CITY OF SCREENS

IMAGINING AUDIENCES IN MANILA'S ALTERNATIVE FILM CULTURE

JASMINE NADUA TRICE

CITY OF SCREENS

BUY

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

SCREENS

IMAGINING AUDIENCES IN MANILA'S ALTERNATIVE FILM CULTURE

JASMINE NADUA TRICE

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS DURHAM AND LONDON 2021

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

© 2021 Duke University Press
All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper ∞
Cover designed by Drew Sisk
Text designed by Amy Ruth Buchanan
Typeset in Chaparral by Westchester Publishing
Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Trice, Jasmine Nadua, [date] author.
Title: City of screens : imagining audiences in Manila's
alternative film culture / Jasmine Nadua Trice.
Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2021. |
Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2020021680 (print)
LCCN 2020021681 (ebook)
ISBN 9781478010586 (hardcover)
ISBN 9781478011699 (paperback)
ISBN 9781478021254 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Motion pictures—Philippines—
Manila—Distribution. | Motion picture theaters—
Philippines—Manila. | Independent films—
Philippines—Manila. | Motion picture
industry—Philippines—Manila.
Classification: LCC PN1993.5.P6 T753 2021 (print) |
LCC PN1993.5.P6 (ebook) | DDC 791.4309599/16—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020021680
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/20200
21681

Cover art: Map of Metro Manila, Philippines, adapted
from the author's website, cityofscreens.space. The
interactive map charts film institutions, screening
spaces, and film locations.

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

For my mom,

NANCY NADUA TRICE

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ix

INTRODUCTION 1

ONE. Revanchist Cinemas and Bad Audiences, Multiplex Fiestas and Ideal Publics 39

TWO. The Quiapo Cinematheque and Urban-Cinematic Authenticity 79

THREE. Alternative Exhibition and the Rhythms of the City 113

FOUR. "Not for Public Exhibition": Cinema Regulation, Alternative Cinema, and a Rational Body Politic 153

FIVE. "Hollywood Is Not Us": National Circulation and the Speculative State 189

EPILOGUE 230

NOTES 241

BIBLIOGRAPHY 281

INDEX 299

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book was a collaborative project in many ways, and I am indebted to numerous readers and friends for their comments and advice. I would like to thank my cousins in Las Piñas, Metro Manila, especially RJ Vekka Nadua, for contacting me when I was a graduate student in Bloomington, Indiana, and spurring my interest in returning to the Philippines. When I arrived, I benefited from the care of the entire Nadua clan—Tito Bobie and Tita Estelle, Tito Butch and Tita Riza, and all the cousins: Toni, Frances, Patrick, Carlo, and Joan. As I settled into Quezon City, Aida Santos, Diego Maranan, and Kharen Surita made me feel like I had a family away from home. Aida's and Diego's generosity and commitments to both art and activism were a constant source of inspiration. Ed Maranan generously shared his insights when he was a member of the Film Development Council, and like many others, I was deeply saddened by his passing.

I owe much gratitude to my professional home in Manila, Isis International (now Io International). Isis had welcomed feminists from around the world for over two decades when I arrived, and I learned a great deal about feminist media activism in my time there. In particular, I'm grateful for the support of my friends and colleagues Danicar Mariano, Tesa De Vela, and Mira Ofreneo, who welcomed me into the People's Communications for Development project.

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

This book would not have happened if I hadn't met the pioneering film critic Alexis Tioseco early in my time in Manila. His enthusiasm for Philippine cinema was infectious, and film scenes around the region still feel the loss of him and his partner, Nika Bohinc.

My graduate school mentors, particularly Barbara Klinger, Greg Waller, and Joan Hawkins, were a crucial part of this project's early stages. My colleagues at the National University of Singapore, Paul Nerney, Bea Lorente, Anu Ramanujan, and Patrick Wade, offered feedback and support at a critical time. At UCLA, my students and colleagues have been an indispensable part of the project's growth—I am especially indebted to Victor Bascara, Karrmen Crey, Stephen Mamber, Purnima Mankekar, Kathleen McHugh, Chon Noriega, and Mila Zuo, who offered feedback on the manuscript in its early stages. I'm also very thankful that I get to work in the Cinema and Media Studies program alongside Ellen Scott, Steve Anderson, Shelleen Greene, Denise Mann, Veronica Paredes, and John Caldwell. It's my extreme good fortune that I have such inspiring colleagues. Roland Tolentino, José B. Capino, Mette Hjort, Virginia Crisp, and Bliss Cua Lim generously read the manuscript in progress, and their insights are a critical aspect of this work. At Duke, Elizabeth Ault's editorial insights have expertly guided this project down a long and winding road toward publication. I am also tremendously indebted to the four reviewers, whose perspectives have strengthened the work.

This project has also benefited from feedback provided at various presentations throughout its development. Participants at the Association for Southeast Asian Cinemas conferences have offered incisive commentary on different chapters over the years, especially Gaik Cheng Khoo and Mariam Lam. I have been grateful for invitations to present different aspects of this work at various venues, including the Film and Media Studies Department at the University of California, Santa Barbara; the East Asia Center at the University of Virginia; the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at the University of California, Berkeley; the Asian Film and Media Initiative at New York University; the University of the Philippines Film Institute; the Department of Communication Arts at De La Salle University; and the Kritika Kultura Lecture Series at Ateneo de Manila University. The commentary at these events has helped me see the work in new ways. Funding from the Asian Cultural Council, the Association for University Women, the UCLA Faculty Career

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Development Award, a Hellman Fellowship, and the TFT Dean's Vision Fund Award have been an indispensable part of this project.

For their support throughout all aspects of my life, I am thankful for my friends and family. Sarah Sinwell and Natasha Ritsma have been essential readers and sounding boards. Christina Davis has helped L.A. feel like home. I'm thankful to Harmon and Libbi Brown for their ongoing encouragement. My parents, Nancy and David Trice, and my brother, sister-in-law, and niece—Chris, Pamela, and Emmy Trice—are a constant source of laughter and well-being. And finally, I am continually grateful for my partner in all things, David Brown.

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

INTRODUCTION

In 2008, the young, Manila-based critic Alexis Tioseco published a list titled "Wishful Thinking for Philippine Cinema" on his widely read blog. Tioseco's blog and his online magazine of Southeast Asian film criticism, *Criticine*, had become hubs of speculative discourse for the new Philippine film scene that had taken shape over the past several years. Since the turn of the millennium, the rise of digital production technologies and informal DVD and VCD circulation had led to a resurgence of films produced outside the domestic media conglomerates that had long been the primary source of mass entertainment. These films played primarily in international festival circuits, and Tioseco's wish list for this burgeoning scene focused on ways to bring them home. It included a "pure film studies" course, audience education, calls for more criticism of local cinema, a journal, more support for "regional" filmmakers outside the capital city, government-sponsored DVD releases of classical Philippine films, and a film library.[1] Describing the state's Film Development Council, Tioseco wrote, "They support filmmakers with finished films to go abroad to festivals for the pride they bring their country—I wish instead they would support their films locally, and help them get seen by a larger Filipino audience."[2] A commenter based in the Philippines but outside the capital replied, "Add

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

one more: I wish the films of Martin, Diaz, de la Cruz, Torres, and all the others had at least a minimal distribution network, so that those of us that are not located in Manila can actually see the works you mention."[3] In this wishful vision, local makers produce films, local channels circulate them, discerning audiences see them, and thoughtful viewers write about them. This projected Philippine film culture would, ostensibly, require audiences *in* the Philippines.

When I moved to Manila in 2006, Philippine films were just beginning to make their mark on the international festival circuit. As a newcomer, the suggestions I received most frequently were those that marked the profound cultural and technological shifts in the city's cinema cultures. The two I heard most had to do with sites of film circulation. The first recommendation was that I look at Alexis's online magazine, *Criticine*.[4] The second was that I visit Quiapo, where I would find one of the city's oldest Catholic cathedrals and its biggest Muslim mosque, surrounded by a thriving maze of street vendors selling pirated DVDs. My initial research intentions focused on the city's mall multiplexes, but as I encountered the range of alternative film exhibition and distribution sites sprouting across the cityscape, they eventually became quite different. I can trace their transformation to these two foundational suggestions. Alexis generously familiarized me with the growing independent film scene that had taken shape over the previous couple of years. He screened films at his Quezon City home, due to a scarcity of independent screening spaces in the city, and he introduced me to filmmakers. Meanwhile, visiting Quiapo illuminated how the culture of piracy itself was becoming a valued aspect of Philippine cinemagoing, feeding nationalist narratives of local ingenuity and greater access to world cinema. Each in their own ways, these two recommendations were informal compensation for infrastructural shortcomings, and they captured the transformations of Manilenyo film culture in the early 2000s. The young cinephile's work and the informal DVD district were both hubs of the city's cinema circulation. They introduced me to a dynamic film culture undergoing major transformations.

