archival images shot on 35mm film—there are only 15 scenes over the course of its 90-minute running time. The movie is basically devoid of spoken lines and basic traditional narration. One of the first scenes, which lasts for almost 40 minutes, is a hand-held,

blurry shot that follows a young man as he crosses a busy street at night. In the following scenes, the man, along with another individual, is driven around in a police car. In the last scene, the two men are seen bloody and beaten up. One is suddenly killed by a gunshot whilst the other escapes amidst the trees. Throughout the film, Martin combines a low-quality aesthetic reminiscent of video surveillance, with bucolic contemplative images of nature shot in HD. It ends, however, with three silent movies, all of which are shot by Raymond Ackerman, who worked for the film company Biograph. During the early years of cinema, the majority of movies that recounted the Philippine-American war were studio re-enactments shot in the US by T.A. Edison. When asked to discuss his role in these re-stagings, Nick Deocampo described the process as follows:

Interestingly, the Edison studio reconstructed war events on film by shooting them not in the sites where they happened, but in West Orange County. The thick foliage in parts of the county hinted sufficiently at the tropics. Most surprising of all, Filipino guerrillas were represented on screen by blacks wearing loose white shirts and pants that vaguely resembled what was worn by the *revolucionarios*. All of them carried rifles, with no sight of bolos or machetes, which were the more common native weapons in the war. The flag which was supposed to represent the Filipino banner is poorly-defined and is often lost among bushes or merges into the distant background. On the other hand, the American flag is always unfurled prominently in the foreground and distinctly at center frame.¹⁵

When viewed from this perspective, Ackerman's decision to shoot on location and portray Filipinos for the first time on film was something of a rarity. Although the first and last of the three movies are shown without their title, they centre upon episodes involving American troops. The first, *An Historic Feat* (1900), also known as *Gen. Bell's Pack Train Swimming Agno River*, depicts a real incident, where the American's army mule pack ended up in the waters of the Agno River in Luzon. The last film, *25th Infantry* (1900), shows the 25th Infantry returning from Mount Arayat under the leadership of generals Frederick D. Grant and A.S. Burt. *Aguinaldo's Navy* (1900), the second Ackerman movie, is the only one to maintain its title card. Yet as Deocampo notes, this title is somewhat derogatory, as the film depicts a series of *barcas*, modest fishing boats, calmly floating on a river. When screened for an American audience, along with films celebrating the impressive US navy, the intent was to mock the cultural and military underdevelopment of the

FIGURE 3: *Autohystoria*, Raya Martin, 2006. [The frame is actually *Aguinaldo's Navy* by Raymond Ackerman, 1900.]

Filipinos (Figure 3); a decision that not only served to 'Other' the country, but also set it backwards in a forced primitive past. On first encounter, Martin's decision to insert these images into his film draws a parallel between the historical depiction of Filipinos by their oppressors and the way in which the story of Aguinaldo was told by US historians. On closer examination, however, they can also be read as an early attempt of visual surveillance. Not only were the films screened for the general public, they were also shown to the US military to provide them with information on the local population. This is perhaps what really connects *Aguinaldo's Navy* with the rest of *Autohystoria*: its faceless, low-quality aesthetic that does not belong to a particular person, but rather to history itself, and the implication that cinema, since its birth, has been used to surveil and control colonized people as well as their representation.¹⁶

Now Showing is another highly experimental movie that shares some points of commonality with *Autohystoria*: the present setting, the use of long takes (which are stretched even further here, thus making the feature reach the five-hour mark), the use of different formats and the inclusion of archival images on film. Depicting the story of Rita, a Filipino girl who grows up in the 1990s, *Now Showing* is infused with a semi-autobiographical tone. We see her mature from a child to an adult, and becomes a clerk in a pirate