But the wish for domestic audiences reflected in Alexis's list was not an easy matter.[5] Upon their return home from their festival runs, the films that had been so quickly welcomed into the annals of "world cinema" would have much more difficulty becoming a "national cinema" in anything other than prescriptive, top-down terms.[6] The city's ubiquitous mall multiplexes had little commercial incentive to play

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

these films, regardless of whatever international distinction they had accrued. In the early-aughts moment of Philippine cinema's revival, other exhibition possibilities were scarce. Filmmaker Redd Ochoa spoke to a Philippine newspaper from the 2007 Montreal World Film Festival, where his feature, *Baliw* (Insane), screened in the festival's "Focus on World Cinema" section alongside two other Filipino films, Brillante Mendoza's *Foster Child* and Neal Tan's *Ataul* (*Casket for Rent*).[7] Ochoa noted that local circulation had proven to be a more difficult issue: "Only a handful of movie theaters in the Philippines show independent films. . . . Finding a venue to play a low-budget film in Manila is like looking for a needle in a haystack."[8] This was an aspiring national cinema without a national audience.

Perhaps no aspect of film culture is more common than an internationally lauded art cinema's absent national audience.[9] But despite, or perhaps because of this ordinariness, this absence has not generated a great deal of academic analysis. Methodologically, both art and independent cinemas are most often approached through examining texts or institutions of production rather than the vagaries of circulation and collective reception. But these matters of circulation and its limits define particular film cultures, often in inconspicuous ways. Similar rhetorics, spaces, and practices of circulation and reception gather art, independent, and other marginal cinemas under the broader rubric of alternative film culture. Urban networks comprise such film cultures, shaped by shared values and formed through the production and consumption of both films and film discourse. Shared values include distance from the mainstream film industry (a rhetorical touchstone constituted through its positioning within the local industrial structure and discourse) and an aspirational approach to cinema's place in public culture. I use the term "aspirational" because many of the works associated with such film cultures hold an uncertain place in relation to national and local distribution and exhibition channels. There has been fascinating work on the politics of *trans*national circulation and the kinds of global south films that festivals produce and exhibit.[10] As scholars have observed, these films often mediate social problems through a focus on representations of working-class, poor, or rural communities.[11] Debates around these films point to a combination of representational excess and domestic absence—these were films whose publics existed primarily outside national borders. Emerging largely from the growing body of research in film festival studies,

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

scholarship in this area has focused on the transnational infrastructures that have brought these films into being.[12]

Focusing on problems of exhibition and distribution, I train my critical lens on what happens when films and their makers return home. Rather than seeing national and transnational cinemas in opposition to one another, I view them as mutually defining concepts that map onto localized debates about taste, class, and culture.[13] Often, these debates take shape in the urban, metropolitan centers that act as national gateways for transnational cultural goods, where dominant versions of national culture are shaped and disseminated. The chapters track practices of film circulation as they take shape within a specific space and time in Metro Manila, Philippines, from 2005 to 2012. I emphasize these years because they are rich with speculative discourse about what this nascent, urban film culture might become. The year 2005 saw the founding of two key funding and festival institutions, Cinemalaya and Cinema One Originals. The book ends in 2012, with the rise of the term "maindie," a portmanteau of "mainstream" and "independent."

I refer to this seven-year window as the "transition period" to indicate its specificity as a moment of technological, institutional, and cultural transformation within the film scene. Digital forms of production and dissemination were novel, their low cost providing new opportunities for alternative filmmaking. In later years, streaming, social media, and smartphones became ubiquitous among the city's middle class, and media texts were less moored to the physical object of circulation (VCDs and DVDs). In contrast, these early-aughts digital tools were anchored within material forms, thereby locating them within urban space. The era marks a precise, transitional moment for considering media circulation and the cultivation of a film culture through urban networks, public spaces, and discourse.

The chapters examine film circulation projects and initiatives, analyzing the discourses that surround their founding, operations, and, frequently, their closures. These initiatives often lived short lives, and new ones emerged to take their place. This ongoing cycle became a constitutive part of Manila's alternative film culture, an ephemeral counterpoint to the endurance of neoliberalism in the megacity where these projects struggled to take root. I analyze these initiatives' empirical operations, as well as the speculative rhetorics that surrounded them. Often, these speculative rhetorics envisioned these spaces of distribution and exhibition as sites for cultivating ideal film publics.

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

This distance between a prospective, ideal public and its actualized historical operations offers a productive point of engagement for one of the key tensions underpinning alternative cinema. Like other cultural forms, film is rooted in taste cultures, working as part of a system of social reproduction.[14] Alternative films' circulation is limited, conferring status on a rarefied viewership; at the same time, such films are often radical in their form and modes of production. Scholars of independent and art cinemas have long pointed to the contradiction between the putative oppositionality of formal experimentation and "artisanal" production, versus the tendencies for these kinds of works to circulate within a narrow social stratum.[15] This impasse is the foundation of any alternative film culture located in class-divided social settings. In the global south, the ways that domestic social divisions align with transnational cultural flows are especially charged. Rather than avoiding these contradictions, *City of Screens* aims to advance a critical framework for alternative cinema cultures that encompasses these paradoxes. Through analyzing a range of film circulation projects, this book confronts that contradiction, viewing this lack of consensus about alternative films' social status as a constitutive aspect of alternative film cultures. My hope is that acknowledging and animating these contradictions will frame them not as shortcomings but as signals of alternative film culture's vitality. I do not wish to simply affirm that cinemas of varying formal and aesthetic traditions circulate within different industrial and institutional channels to address publics of various kinds. Rather, I am interested in the conceptual possibilities offered through the frictions among these discourses and in how these contradictions evolved in the moment of a particular cinema's emergence, framing film circulation as a critical problem.

To understand how this contradiction between alternative films' radicalism and elitism might operate within Manila and perhaps also in other, similar urban centers, I find revisionist critiques of modernity and the public sphere useful for the ways that they have dealt with the contradictory incompleteness of publicity. As Bruce Robbins argues in his concept of the "phantom public sphere," publics are both necessary and impossible.[16] This phenomenon is especially conspicuous in the global south, where scholars have discussed publics as fractured along class and ethnic lines. Working from the premise of publics' necessary impossibility, I am interested in cinemagoing as both material and ideal—both a phenomenological experience and an ideal aspiration,

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

constructed through projects and spaces of film circulation as well as the rhetorics surrounding them.

The chapters that follow offer a temporally bounded, spatial archive of alternative film culture in early-2000s Manila. They map a wide range of spaces that acted as outposts for alternative film circulation during that historical moment, including multiplex theaters, the informal DVD market, microcinemas, a university film institute, and state-owned national cinematheques. The rhetorics surrounding each site's establishment, operations, and eventual dissolution raise questions about the commerce of alternative cinemas, the values ascribed to them, and the potential audiences that they might reach, project, or exclude. Taken together, these sites form a shifting constellation of alternative cinema networks and publics, both realized and prospective, mapped across an unevenly developed city. Through this cartography, this book offers a model for understanding alternative film cultures in the Philippines' postmillennial transition period, a model whose underpinning propositions may apply in other settings with homologous levels of socioeconomic division and similarly complex relationships to transnational culture. It proposes that alternative cinema's publics are speculative. Their speculative, ideal form is a product of this cinema's inherent contradictions. Hence, alternative film culture is ultimately asymptotic: it is an ongoing trajectory, moving toward an ever-advancing horizon. Film circulation becomes the engine of this trajectory, as organizers seek to expand their domestic audiences.

These audiences had not always been so elusive. From the rise of the midcentury studio system to the 1970s, film was the most popular form of mass entertainment in the Philippines, which led to the colloquial idea of cinema as the "national pastime."[17] The art-house films that drew international accolades during the martial law period of the 1970s and 1980s included films that resonated with local audiences, such as *City after Dark* (dir. Ishmael Bernal, 1980) and *Himala* (dir. Ishmael Bernal, 1982).[18] But by the post-martial-law period of the 1990s, the film industry had declined due to numerous infrastructural problems.[19] By 1996, production levels plummeted following a government-instated 10 percent value-added tax on gross receipts, added to the 23 percent municipal amusement tax, which many in the film industry blamed for causing financial strain.[20] In 1998, the Philippine Motion Picture Producers Association (PMPPA) and the Movie Producers Distributors Association of the Philippines (MPDAP) released a statement

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

addressing the "precarious state" of the local industry, pointing to several factors: exorbitant taxes, escalating production costs, competition from foreign films, censorship, piracy, high-cost star salaries, and cable television.[21] Due to rising taxes and production costs, it became cheaper to import Hollywood films than to make local ones. While numerous bills were introduced to curb the import of foreign films, none became law.[22] As the local industry declined, the Hollywood distribution system strengthened, and new releases began opening contemporaneously across such film capitals as Los Angeles, Tokyo, and Sydney.[23] Not incidentally, the 1990s also saw the Philippines' accelerated integration into the global economy through the Ramos administration's "neoliberal revolution."[24] The exhibition sector began to change as malls remade Philippine cityscapes, eventually becoming the primary film exhibitors.

Exhibition played a critical factor in the changing industry, pointing to the significance of film circulation and prospective film consumption in Philippine cinema imaginaries. Exhibitors began to play a part in the kinds of films being produced and the audiences associated with them. Here, a particular kind of industrial ethnicizing became clear, demarcating the lines between mass audiences and mainstream film producers. The Metro Manila Theater Association (MMTA) and the Greater Manila Theaters Association controlled the majority of film distribution. In his overview of cinema in the 1990s, Nicanor Tiongson describes the "mafia-type control of movie distribution by the two groups of Chinese businessmen," who instated a booking system that some critics viewed as a reason for the decline in production.[25] The two organizations controlled Metro Manila's two hundred movie theaters by 1996, deciding which films would be exhibited; whether they would play in first-, second-, or third-class cinemas; and which would be pulled before their booking ended.[26] Theater owners increased their share of profits, taking over a third of a film's total earnings.[27] They also invested in movie production to ensure a return on investment, creating a self-sustaining feedback loop between production and exhibition.[28] As Tiongson writes in 1994, "Unfortunately, producers continue to use the audience as an excuse for making only popular films. They say that they only give what the audience wants. Moviegoers' tastes and preferences are identified for them by bookers and owners of big theater chains who continually analyze the market for Filipino films. . . . These considerations become paramount when profit-oriented producers make their

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

movies."[29] The assessments of "Chinese businessmen" as risk averse and profit minded evoke long-standing stereotypes that associate the Philippines' Chinese community with capital and commerce.[30] Such images shifted in tone and scope from the twentieth to the twenty-first centuries, from "pariah capitalist" to liberal "middle-classes" and "entrepreneur."[31] Nonetheless, the maligned configuration of Filipino masses, mainstream foreign or domestic films, and Chinese businessmen persists in ethnicized imaginaries of the industry.[32]

As this history suggests, concepts of "Philippine cinema" include visions of its audience—the speculative publics that emerge in public discourse within specific historical moments, mediating cinema's relationship to class, ethnicity, and ideas of locality. Controlled largely by national conglomerates, exhibition and distribution became a critical aspect of this construction. The mainstream industry's gradual decline reached a head in the early 2000s, falling from the usual two hundred to about fifty films produced per year in 2004.[33] An opportunity to restructure the Philippine cinema opened, made possible in part through the advent of low-cost, digital technologies for production and distribution outside the studio system, often vis-à-vis international festival circuits hungry for fresh content.

Dubbed "independents" in popular press coverage, the proportion of these films increased steadily during this period, going from 24 percent of locally produced films in 2005 to 34 percent by 2011.[34] As scholars and critics pointed out, these films' independence was nominal, as much of this initial output flowed from two festivals with ties to corporate media conglomerates: Cinemalaya and Cinema One. Founded in 2005, Cinemalaya—a festival, foundation, and conference—provides yearly "seed investments" to filmmakers (PHP 500,000, or approximately $10,000), based on script submissions.[35] The films debut at the state Cultural Center of the Philippines, a modernist, waterfront venue developed as a project of Imelda Marcos.[36] Until 2014, Cinemalaya's funding came largely from the media tycoon Antonio "Tonyboy" Cojuangco, who initially intended to use the films as programming for his video-on-demand channel.[37] Meanwhile, the Cinema One Originals festival began the same year. Involving a similar script-submission process, the festival is produced through the Filipino cable network Cinema One, owned by ABS-CBN. Nonetheless, the films it produces are sometimes far from conventional. For example, Sherad Anthony Sanchez's digital work, *Imburnal* (Sewer), tells a story of coming of age amid violence and poverty in a four-hour, "slow cinema" format. As one *Hollywood Reporter*

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

review from the Hong Kong Film Festival described, "Asian, human rights, and avant-garde focused festivals are sure bets, but theatrical release is almost out of the question, even at home. . . . [The] film isn't without merit, but ultimately [it] alienates viewers."[38] The parameters of this new cinema were heterogeneous and contradictory, existing at the edges of the commercial media infrastructure. For this reason, I use the term "alternative" to describe the films under discussion in this book. The term points to the relational quality of the designation, while forgoing claims of autonomy from other media infrastructures.

Although the share of alternative films rose during this initial period, the financial feasibility of the film industry as a whole remained unstable. A Philippine Statistics Authority study released in 2012 stated that only two of the top ten highest-grossing films of all time were Philippine produced (*The Unkabogable Praybeyt Benjamin* [*The Unbeatable Private Benjamin*], dir. Wenn Deramas, 2011; *No Other Woman*, dir. Ruel S. Bayani, 2011).[39] Both were from the studio Star Cinema—the others were Hollywood blockbusters. While, certainly, alternative films might prioritize a different kind of economy, the idea of the domestic audience remained an implicit part of many of these works. The concern with audience and viewership became particularly evident when investigating the spaces and events developed to exhibit and distribute them. Sites of exhibition, distribution, and consumption became primary sites for envisioning circulation and the publics that these paths might imply. These visions offered speculative images of Philippine film culture in the early-aughts transition period, a moment when many exhibition and distribution initiatives hoped to overcome alternative cinema's inherent contradictions.

Speculative Publics and Alternative Film Cultures

Speculative publics are the visions of audience that promised to overcome these contradictions between radical texts and rarefied audiences. Evoking speculative fiction, the term suggests the fantastic, prospective dimensions of alternative cinema enterprises. In literary studies, speculative fiction contends with the "moral and ethical demands of worlds to come."[40] But the term "speculation" also has a history in finance, locating the concept of speculative publics within the recent history of neoliberalism. Theorists have responded to the concept's economic variation with their own treatises. For example, the Uncertain

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Commons group published a 2013 manifesto, arguing, "More and more, it seems, the future is imported into the present, bundled up, sold off, instrumentalized. Some eagerly buy into these futures markets, placing their bets; others imagine things differently. All in all, nothing more than speculation and nothing less."[41] It may seem far afield to apply this mode of speculation to the small-scale art scenes under discussion here. But the term is not just economic; it is also cognitive and affective. While its economic application refers to the structures of late capitalism, speculation can also mean "to contemplate, to ponder, and hence to form conjectures, to make estimations and projections, to look into the future so as to hypothesize."[42] The current preoccupation with how to predict and fix the future is a specifically modern form of speculation that pathologizes uncertainty; as an antidote, the authors of the manifesto offer the term "affirmative speculation," a practice that "embraces uncertainty and, in so doing, remains responsive to difference, to unanticipated contingencies."[43] Roughly put, speculation describes both a structure and a form of agency, referencing the dialectic between infrastructural crisis and possible alternatives to the upheaval it wreaks.

I find the polysemy of the term "speculation" fitting. Its more dystopian connotations describe the environment in which alternative film movements emerged across Southeast Asia: the 1997 financial crisis caused by the speculative property market. These film movements arose in urban metro areas that neoliberalism had transformed with the construction of malls, office towers, and luxury condominium high-rises.[44] In the Philippines, this crisis was the culmination of a longer history that began with post–World War II economic policy, continued with the structural-adjustment programs imposed by the World Bank in the 1980s, and was consolidated under the Ramos administration in the 1990s.[45] Rooted in economic policy endorsed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the crisis spread across the region, marking the end of the "East Asian regime" of accumulation enabled through "developmental states."[46] Currency devaluation, unemployment, and bank closures followed, pushing millions into poverty across the region; the crisis was a devastating product of the chaos created through neoliberal policy.[47]

As Wendy Brown argues in her analysis of neoliberalism, this kind of chaos indicates a turn from calculation to speculation: "Financialization changes markets from predictable reactions to supply, demand, and price into markets where speculation is the driving dynamic—from interest to gambling, from stability to instability, from following

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

the crowd to shorting it. . . . And it is very easy to crash."[48] The Southeast Asian independent film scenes unfolded in an environment characterized by instability and possibility. The term speculation points to these two kinds of potential, offered in both fictional aspirations and in the chaotic quest for profit.