DVD shop. The medium of choice—analogue video, DV, HD—changes with Rita's age and her dreams of being a famous actress like her grandmother, Luna Valencia. The first two hours of *Now Showing* are shot in a similar manner to home movies shot on cheap VHS. Yet, rather than simply replicating the intimate style of home movies, the weariness of the image gains an additional emotive baggage due to the repetitive watching and rewinding of the tape. This part of the movie—almost two hours long—is interrupted by the insertion of images shot on film. Whilst Martin presents these images as the lost frames of the only movie by Rita's grandmother, in reality they come from *Tunay na ina* (dir. Octavio Silos, 1939), one of the few early Filipino movies that have survived to the present day. The image, however, is heavily edited and distorted in a manipulation reminiscent of Joseph Cornell's *Rose Hobart* (1936), a found footage classic. Not only has the image barely survived due to the lack of facilities for its preservation, Martin destroys the few intelligible parts by carelessly handling what is left. Although visible within the film itself, this damage is particularly visible in its accompanying discourse. In various promotional interviews for the movie, as well as the official press kit which was distributed at Cannes, Martin claims that *Tunay na ina* is a product of the Golden Age of Filipino cinema, which, he claims, occurred during the 1960s. The statement is wrong for two reasons. Not only was Silos' movie shot in 1939, the so-called 'First Golden Age' is almost unanimously recognized by Filipino critics as a product of the 1950s. The possibility that such well-known information could be missed by a cinephile such as Martin is close to zero. Consequently, the question of manipulation extends beyond Martin's film, cutting into both the memory of Filipino cinema and the context in which the director operates—namely, the Western arthouse film industry. By providing Western audiences and critics with misleading and incorrect information, he echoes the inaccuracies of the fading memory of a lost national cinematic history, whilst also reinforcing the performative role he is forced to endure as a 'Third World' filmmaker in the Western arthouse film industry.

When understood in these terms, Martin's cinema becomes a constant performative gesture, one that seeks to explore the void that is past Filipino cinema. Archival loss becomes like a badly sutured wound, where a few haunted images continue to reappear and are forced to bear decades of other phantom images on their thin layers of corroded skin. To create fake archival images from scratch or to problematize existing archival images—either by leaving them in their original form or manipulating them to the point of unintelligibility—are actions pertaining to the anarchive, an archive made of shadows, ashes and images that never were.¹⁷ Yet the anarchive is also an

anarchic archive, one with no regard for the integrity of images whatsoever: its aim is not to preserve but to destroy even further, and to build something from its remnants—an anarchival drive that filmmaker John Torres embraces to the fullest.

Typhoon Archive: Film as Subjectile in Two Movies by John Torres

For many years, critics credited Torres with spearheading the Filipino digital revolution, describing his contribution to film as second only to the godfather of digital guerrilla cinema, Khavn.¹⁸ Much of the fascination with Torres' filmography, particularly his early intimate short movies and his first feature *Todo Todo Teros* (2006), stems from its budget production and low-res digital aesthetic. Due to the emphasis it places on emotive introspection and autobiography, the question of the postcolonial is less immediately obvious, but ultimately still present in many of his efforts. Much of his work also refutes the classic narrative structure in favour of a layered, experimental approach. On a number of occasions, Torres disrupts the original meaning of his images through editing and voice-overs, a gesture that is particularly visible in *Todo Todo Teros*, which was made whilst Torres was in Berlin for a residency. Shot on a low-quality digital camera, the film depicts the relationship between Torres and his tour guide, a Russian woman with whom Torres had an affair. By building layers of intertwining narratives and fictionalizing his own life, the director subverts the original meaning of the images, so much so that the footage effectively becomes *found*.

Similarly, in *Ang Ninanais* [Refrains Happen Like Revolutions in a Song] (2009), reality and fiction blur into one another as three stories swirl and unfold in a dense mesh of images, words and text.¹⁹ One of the ways in which Torres achieves this enmeshing is through the use of subtitles. Shot on the isle of Panay, the majority of the film occurs in the Hiligaynon dialect, which Torres does not speak. Consequently, the subtitles, which are presented to the audience as a faithful rendition of the spoken words, are in fact invented by Torres. By taking something that is usually considered to be extra diegetic and using it as a fundamental tool in the construction of fantasy, he finds unexpected ways to subvert the cinematic means of production and thus perform his postcolonial reflections. This gesture can also be linked to the way in which Torres and his contemporaries first encountered filmic culture more broadly. Although visible throughout Southeast Asia, the illegal piracy market is deeply rooted in the Philippines. The lack of proper distribution channels for arthouse European movies, or anything that was not mainstream US or Filipino cinema, created a huge demand for these titles, which has been

mostly filled by pirate DVD sellers.²⁰ Indeed, both Martin and Torres have expressed the formative role that watching pirated copies of old American classics or European arthouse masters played in their formation as authors. When recalling a meeting with the Cinefondation at Cannes, Martin remarked: “Here I was, in front of producers and distributors of films I was only familiar with from pirated DVDs, talking about my approach to filmmaking.”²¹ Not only are pirated DVDs the first resource for discovering other cinemas, they are also the fastest way to have your movie circulate outside of the mainstream circuit, as Torres did with *Todo Todo Teros*. Unsurprisingly, these events also have an effect on the aesthetic that these filmmakers adopt once they start making their own movies. This encounter with cinema primarily via low-quality screenings and DVDs has thus shaped a new sensibility towards ‘poor’ images and a subjectile use of their support.