If one side of speculation points to the possibilities of alternative film culture, the other points to its open-ended structure, arguing that alternative film culture's ever-receding end point is the ability to overcome its inherent paradoxes. The impossibility of overcoming these contradictions should not be seen as failure but as a constitutive part of alternative film culture's speculative structure. In this way, alternative film cultures are an asymptotic process; their speculative publics are an aspiration they cannot meet. Their circuitous movement toward this infinitely receding horizon shapes and defines them. In using the term "asymptotic," I adapt and revise a mathematical model, in which an asymptote is "a line which approaches nearer and nearer to a given curve, but does not meet it within a finite distance."[49] The model reflects both utopian and dystopian possibilities. In a more utopic view, it works as a microcosmic parallel to theories of radical democracy that posit democracy as always yet to come, never to be achieved but vital to seek.[50] Idealistic filmmakers and activists work to build institutions that will support the production and dissemination of films, creating a subjunctive, "would-be" projection of an alternative film culture. Within this projection, that film culture is economically sustainable and widely accessible. From another perspective, this ever-receding horizon mirrors the progressivist discourse of modernity—it offers a view of modernity's universalizing drive, positioning the possible publics of alternative film culture in a pedagogical relation to the agents of cultural production.

In the Philippines, mass audiences' crucial roles in political history connect screen media to broader questions about the possibilities of social transformation. If, as Chantal Mouffe contends, the political is predicated on "the always-to-be-achieved construction of a bounded yet heterogeneous, unstable and necessarily antagonistic 'we,'" grappling with how paradoxical alternative film cultures articulate various versions of this "we" reveals the problem of circulation—distribution, exhibition, and the dissemination of discourse—as a critical aspect of alternative cinemas.[51] This approach opens a useful arsenal of analytic tools. It enables me to engage frameworks that are well trodden in cinema and media studies, such those used in relation to national, transnational, art,

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

and independent cinemas, and to combine them with a range of critical perspectives located in other fields, such as rhetoric, urban studies, geography, and anthropology. Through this interdisciplinary attention to cinema's social life, I aim to better understand the impasse of alternative cinema's limited circulation. Oscillating between material practices and speculation, cinema circulation initiatives offer a productive window onto this largely unacknowledged dimension of film cultures.

Asymptotic film cultures and speculative publics are not normative categories. Rather, the concepts offer a critical framework for theorizing the contradictions of alternative cinema in the global south, taking the heightened contentions around the absent mass audience as their premise. These contentions underscore the importance of film circulation as an aspect of such settings' diverse modernities. As Brian Larkin observes in his work on cinema in Nigeria, since the late nineties, Frankfurt-school-influenced cinema studies research has defined its object in terms of time ("early cinema," "new media"); however, it is also important to consider the medium across spatial and temporal difference.[52] A few works have taken on this project, including Bhaskar Sarkar and Joshua Neves in their groundbreaking anthology *Asian Video Cultures*, which theorizes Asian video practices as "penumbral," underscoring "the indelible presence of local cosmologies and practices in the mediation of globalities—distinctively local aspects that can never be fully subsumed within any universal imagination."[53] Focusing on peripheral video practices conducted in the vein of "making do" rather than vanguardist interventions into media culture, they observe, "Some of the most exhilarating instances of creativity appear when the fetish of creativity is abandoned in the throes of quotidian life."[54] *Asian Video Cultures* sits alongside other recent works in media studies (e.g., Brian Larkin's *Signal and Noise*, Ravi Sundaram's *Pirate Modernity*, Jeff Himpele's *Circuits of Culture*) whose theories of film and video cultures in sites such as Nigeria, India, and Bolivia offer compelling challenges to modernity's dominant ideologies of teleology, development, progress, and creative authorship. Instead, each of these works is grounded in the structures of media circulation, situating media forms within larger, localized urban networks. Unlike these works, however, *City of Screens* focuses primarily on the kinds of films and urban art scenes that modernist visions of culture would deem legitimate. This focus is not meant to privilege these works as worthier of study than their more commercial, mainstream variations. Rather,

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

it is meant to demystify alternative cinemas by positioning them as components of larger sociocultural and institutional structures.

City of Screens maps cinema onto larger discussions about the incompleteness of modernities in the global south, offering the Philippines as a case study. It is important to note, however, that while modernity's incompleteness is more debated and perhaps more visible in the global south, it is an inherent aspect of modernities everywhere. In an argument that evokes the impasse of alternative cinemas, Susan Buck-Morss contends that the globalized public sphere gave rise to several paradoxes, among them a paradox between democratic egalitarianism and political elitism. As she writes, a "contradiction that needs to be considered in regard to the unfinished modern project is the tension between democracy in its radically egalitarian form and social hierarchies that exclude democratic participation."[55] Undoubtedly, her argument addresses a much larger scale. But it also applies to the cultural forms that refract larger political and social structures. While this impasse exists in any social setting, its cultural and political significance rises in conjunction with levels of social inequality. In Manila, these hierarchies are spatialized. As Rolando Tolentino argues, Metro Manila's overdevelopment, especially through the malls that house the majority of the city's cinemas, involves "the construction of an ideal transnational space housing everything within one roof; the franchisement of middle class entertainment and culture . . . and a trope for discussing gentrification in a social formation where seventy percent of the people live below the poverty level."[56] As Tolentino and others have written, Manila's urban space reflects and creates the city's social divisions. In contexts where a minority of middle-class intellectuals carries the bulk of the cultural power, the question of the mass audience is especially charged. Here, that audience holds a different political and cultural place than it does in societies where media availability and mass consumption are more easily equated with the loss of artistic authenticity and integrity.[57]

Circulation and (Inter)national Cinema

To understand how the frictions between absent/aspirational audiences and putatively national cinemas might work in settings like Manila, it is useful to look at how the figure of the mass audience fits into discussions of Philippine public culture. In its early years, the works variously called the Philippine New Wave, New Filipino Cinema, and

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

Philippine indie cinema circulated largely within a transnational institutional infrastructure, joining other Southeast Asian cinemas that flourished with the rise of digital production.[58] Film festival funding, distribution, and awards welcomed these films into an ostensibly decentered web of world cinema flows.[59] Because of these cosmopolitan trajectories, the politics of location became crucial to establishing these films' meanings within local settings, as critics and makers in the Philippines debated the stakes of domestic audiences. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover observe that "global art cinema" maintains an "ambivalent relationship to location."[60] As they describe, art cinema is a "resolutely international category," defined through institutional context rather than text; even films considered popular cinema domestically sometimes become "art cinema" when circulated abroad.[61] This locational ambivalence also works domestically. Films considered "national cinema" abroad become "foreign art cinema" at home, despite the location of their production or the biographies of their makers. In this way, circulation becomes a controversial aspect of these works' definition; the question of which audiences films reach shapes how various publics understand them. In an often-cited 2006 essay that works to define world cinema in ways that go beyond "not Hollywood," Lúcia Nagib concludes that world cinema "has no centre. It is not the other, but it is us. It has no beginning and no end, but is a global process. World cinema, as the world itself, is circulation."[62] Written at the height of critical reassessments of the national cinema framework, the essay is a compelling call for flexible geographies that cut across films and movements. But this macroperspective's utopian view of a world cinema "us" can also be exclusionary, an unscalable model of cinema circulation that has limited reach. Examining domestic patterns of circulation and obstruction provides another view of world cinema's operations, one that is not always visible from large-scale perspectives.

As Philippine independent films crossed national borders to be feted by an international elite, they became tidily Filipino, aligning with the national identity ascribed to them. When they returned home, matters of class, taste, and culture refracted any easy labels. In a show-business magazine, the entertainment journalist Edgar O. Cruz wrote of the three Filipino films playing in the 2009 Cannes festival, critiquing their transnationalism, "Are the three films in the newly opened Cannes International Film Festival to be held in Cannes, France from May 13 to 24 a triumph for Pinoy movies? Perhaps to Pinoy moviemakers who

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

are hanged up on the Gallic ambition. It looks to this writer as more like a French triumph than a Pinoy victory."[63] Cruz claimed that international programmers were inclined to screen the three films because of the works' histories of European funding and crew members.[64] Raya Martin's *Independencia* was selected for the Un Certain Regard section, while *Maynila*—a tribute to second-golden-age directors Lino Brocka and Ishmael Bernal that Martin codirected with Adolf Alix—screened out of competition. Brillante Mendoza's *Kinatay* screened in competition, going on to win Mendoza the festival's award for best director. Martin himself seemed aware of the kind of critique leveled by Cruz. Comparing their comments reveals competing discourses of cinema and nation. In a 2010 interview, Martin aligned national identity not with location but with his own authorship as director:

> When making my films, I don't necessarily ask myself whether this is Pinoy enough, or how this will impact the Philippines. My films are like mirrors I portray parts of myself on. As much as possible, I try my best to portray those parts of myself accurately and honestly. I'm Filipino. That's what makes my films Filipino. Not the wardrobe, not where I shot it. You can shoot a film in fucking Cavite [a province south of Manila] but if its ideology and sensibility is Western, then it isn't a Filipino film. But Lav Diaz can shoot a film in New Jersey and it will still be very, very Filipino.[65]

Martin asserts a deterritorialized version of cinema's cultural identity, based on adherence to a personal "ideology and sensibility"; it is an authorship-driven, textually based model. Meanwhile, Cruz's charges of cultural inauthenticity are based largely on contextual matters, constructing a vision of nationally produced images he sees as "contaminated" by transnational labor, finance, and reception. Martin's cinematographer for *Independencia* was Jeanne Lapoirie, a French director of photography known for working on such art-house films as François Ozon's *8 Women* (2002). Martin received €120,000 through the French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs' Fonds Sud Cinema grant, which focuses on "supporting cultural diversity in world cinema" by funding filmmakers from the global south.[66] Meanwhile, Mendoza's work was funded by the producer Didier Costet's Paris-based Swift Productions. Such trajectories of finance and personnel are essential for filmmakers working in contexts where there is relatively little domestic support for the arts. But because these transnational collaborations

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

involve distribution and exhibition as well as production, local critics sometimes see them as suspect, regardless of how necessary such border-crossing partnerships are.

Following the article's release, Cruz published praise for his self-described "exposé" online, though the extent to which this positive reception is representative is unclear. One director who offered kudos for Cruz's assessment of the Cannes films was Redd Ochoa. Maintaining that his remarks were not based on suspicion of other filmmakers' achievements, Ochoa commented, "I believe that it's not until we find success in our own soil that we'll be able to win the rat race that's brought forth to us by these competitions."[67] This comment highlights the contradictions that structure alternative cinema's role within public culture. Moreover, to a certain degree, these debates position filmmakers against audiences, a highly charged prospect in a context where the stakes of the mass audience connect to histories of political struggle.

As the debates involving Cruz and Martin suggest, the question of the mass audience is intensified within settings in the global south, where it is often seen as the locus of cultural authenticity and national possibility. While visions of mass audiences abound in many settings, in the Philippines such visions have long histories, connected to the ongoing process of nation building. A few years before the rebirth of alternative filmmaking was in full swing, a 2001 review by scholar Charlie Samuya Veric, published in the *Philippine Star* newspaper, put forward a notion of viewership, nation, and alternative film that laments an absent mass audience. Writing about Kidlat Tahimik's watershed 1977 experimental film, *Perfumed Nightmare*, Veric argues that problems of circulation undercut the film's revolutionary potential. Critics in the Philippines and beyond view the film as a landmark of Third Cinema. But Veric observes that its points of transmission are clandestine and cloistered; even when it reaches that most "mass" medium—the television—critics use opaque language to discuss it. The resulting image is one of a film culture fractured along class lines:

> How can a film be so revolutionary when only a small circle of well-perfumed aesthetes and pompous academicians have watched the film and talked about it among themselves? [The scholar E.] San Juan [Jr.] correctly remarks that Tahimik's films are "mainly viewed and appreciated by a Western metropolitan audience." As far as I can remember, the last time *Perfumed Nightmare* was shown on popular

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

TV programming was years ago in celebration of cinema's 100 years. (Was it at 11 p.m. when half of the viewers were already snoring?) This is the sadness of our cinema: the best of our movies are seen by the least of our people. Such isolation is made even more pronounced by critics whose discussion of a popular film is mediated by a language that a populace may find totally ungraspable, if not impossible. How can a revolution happen in a secret movie theater frequented by a coterie of critics speaking the most mysterious language?[68]

Veric's assessment is a common one. Philippine cinema's "sadness" is its stalled circulation, its struggle to reach broader publics within the nation rather than the "Western metropolitan audience."[69] As several critics and filmmakers have noted, the question of the mass audience remains critical within Philippine film culture. Like Veric, many filmmakers have used historically resonant terms such as "revolution" to describe the transition to digital technology; similarly, the term "feudal" has been a reference to the mainstream film industry.[70] While new digital technologies suggested new freedom for film*makers*, the revolution of film *audiences* remained prospective, as Veric notes. Read within the context of Philippine history, these debates around revolution and the cinema's potential role within it suggest the asymptotic nature of alternative film cultures, mapping the role of cinema within incomplete, always-impending modernities.

Mass Audiences

As these debates suggest, the mass audience holds a critical place in discussions of Philippine alternative cinemas, one that differs from its place in contexts such as the United States and United Kingdom. As scholars in those settings have recognized, the paradox of alternative cinemas lies in the disparity between the radicalism of the text and the narrowness of those texts' patterns of distribution, exhibition, and reception. This perspective pivots on notions of the audience as market, circulation as commerce, and commerce as corruption. But as the discussions above imply, this paradox works differently in the Philippines, where the mass audience is not as easily aligned with a loss of artistic integrity. The accounts above suggest connections between mass audiences and histories of revolutionary nationalism, which makes them difficult to dismiss as simple populism.

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

This notion of national collectivity has a complex history in studies of Filipino society; as in many other settings, it is an incomplete, perhaps impossible project. I aim to reorient the parameters of discussion a bit, to move away from the idea that a lack of collectivity at the national scale is necessarily preferable to more small-scale, short-term forms of communal association. I see the asymptotic model as an imperfect means of theorizing how film organizing might work, given the histories of colonization and more recent conditions of neoliberalism that have structured much of Philippine society. Many have written about the complexity of "imagining community" across the diverse classed, ethnic, and linguistic cultures constituting the Philippine archipelago. The sociologist Randy David links this problematic to the legacy of colonization, arguing that despite the Philippines' status as "the first modern republic in Asia," the country has not yet established a functioning democracy, and the state has failed to win the people's trust. David questions the idea of national collective identity.[71] He and other scholars argue that moral identities draw from family and broad kinship structures rather than externally imposed institutions.[72]

It may be useful to view these debates on the supposed failure of national community in light of theories that view failure as an inevitable outcome of capitalism and neoliberalism.[73] As Jack Halberstam notes, the market economy necessitates winners and losers, gambles and risks.[74] Within this context, failure is inevitable; but for marginalized communities, it can become a means of rejecting pragmatism and refusing to submit to dominant models of power.[75] Those with limited resources can exploit failure to work against disciplinary logics, using it to avoid institutional legibility.[76] This work finds some parallels in research on Philippine societies. The anthropologist Charles J-H Macdonald, for instance, argues that common understandings of Philippine society's personalistic values, lack of public consciousness, and randomness, ordinarily understood as its "uncrystallized" nature, are actually instances of the "anarchic harmony" common to many indigenous peoples of Southeast Asia.[77] Offering vastly diverse accounts of failure (urban/rural, Anglo-European / Southeast Asian), these theories map certain kinds of absence within a broader narrative of life within a capitalist social order. A lack of national community, an absent national audience—these supposed failures are inexorable within the conditions of late modernity, not just in the Philippines but in many settings. The idea of an asymptotic film culture is meant to

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

acknowledge the inevitability of these absences. Within this context, the aim of a national audience for alternative cinema may likely fall short, but it will continue to cultivate collective aspirations, raising productive debates about culture, identities, and audiences. While I have reservations about ascribing deliberate "resistance" to the volatility of local film scenes, I appreciate how theories of failure frame this volatility as the outcome of broader political-economic conditions. As suggested in writings on the nature of national community in the Philippines, the issue of collective unity has initiated much debate in studies of Philippine culture, as a key dilemma connected to the instability of the nation-state and the legacy of colonization. The idea of extrafamilial collectivity within Filipino culture is a controversial topic, linked to the question of whether a broad "Filipino culture" as such can exist in a normative way.[78] Obviously, my work here addresses much smaller-scale, urban art enclaves. But when filmmakers lament their work's inaccessibility to larger audiences, their comments evoke these histories.