When viewed from this perspective, Torres’ latest films, *Lukas Nino* (2013) and *People Power Bombshell: The Diary of Vietnam Rose* (2016), acquire a new meaning. Both are shot on film and both are inextricably linked with archival images. By his own admission, Torres is a cinephile and particularly fond of 1970s and 80s Pinoy cinema:

Filipino mainstream films in the ’70s and ’80s, when I really started watching films, were almost surreal. You could tell that the dialogue was not in synch. The visuals, the colours weren’t even close. Everything was, you could say, not properly done. In that sense, I imbibed the technical aspect of it. I also wanted to describe and show the fact that I’ve seen all this mishmash of tapes and the very, very rough aesthetics of ’80s Filipino filmmaking, which I grew to hate, but later grew to love, and grew to embrace. Also, there’s the fact that I don’t really remember the stories behind those films, I don’t really remember the narratives, so what I have are just these snapshots or images and their combination with dialogue or sound that’s not in synch.²²

It is this “mishmash of tapes” that provides the starting point for *Lukas Nino*. More specifically, the work is built on the ashes of a lost film by Ishmael Bernal, one of the masters of the Second Golden Age of Filipino Cinema. As Torres recounts:

A third into the filmography of Bernal is a work that was not released to the public, titled *Scotch on the Rocks to Remember, Black Coffee to Forget*. The film’s producer hated the film so much he burned

all negatives and positives. I wanted to make something to cope as a filmmaker because of this curious gap left by this lost film. I re-read the titles in the list of films Bernal made in his career and imagined a story from reading just the titles from the first film to the last. This (scar) provided by the lost film made me think of the film before it. Because I wished for a continuance, I wanted to make my own film to fill the gap. The film before is called *Mister Mo, Lover Boy Ko* (*My Husband, Your Lover*). It gave me the setting to continue this cinematic/fictional life of the characters that were left hanging. I made *Lukas Nino* out of characters and places inspired by [it], and I portrayed this gap left by the lost film as a river of scars and forgetting.²³

In the films of Raya Martin, the archival image is isolated but ultimately connected to other images in a self-reflexive and meta-discursive way. For Torres, however, it provides the basis around which other images grow, intertwining to create new meanings and new movies. The inspiration for *Lukas Nino*, for example, is Bernal's *Mister Mo, Lover Boy Ko*. Given that original film stock of the movie has been lost, Torres bought a low-quality, pirated DVD of the movie, most likely a recording from an old cable airing. The images from Bernal's movie that open *Lukas Nino* do not have the clarity and purity of a newly found intact image. Rather, they are the mutant offspring of film turned video turned digital, a low-resolution piece of green-tinted nonsense—scratched, ruined and colour-burned. But it is precisely this corrupted image that serves as the starting point for a new beginning, an apocryphal continuation of an almost lost movie. Indeed, as Torres notes, these images are the visible scars of the history of Filipino cinema. Shot on 35mm stock film, the new images that blossom from these remains form a suture, an attempt to fill the void. This choice of film is not a mannerism, but a memory vessel. Whereas the location for the film is the home village of the director's mother, the story takes place during the 1980s, thus echoing Bernal's cinema as well as the last years of the Marcos dictatorship—another dark chapter of Filipino colonial history.²⁴ As a result, *Lukas Nino* is a device that digs deep into Filipino history and its loss of memory (graphically represented by the 'river of forgetting', which echoes the tortured bodies under martial rule), as well as Torres' personal history, blurred through the mixture of metacinema (the movie within the movie within the movie), folklore (the *tikbalang* as a ghostly rendition of an absent father) and real/fictional images, once again complicated by the anarchic use of subtitles, which often fill the void left by intentionally muted dialogues. Nevertheless, *Lukas Nino* is just a small step

FIGURE 4: *People Power Bombshell*, John Torres, 2016.

compared to the use of film stock in his subsequent feature, *People Power Bombshell*, where the subjectile nature of the film is fully evident.