Discourses on the mass audience reflect these long-standing debates about nation building, and the problem of circulation becomes similarly critical. In her rejection of the bourgeois, hegemonic "imagined community," Neferti Tadiar argues for a revolutionary, antagonistic form of nationalism, distinguishing between ideas of "the people," which includes the exploitative classes, and "the masses," which jettisons these classes in a fight against imperialism and feudalism.[79] If Tadiar's focus is on the discordant possibilities of a revolutionary, national imagination, historian Caroline Hau's is on its more unifying dimensions. For Hau, culture is vital within middle-class, nationalist debate in midcentury, postindependence Philippines, where Filipino culture is seen as being contaminated by interaction with foreigners, especially colonizers, rendering it absent or damaged.[80] Nonetheless, Hau argues that the ability of this culture, however sullied, *to be shared by a large number of Filipinos* becomes a "theoretical and emotive binding agent invested with the symbolic power of suturing the social divisions that wound the Philippine social body."[81] What is implicit in Hau's reading is that while Filipino culture's *content* might be "impure," it becomes "national" in part through its patterns of circulation, which become the key to integrating a wider public. Culture becomes a means of "healing the rift between social classes."[82]

Tadiar's and Hau's views represent two ends of a widely varying spectrum between liberationist and unifying versions of the national

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

imagination. Hau's model foregrounds the significance of circulation itself as an end goal for unifying diverse publics at the national scale. It highlights the affective dimensions of circulation as an object of national desire, one with emotional, "healing" potential. Bridging class antagonisms, this circulatory matrix becomes as critical as the texts themselves. But as Tadiar's critique suggests, others feel that these visions of national unity compromise revolutionary aims. Grappling with who the national "we" comprises, these debates evince the complexity of the Philippine cinema public, a scenario paralleled elsewhere in the global south. Alternative cinema's impasse maps onto these long-running arguments about the nature of cultural circulation, and this connection intensifies its political-cultural stakes.

Circulation and the Possibility of Cinema Publics

As this history suggests, the idea of publics holds a crucial place in discussions of the Philippine nation, a place that hinges on problems of circulation. The public sphere has existed at the interstices between the material and ideal since its inception. While Jürgen Habermas developed the model to discuss an imagined, nineteenth-century space of rational debate that existed outside the purview of the state or the marketplace, critics have pointed to the limitations of a democratic vision based solely on rational communication and the exclusion of non-dominant groups.[83] What I find useful for considerations of alternative cinema is the public sphere's implicit, subjunctive temporality. For revisionist scholars who have salvaged its more progressive possibilities, the model functions as an affective, wished-for object of collective desire. Moreover, the divide between its less-than-ideal present and its hoped-for future is not static but activated and dramatized through public discourse, as the passages above suggest. In contrast to audiences, which are finite and complete, publics are a possibility in process.

In early-aughts Manila, much of this public discourse focused on problems of circulation and audiences. As such, *City of Screens* focuses on the heightened cultural significance of film distribution and exhibition. Cinema and media studies has recently seen an increase in rich studies of exhibition and distribution, much of it organized around industrial practices of film dissemination.[84] The cases under study here overlap with this work, but I am interested in focusing on a slightly different dimension. The chapters that follow examine how the con-

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

stellation of networks and spaces linking texts to audiences take on *cultural* significance within a particular space and time. Due to the long history of intense debates about mass audiences, the film circulation initiatives that would ostensibly capture those audiences function in multiple ways: as institutional plans and practices, as objects of public imagination, and as formal, semiformal, and ad hoc systems.

Alternative cinemas provide a useful means of examining how circulation initiatives construct speculative publics. Existing at the peripheries of public culture, such cinemas are often seen as indifferent or antipathetic toward ideas of audience. But attention to domestic distribution and exhibition complicates this perception, constructing a notion of alternative cinema's *prospective, speculative publics*. To claim that alternative film cultures are speculative and asymptotic is not to view them as mere idealism, but to trace the ongoing negotiation between the empirical and the ideal that shapes these film cultures' public meaning. Circulation initiatives become a primary site of this negotiation. On the one hand, such initiatives encompass a range of material practices: hosting workshops and screening events; generating and circulating mission statements, plans, and promotional materials; becoming objects of popular discussion in journalism and online; acting as venues for film pedagogy and production. On the other, circulation initiatives are also premised on the idea of not-yet-realized potential: purely by their existence, they have the *capacity* to call publics into being. This is a complicated proposition, as scholars of publicity have pointed out. Access does not necessarily translate into structural change. As Nancy Fraser argues, to work toward a postbourgeois, postpatriarchal public sphere means seeking not only equal access to public discourse for subordinated groups but also equal power to determine the conventions, set agendas, and influence the procedures of communication.[85] Fraser points to how the fantasy of accessibility can function as a marker of distinction. Models of public formation that privilege dissemination alone fail to capture various groups' uneven levels of power to change the mechanisms of dissemination themselves. With limited financial and infrastructural resources, many of the initiatives that emerged in early-2000s Manila capture these dynamics.

These tensions have long been a point of discussion in theories of publicity, and they shed light on the notion of the mass audience as the structuring absence of alternative cinema. As the previous section established, the political potency of the mass audience heightens alternative cinema's

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

underlying paradox. I am curious about how theories of publics might provide useful context for this dynamic, tying film circulation's temporality to larger discourses about incomplete modernities. As Michael Warner has argued, the concept of publics is itself paradoxical. Publics are both notional and empirical, internal and external to discourse: they are the imagined end point of discourse, but at the same time, they preexist it.[86] For Warner, publics are both known (an *entity* out there, to be targeted) and unknown (a *possibility* created through the circulation of texts). In this way, they are speculative: both imagined and empirical, an object of contemplation and anticipation. In a context where mass audiences evoke histories of political revolution, this framework is especially significant; as Michael Warner notes, the unknown ends of circulation enable hope for transformation.

Texts and Paratexts

The media circulation that scholars of public culture describe is not linear; nor is it confined to a single text.[87] Rather, publicness is dynamic and elusive. Clive Barnett describes circulation as a "process of scattering and dispersal," a process whose medium is discourse.[88] The idea of publics as formed through a concatenation of texts speaks to more recent methodological approaches to media studies, which focus not only on screen media texts but also on the paratextual satellites orbiting them: industrial discourse, promotional materials, audience forums, and criticism.[89] Circulation sites for film—mall multiplexes, art-house cinemas, informal DVD markets, university screening spaces, state-run cinematheques—act as vehicles for the dissemination of one form of discourse (filmic texts), and they are also sites for the exchange of paratextual discourse (e.g., promotional materials, Q&A sessions with directors, or conversations among audience members).[90] While the term "paratexts" suggests a subsidiary relationship that privileges the main attraction of the feature-length film, I would like to propose a model in which the term draws from its roots in "parallel," meaning side by side rather than auxiliary. For alternative cinema cultures whose feature-length films find few venues for exhibition, such paratexts are often the *only* access viewers might have to particular works. This awareness of the existence of films, coupled with their absence from widespread exhibition, creates a relationship between films and their publics that is based on a prospective, rather than actualized, connection.[91]

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Spaces of circulation become critical venues for cultivating this sense of prospective connection, though many scholars have argued that the internet might be the more relevant space of public discourse in the present. While this may accurately describe the current moment of film consumption, physical spaces still hold the subjunctive promise of public culture. Geographer Doreen Massey describes the concept of open spaces as parallel to the notion of democracy yet to come, due to its characteristics of openness and uncertainty.[92] Within this model, place becomes "an ever-shifting constellation of trajectories [that] poses the question of our throwntogetherness," holding the *potential* of public unity.[93] This, in part, explains the film scene's attention to physical spaces for alternative media circulation in early-aughts public discussion, even at a time when domestic viewing dominated and online streaming was beginning to become more available (2005–2012).[94] Through public discussion of their plans, possibilities, operations, and, often, their closures, these physical distribution and exhibition spaces accrue sociocultural meaning, becoming texts in and of themselves. They index the relations among alternative film texts, their makers, and their present and projected audiences.

These issues around projected audiences came to the fore in a 2010 anthology titled *Philippine New Wave*. Filmmaker Khavn de la Cruz published the volume through an imprint associated with an arts festival he runs, the MOV International Film, Music, and Literature Festival. The anthology's interviews with filmmakers discuss a range of topics. Interestingly, the question of audiences emerges repeatedly, and the filmmakers' reflections oscillate between urgency and cynicism. Lav Diaz, for instance, attributes the mass audience's absence to the "feudal setup" of the mainstream industry, perhaps drawing from his own experience working as a director for Regal Films in the 1990s: "Digital leveled the field. The very feudal setup of making movies vanished. But we are suffering from a great cultural debacle. The masses remain ignorant. . . . The people don't know how powerful the cultural effect of cinema is. It can be a cultural tool to educate our masses."[95] This language references the hacienda system of land ownership, a social structure founded on colonial racial hierarchies. In his view, if the mainstream film industry become the *hacienderos*, filmmakers wielding digital tools become the agents of social change. The discussion here metaphorically links the absent national audience to broader national histories. While the length of many of Diaz's films precludes their access to industrial

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

circulation channels, he remains concerned about the problems of domestic reception. His discussion here implies a speculative desire for circulation and the publics it would construct. It highlights a tension between the realities of the present (an industrial exhibition infrastructure that precludes long films, a public that may not be interested in such works) and an implied, speculative future, in which such films are used as tools of education.

The power of this paradox is also apparent in director Ato Bautista's comments; Bautista makes films that are closer in nature to accessible genre pictures, though with more darkness and violence than is typical in Philippine mainstream cinema. (Bautista counts the American director Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* as a major influence.) In theory, it could be easier for his work to move in wider channels than the films of his counterpart, Diaz; but Bautista is also concerned with an absent domestic audience. He notes, "Out of 94 million people, not even 0.5 percent have seen our works. It may even be at .00 percent or something. So the things we do for the country—are they even able to watch it? It's an absurd idea that maybe it's just us who understand each other."[96] Despite the vast differences in their filmmaking styles, Bautista shares Diaz's critical view of mainstream films. However, Bautista's perspective is asymptotic. He envisions the present as a future history, its failures to reach potential audiences reflected in the class status of the makers. He argues that if someone were to research the current generation of filmmakers in the future, "they'll find out we came from the middle class. Let's say, I'm a kid, and 20 years from now, I research on a certain filmmaker. I'll find out that the reason he was able to get a full house [in the cinema] was because he didn't have to worry about buying a toothbrush, buying Colgate, soap, or what he'll eat every day because he's from the upper middle class. What about me? How is that going to be possible?"[97]

Matters of form and content are certainly critical in these discussions of audience. The films of the early aughts ranged across a spectrum of formal and narrative innovation, and this affected their circulatory trajectories. Critical reception of form and content became one aspect of circulation, mapping the parameters of films' movements through national and transnational space. On one end, films like *The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros* (dir. Auraeus Solito, 2005), received praise from international and domestic critics for its universalism. The low-budget Cinemalaya feature employs the realist aesthetics associated with accessi-

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

ble indie filmmaking, while telling a story that transgresses the norms of the more mainstream studios.[98] Its main character is Maxi, a young cinephile who would fall into the social category of *bakla* within Philippine culture. As Martin Manalansan describes, *pusong babae*, or female heart, "encapsulates what is perhaps the core of the social construction of the bakla," that of being a man (or in this case, a young boy) with a female heart.[99] Maxi's mother has passed away from cancer, and their father Paco makes a living selling stolen cell phones. Their home life is a happy one. They skip school, spending time in a neighborhood screening room, watching old Filipino movies with other children. Maxi befriends an idealistic rookie cop, Victor, developing a schoolchild crush. Victor wants to insist on clear binaries—between right and wrong and between male and female. The film's ultimate message demonstrates his misguidedness, endorsing the blurred boundaries of Maxi's identity and their family's occupation. The sometimes-questionable but never transgressive child-adult friendship is tested due to Victor's investigation of a murder involving one of Maxi's older brothers.

Relative to other works associated with the burgeoning alternative film scene, *Maximo* fared well among domestic audiences. This had much to do with its form; Manila film critic Oggs Cruz explains the film's appeal as grounded in its universalism.[100] Disdaining what he sees as the more exploitative tendencies of other, similarly themed works, Cruz points to the film's tempered experimentation with portraying prepubescent romantic desire. Moreover, as Cruz describes, the film balances its depiction of a "gritty" urban setting with its simultaneous portrayal of that setting as a tolerant "Utopian paradise." *Maximo* offers difference, while undercutting that difference with familiarity. The film became the first Philippine film to play at the Sundance Film Festival, going on to win fifteen international awards. Like many of the works of its production companies, UFO Pictures and Unitel (one of its two local distributors), the film mixes universality and specificity. This balance owes much to its critical success both locally and abroad, an unusual combination for the recent wave of independent films.

If *Maximo* represents a negotiation between familiarity and difference, another film released in 2005 occupies a point further toward the margins. The same year, director Raya Martin released his first feature film, *A Short Film about the Indio Nacional (or the Prolonged Sorrow of the Filipinos)*. Conceived while Martin was a twenty-one-year-old student at the University of the Philippines, the film mimics the style of early

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

cinema, depicting village life during the 1890s era of Spanish colonization. The majority of its ninety-minute run is shot on 35 mm, black-and-white celluloid, save for a framing device, which occupies the first twenty-two minutes. Shot in color on digital video, this sparse, three-shot opening sequence involves a man who tells his restless wife an allegorical story of the Philippines as she tries to sleep, with only the sound of crickets in the background. The man's story tells of an encounter between an old man and a young boy. In his story, the old man represents the Philippines, and he carries a heavy load that represents fraud, poison, and corruption. The film then becomes a simulacral relic of silent cinema, taking place during the 1896 Philippine Revolution. It is divided into three parts according to the age of its protagonist, who is portrayed as a boy, an adolescent, and a young man. Loosely linked scenes depict a nationalist iconography: a friar is tossed into a river, Katipuneros (an anticolonial resistance movement) foment rebellion, and a performance troupe depicts the mythological Bernardo Carpio, a giant who appears in nationalist author Jose Rizal's novel *El Filibusterismo* and will lead Filipinos to revolution. Brief, animated sequences depict a winking sun and moon, who watch over the film's hero. The film had a successful festival run, playing at Locarno, Rotterdam, Hong Kong, San Francisco, and Venice. Critics found the film compelling, if opaque. It drew comparisons to early filmmakers, such as Edison and D. W. Griffith, as well as the contemporary Canadian filmmaker Guy Maddin, whose work similarly evokes silent cinema.[101] These films represent two ends of an aesthetic and narrative spectrum of film practice that emerged as the millennium turned. Predictably, their circulation patterns reflected their form. *Maximo* was well known for an alternative film, while *Indio Nacional* played primarily in international festivals, largely due to a lack of alternative venues at home.

In the *Philippine New Wave* volume, these questions of content and form are less significant than the absence of exhibition and distribution channels. In his contribution, Khavn de la Cruz is explicit about this lack of alternative circulation infrastructures, pointing to the compensatory roles of informal mechanisms for distribution:

> Is the Filipino audience ready for that level of cinema? I don't think so. Not at this point. They've been spoon fed by GMA7 and ABS-CBN for so long. They're used to being boxed in. They like that box. They're not aware that there's something outside that box. They're not stu-

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

pid, just clueless. That's actually one good thing about piracy—the accessibility of all forms of cinema. Of course, the bulk of pirated movies still leans towards Hollywood. . . . Force-feeding them is probably not the right way to go, but the viewers should be given more options. How exactly? I don't know. There was one proposition that Film Appreciation classes should be taught in all schools nationwide. Efren Penaflorida, the CNN Hero of the Year, had a good idea. But instead of pushing around a cart with books, fill it up with DVDs of films, great films.[102]

Obviously, the problems of inequality underpinning this divided public go well beyond matters of access. Cruz's own films, for example, are highly experimental, with little attention to matters of textual accessibility. Nonetheless, for him, the problem of audience lies with the lack of infrastructural access to education, exhibition, and distribution.

What interests me about these passages is their emphasis on the circulatory matrix, rather than the text, as the crux of this film culture's meanings. *Maximo* and *Indio Nacional* generated a range of discussions about their relative merits as films; at the same time, they were defined by the circulation networks that moved them—festival programs, successful or unsuccessful local runs. If world cinema *is* circulation, aspirational national cinemas, it seems, *would become* circulation, even if their mobility is stalled due to alienated mass audiences and poor distribution and exhibition infrastructures. Alternative film culture is a product of this friction, defined and constituted by the rhetorical tensions between past, present, and future visions of cinema's social role. These frictions hold particular power in places where the divide between the middle classes and the majority has become a formative part of national discourse and where alternative films can offer new forms of global visibility to national cultural industries and governments.[103]

This dynamic is not limited to the Philippines. It occurs in many settings where under- or misrepresentation within global media culture heightens the stakes of foreign visibility, and where histories of colonial exploitation coexist with present conditions of global economic marginalization, intensifying the cultural politics of local-global interaction. For example, in her influential work on translation, Rey Chow notes the cross-cultural politics of Fifth Generation Chinese filmmakers, whom nativist critics fault for pandering to "foreign devils."[104] Similar undercurrents are discernible in the reception of other recent

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Southeast Asian independent films as well. Gaik Cheng Khoo notes that the local audience for Malaysian independent films is usually "the urban middle class, arts and film students"; Khoo also quotes Malaysian director Amir Muhammad, who defines a Malaysian indie film as "one that is accepted to foreign film festivals but not at the Malaysian Film Festival."[105] In a study that encompasses rifts among transnational, urban, and rural scales, Benedict Anderson describes the divided reception of the Thai festival favorite, Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Tropical Malady*, which middle-class Thai audiences in Bangkok reproached as being made for foreigners.[106] Meanwhile, rural upland viewers were far more interested in the work, accepting the art film's jungle settings as mundane reality, rather than stylized fantasy. Such trans- and intranational rifts among diverse audiences structured Manila's early-2000s alternative film scene, and circulation strategies became a means of coping with them. As in many contexts, the spaces of exhibition and distribution that emerged to push against these circulatory limits faced tremendous challenges, including state censorship; vast, difficult-to-navigate megacities; and the understandable indifference of the majority of city dwellers. But the desire for wider audiences at the national level persisted, as the passages above demonstrate. These tensions depict how the problems around alternative film circulation resonate with the incompleteness of modernities and publics.