On first encounter, *People Power Bombshell* would appear to be another “sutured cinematic scar”, born from the almost destroyed remains of an unfinished movie by cult exploitation director Celso Ad Castillo (Figure 4):

For four months, Celso and his crew tried to shoot everything, but because of financial difficulties, they never finished the film. It was an all-Filipino cast, and the best production crew was involved. It was supposed to feature a young star, Liz Alindogan, who produced the film out of her life savings. According to her, Celso chose to take his time to pressure her into being intimate with him, which was the only way to finish the film. She didn't give in, so they packed up. Liz was devastated and her career suffered, but she kept some rolls of 35mm film under her bed for 30 years. The film is damaged; moisture has seeped into the material. But we made use of the decaying film and we recorded new sound of the original cast telling us of the experience of making the film. We projected raw footage of [the film] to help them remember.²⁵

FIGURE 5: *People Power Bombshell*, John Torres, 2016.

To fill the void left by the destruction of the lost reels, Torres shot other scenes on expired and ruined film stock to give a sort of continuity with the remaining scenes (Figure 5). Yet Torres is not interested in completing but complicating the original movie, layering the original images with new ones and letting the original crew speak over them—sometimes acting out a sort of plot, other times recalling the experience.

Overall, however, it is neither the plot nor the images that bear meaning, but rather the gesture of suturing the wounds of destroyed film. Like picking open a scar instead of wrapping it in bandages, film destruction is elevated to the level of an aesthetic and political gesture. Decaying film embodies chaos and death, when the director allows it to rot in front of the audience. There is no will to restore or embellish a fading image; its disintegration contaminates the rest of the movie as if it was a virus. When viewed from this perspective, film as medium becomes a subjectile, “at once a support and a surface [...] everything distinct from form, as well as from meaning and representation, not representable”.²⁶ Not only a carrier of moving light translated into images, but an image in its material self:

The subjectile: itself between two places. It has two situations. As the support of a representation, it's the subject which has become

a *gisant*, spread out, stretched out, inert, neutral (*ci-gît*). But if it doesn't fall out like this, if it is not abandoned to this downfall or this dejection, it can still be of interest for itself and not for its representation, for *what* it represents or for the representation it bears. It is then treated otherwise: as that which participates in the forceful throwing or casting, but also as what has to be traversed, pierced, penetrated in order to have done with the screen, that is, the inert support of representation. The subjectile, for example the paper or the canvas, then becomes a membrane; and the *trajectory* of what is thrown upon it should dynamize this skin by perforating it, traversing it, passing through to the other side.²⁷

Consequently, the decaying film takes over narration and meaning, becoming embodied in the apocalyptic typhoon that literally and symbolically destroys the movie, a gesture that recalls both the destruction of Marcos' dictatorship and the destruction of cinema as a narrative tool. All is destroyed and melted in a single political gesture. Whilst the archival image in Torres' films cannot be cleaned or polished, it brings within it the ruins and destruction of the Martial Law era. It is the ongoing destruction of the filmic medium which ultimately leads to *People Power Bombshell*:

The negatives were badly damaged and the artifacts and visual representation of all those scratches, molds, and other defects seemed very tempestuous, even graphically similar to how we see whirlwinds and tornadoes. In fact, we saw curious details, how in some closeups of Liz, there's always a whirlwind-type of scratch on top of her, so that we can barely see her but we know she is saying something [...]. There were different 'color schemes' depending on how badly damaged the reels were. And *I was just letting the material take me in terms of order and structure*, letting the material tell a different story from what the director/messiah/strongman type of leader was leading us to.²⁸

It is no coincidence that Castillo's movie was shot in 1986 during the EDSA revolt, which ultimately resulted in Marcos' exile to Hawaii and the end of his dictatorship. Back in the present, Torres shot his movie whilst Marcos' son, Ferdinand Jr., also known as Bongbong, was close to being elected vice-president of the Philippines. The slow decay of film that eventually engulfs the image in its entirety is the silent revolt of the oppressed, be it the abused actress Liz or the massacred and silenced Filipino people.

Conclusion

Due to the lack of a 'proper' cinematic memory, the process of working with archival images in Filipino cinema is both political and self-reflective. Consequently, an element of fantasy is necessary to fill the void left by colonial destruction. Like many other Filipino filmmakers, Martin and Torres work outside of the narrative or arthouse path to explore their national identity through cinema, not merely by telling stories but by interrogating the medium itself.²⁹ Whilst I chose to concentrate more on the concept of the anarchic in the case of Martin and the subjectile in the case of Torres, these two theoretical tools can be applied to both filmmakers. With the exception of *Aguinaldo's Navy*, their work does not acknowledge its origins in a diegetic way: the images are presented as images, often resulting in the destruction of the filmic support itself. This is because the archive is no longer recognizable as such. Rather than attempting to question itself or reconstructing something that is historically accurate, the images are reinvented with the few remaining scratches that are left. It is for this reason that the ruin of the archive, that is, its ashes, is the actual medium through which they rewrite, refile and retell history.

But although these images bear the limitations of filmic support, they do not function as traces of what is left of the Philippines' cinematic heritage. Rather, they are an alternative archive, a negative, counter archive, an anarchic gesture aimed at the destruction of cinema and at the creation of self. To quote Lippit:

Is the archive of the uninscribable, unwritable, and unrepresentable possible only as the destruction of the archive? Is it necessary to found, always in the ruins of the archive, a shadow archive? Another archive that replaces the archive, that takes place in its ruin as an afterthought and effect of destruction? Which archive survives in the end? Which one remains, the archive or its shadow? What remains?³⁰

Working with images that are both anarchival and subjectile requires the viewer to go beyond the representations that the medium holds on its surface, and beyond cinema itself. Consequently, I read these movies as one of the many trajectories of a wider performative gesture that attempts to re-signify both its source materials and the political and artistic implications that surround them, as well as take into consideration the gaze of those who will interact with this gesture. In this regard, Martin and Torres's position as Filipino filmmakers who struggle to be seen in their home country but who are increasingly visible in European film festivals, where the vast majority of

audience members could never grasp the many cultural references, functions as another tool of postcolonial retaliation—from the deliberate fabrication of archival images to the use of subtitles that wrongly translate regional dialects, and the dissemination of false information about Filipino film history that is diligently transcribed by Western film critics.

Moreover, Martin and Torres also openly work with the chaotic violence embodied by time-ruined filmic supports that are often combined and related. Visible in the destruction of the medium itself, this violence is an inherent echo of the tortured history of the Philippines, of its colonial past and its postcolonial present. Consequently, their movies become theoretical and political acts of resistance that ignite many other topics but maintain their focus on the concepts of postcolonial time, history and identity as something continuous and never-ending.³¹ More specifically, these are performative acts, gestures aimed at shifting the archival paradigm, which is no longer bound to the recuperation of lost artefacts or forgotten histories, towards a radical reconfiguration of history.³²

BIOGRAPHY

Renato Loriga is an independent scholar, producer and curator. In 2016, he published the book *Autohystoria. Visioni postcoloniali del nuovo cinema filippino* (Roma: Aracne), which focuses on contemporary Filipino cinema. His articles and essays can be found in a range of publications and websites. He works as a researcher for *MiBac* (Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities), a producer/distributor for Zomia and is director and curator of the independent queer film festival Hacker Porn.
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NOTES

- ¹ The ABS-CBN library was established to preserve the catalogue of their film wing, Star Company, but later came to preserve over 2,500 titles. For further reading, see San Diego Jr 2010.
- ² The most famous of these titles are *Giliw Ko* (dir. Carlos Vander Tolosa, 1938), *Tunay na Ina* (dir. Octavio Silos, 1939) and *Pakiusap* (dir. Octavio Silos, 1940). Other movies, such as *Zamboanga* (dir. Eduardo De Castro, 1937) or *Moro Pirates* (dir. Jose Nepomuceno, 1931), were believed to be lost and found only recently. For further reading, see Lumbera 1983; del Mundo, 1998; Lim, 2013.
- ³ On the concept of historical amnesia in relation to Filipino history, see Constantino 1970; Iletto 2001; Tupas 2003.
- ⁴ Ruanni F. Tupas, “Bourdieu, Historical Forgetting, and the Problem of English in the Philippines”, *Philippines Studies* 56, 1 (2008): 55.
- ⁵ See Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Atomic Light (Shadow Optics)* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).
- ⁶ Bliss Cua Lim, “Temporalities of Anarchival Loss: A Response to Lucas Hildebrand’s ‘Inherent Vice’: On the Poverty of Videotape and Copyright”, Critical Theory Institute Panel Discussion, University of California, Irvine, 5 May 2010.
- ⁷ *Dalagang Bukid* (dir. José Nepomuceno, 1919) is almost unanimously considered to be the first Filipino film, that is, the first movie produced, directed and acted entirely by Filipinos. Prior to this, there were only American productions, like those of Edison and Ackerman, which featured a heavily colonial representation of Pinoy people, who were often not even portrayed by actual Filipinos.
- ⁸ *Ars colonia* was commissioned by the International Rotterdam Film Festival and was screened before all films supported by IFFR’s Hubert Bals Fund.
- ⁹ Renato Loriga, “A Revolution in Time. History and Identity in Raya Martin’s *Autohystoria*”, *Cinema&Cie* XVII, 28 (2017): 61–70.
- ¹⁰ Neferti X.M. Tadiar, *Fantasy Production: Sexual Economies and Other Philippine Consequences for the New World Order* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003).
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- ¹² See also *Buenas noches, España* (2011), discussed more thoroughly in Loriga, 2016.
- ¹³ Emilio Aguinaldo would later become the first president of the Philippines.
- ¹⁴ For further reading, see Agoncillo 1959; Iletto 1979; Constantino 1975; Ouibuyen, 1999.
- ¹⁵ Nick Deocampo, “Cinema and Colonization: American Colonization and the Rise of Cinema in the Philippines”, *Comparative American Studies: An International Journal* 5, 2 (2007): 147–71; 154.

- ¹⁶ For an in-depth analysis of *Autohystoria*, see Loriga 2016 and 2017.
- ¹⁷ This can also be seen in the project *UNdocumenta* curated by Martin in 2016.
- ¹⁸ Arguably the most prolific Filipino filmmaker, Khavn is a director, producer, musician, writer and overall cultural agitator. He founded the .MOV festival in 2002, the first film festival in the Philippines dedicated entirely to digital movies and which saw the rise of directors like award-winning Lav Diaz.
- ¹⁹ The title is a play on the seminal experimental short film, *Revolutions Happen Like Refrains in a Song* (1987), by film scholar and director Nick Deocampo.
- ²⁰ T. Baumgärtel, "The Culture of Piracy in the Philippines", in *Cinema in/on Asia*, ed. J. David, K.S. Dong (Gwanju: Asian Culture Forum, 2006), pp. 377–401.
- ²¹ Raya Martin, "Journal Entry No. 1: Anticipations of Light", *Criticine*, 14 Oct. 2005, <http://www.criticine.com/feature_article.php?id=19> [accessed 11 July 2019].
- ²² John Torres as quoted in Giovanni Marchini Camia, "John Torres", *BOMB Magazine*, 15 Nov. 2013, <<https://bombmagazine.org/articles/john-torres/>> [accessed 11 July 2019].
- ²³ John Torres, "Notes on our Bodies before the Laws Take Effect", *NANG 2* (2017): 11–9; 12.
- ²⁴ Despite gaining political independence in 1946, many Filipino historians see the American occupation as ongoing and the Marcos dictatorship, which was heavily supported by the US government, as one of the bloodiest chapters in the country's history.
- ²⁵ Torres, "Notes on our Bodies", p. 13.
- ²⁶ Jacques Derrida, "To Unsense the Subjectile", in *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud*, trans. Mary Ann Caws (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998), p. 64.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 76.
- ²⁸ Email correspondence with John Torres. My emphasis.
- ²⁹ Another example would be the lesser known but fundamental work of Gym Lumbera, who often worked as a DOP for both Martin and Torres as well as many other filmmakers. His feature *Taglish* (2012) is paradigmatic of the subjectile use of images that I delved into in this essay. Lumbera shot a medium-length movie called *Tagalog* (2012) on Super 8 film. When a typhoon hit his house, thus destroying and permanently damaging the film reels, he edited the destroyed stock to make yet another movie, *English* (2012), where the ruined celluloid images, which bear almost no resemblance to their original form, are put together in a nonsensical blob of visual noise. The perverse mirroring of a destroyed language is echoed by the title, and together with the painfully ruined images of bucolic countryside and familial love (the couple portrayed in the original *Tagalog* are Lumbera's grandparents), merge into a wasteland of postcolonial madness. Within a single artistic gesture, Lumbera problematizes his postcolonial identity as well as the political use of film stock, not fulfilling an empty nostalgic

desire or a fetishized aesthetic, but returning the gaze of an incumbent catastrophe.

³⁰ Lippit, *Atomic Light*, pp. 8–9.

³¹ For a broader portrait of Filipino cinema, both past and present, and the many postcolonial standpoints from which it can be analysed, see Renato Loriga, *Autohystoria. Visioni postcoloniali del nuovo cinema filippino* (Roma: Aracne, 2016).

³² See Iain Chambers, “Archeology and the Postcolonial Archive”, in *Re-enacting the Past. Museography for Conflict Heritage*, ed. M. Bassanelli and G. Postiglione (Siracusa: LetteraVentidue, 2013), pp. 276–88.

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