Publics in the Global South

I am interested in how the public sphere concept captures an isomorphic relation between the incomplete modernities of the global south and the paradoxes of its alternative cinemas. Historically, the concept itself has long mediated the impasse of public-formation within class-riven and ethnically divided societies, where it takes on a subjunctive, aspirational dimension. In the Philippines, Jose Blanco argues that the contradictory idea of a united public represents the impasse of colonial modernity: modernity requires the consent of the governed, but it is also based on racial exclusion of the "native" population.[107] This paradox is its perpetual crisis, creating a pedagogical relation between elites and the mass population. To use Arvind Rajagopal's term, such publics are "split," and this fissure becomes "a heuristic in thinking about an incomplete modern polity, standing for the relationship between the configuration of political society desired by modernizing elites and

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

its actual historical forms."[108] Rajagopal's heuristic shares much with postcolonial scholars such as Partha Chatterjee, who discusses the hiatus between civil society and political society as a mark of non-Western modernities. Echoing Lav Diaz's comments above, within Chatterjee's model, the elite are engaged in a pedagogical relation to the rest of society; the question then becomes how to conceive of a domain outside modern civil society, without falling into an essentializing binary between modernity and tradition.[109] These notions of pedagogy find parallels in Reynaldo Ileto's work on Philippine historiography, which call for a "non-linear emplotment" that would move away from more developmentalist models. As Ileto writes, "With *ilustrado* [turn-of-the-century, Europe-educated nationalist revolutionaries] writing . . . Philippine history became progressive, linear, and to some extent, 'purposive.' The people, or its vanguard intelligentsia, could help push history to its goal by education/reform or revolution."[110] As Ileto argues, subsequent histories have followed this template.[111]

As these discussions suggest, public cultures are inherently contradictory, fractured, and *projected*. These fissures exceed the idea of publics as divided and multiple. They suggest a *temporal* order, in which class dictates the parameters of a fantasized, future public. Middle-class filmmakers critique the problems around film distribution and exhibition, lamenting the reception-vacuum it creates. At the same time, they project the desire for a future, unknown public. The concept of speculative publics seeks to acknowledge this rupture and empower its contradictions. It does not smooth over alternative cinema's impasse—its paradoxical radicalism and elitism, drawn across the divide between texts/production and reception/circulation. But this homologous relation between alternative cinemas and incomplete modernities might provide a more complex context, one that neither dismisses alternative cinemas as an elite enterprise, compromised through foreign funding and circulation, nor isolates alternative cinemas as the only films of value in a rich domestic mediascape. Rather, it constructs alternative cinemas' paradox as the inevitable outcome of an always-unfinished modernity.

Passionate Observation and Writing against Film Culture

This book provides a concentrated picture of recent cultural history, taking shape over a period of time that saw profound changes in Philippine film culture. The years 2005–2012 were a period during which an

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

emergent cinema was being debated and discussed, sometimes critically, often hopefully, and almost always with a sense of its innate possibility as a national cultural form, working in the contexts of intranational divisions and transnational flows. The struggles to create sites of exhibition and systems of distribution were crucial parts of these ongoing efforts.

The book covers a very specific time in internet history, which has played a crucial part in its archive. As Patrick Campos has observed, "virtual networks have fostered spaces for immediate, spontaneous, and sometimes sustained exchanges by highly film-literate Filipino Internet users."[112] Because I am interested in the public dimensions of film culture, I focus on observation at events and sites, as well as analysis of circulating, public discourse. In popular journalism, as well as on blogs, message boards, and comment threads, these discourses mark the internet as another "site of circulation," not for filmic texts but for the public imaginaries that surround them.[113] Like their brick-and-mortar counterparts, many of these spaces have disappeared. While notions of nationhood evoke the *longue durée* of history, these online sites are a part of what Paul Grainge calls "ephemeral media," which are transitory and evanescent.[114] In this way, their temporality parallels that of the film cultures they helped make.

Another aspect of this project's scope is audience and authorial positioning, which I raise here because of the importance of these issues within Philippine studies.[115] Given my background as a scholar based in the U.S. academy, this book is written with an audience outside the Philippines in mind, in the hopes of introducing elements of this film culture to cinema and media studies readers who may be unfamiliar with this setting. As such, I explicate background information that will be common knowledge to Filipino readers. Although I have familial ties to the city and lived there as a child, I was very much an outsider, even with the generosity and openness of many in the local film and activist communities, who became friends and acquaintances. As a researcher, my outsider status was sometimes useful for garnering explanations of cultural phenomena that seemed a given to my Filipino friends but which were sometimes enigmatic to me.

Thus, the critical-analytical stance I take in this book is that of passionate observation, a slightly tongue-in-cheek, paradoxical term I offer here less as a theoretical meditation on method than as a means of acknowledging both the analytical distance of observation and the

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

affective binds that inevitably develop through this kind of work. This type of reflexivity is standard practice in feminist anthropology, though less common in cinema and media studies. The phrase I suggest is a slight play on the anthropologist Ruth Behar's idea of the "vulnerable observer," a term she develops to move beyond the distanced, objective observer of her discipline's classical period, toward ethnographic empathy.[116] My work is not ethnography per se, and I hesitate to use the word "vulnerable" to describe my intensely privileged position as an academic based first in Singapore and then in the United States, at well-funded research universities. I find claims of either detachment or immersion specious when describing my own experience as a researcher. My investment in Manila and its cinema is not purely intellectual, but I hope to avoid the allure of diasporic romanticism, a view that can slide into Orientalism.[117] If the book's tone is more descriptively analytical than normative, it is because I am also somewhat dubious of certain forms of long-distance nationalism, which make prescriptive claims about a homeland from the comforts of a distant academic post. Moreover, my work is in cinema studies, and while culturally valuable, cinema's broader social impact is circumscribed. I do not want to oversell the medium.

The idea of passionate observation is meant to capture a critical stance grounded in the interstices.[118] As Lila Abu-Lughod writes in her essay "Writing against Culture," the problem with "writing culture" is that such a method distinguishes between self and other, a problematic binary for feminists and "halfies," those whose "national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage."[119] Thus, as she proposes, I endeavor to write against (film) culture, in order to investigate the multiple, often conflicting sectors of a film scene loosely cohered around shifting affiliations of nation, class, region, generation, or mode of production. In May 2010, I interviewed the film archivist and Cinema Committee Chair of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), Teddy Co, over drinks at the Coffee Bean and Tea Leaf in Quezon City's Trinoma mall. Co used the charged word "tribal" to describe what he viewed as Manila's sectarian film culture.[120] The term was used for rhetorical flourish rather than to describe specific practices; Co related the difficulty of getting projects off the ground, saying it is "because we are all working separately."

Such separation could apply to art scenes in many parts of the world, but the description does address the fragmentation that is an

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

important part of alternative film in Manila. Hardly a coherent whole, the film scene is a multifaceted assemblage, which unravels the binary between the removed researcher and the holistic "object" of study. This makes the task of research less about finding commonalities among differences in the name of explanation than about tracking how these varied components inform one another. The classifications that offer useful critical traction for academics and rhetorical impact for pundits—national cinema, independent film, mainstream cinema, Hollywood—are often conditional and strategic, deployed by filmmakers, policy makers, exhibitors, and programmers within particular circumstances. These contingent, multifaceted situations variously embrace and expel the researcher's position, and insider or outsider status is never a settled matter. In this context, what ties the researcher to the work is the ability to negotiate affective binds, while also recognizing the inevitability of distance. The key relation is not that between self and other but between passion and observation—critical modes rather than essential identities.

Chapters

The chapters that follow examine how film circulation sites, initiatives, and discourses construct speculative publics within the contexts of transnational cultural trajectories, global economic flows, and intranational social divisions. The first three chapters investigate grassroots or informal spaces that attempted to integrate alternative film circulation and the city. Acting as transnational hubs for foreign and domestic cinemas, these sites constructed their speculative publics through the interface between urban crowds and circulation space.

The neoliberal cityscape's effects on alternative film culture become evident in the book's first two chapters. Chapter 1 tracks the significance of the mall as a space of film exhibition in the city. I examine Metro Manila's transition into what urbanists dub a "revanchist city," premised on massive privatization and the punitive excision of the poor from public space. The chapter argues that the principles associated with the revanchist city have entered the mall multiplex cinema and the speculative publics associated with it. The revanchist cinema became a microcosm of the city outside the mall's doors, mirroring its values of top-down surveillance and bourgeois decorum. This made it a key site for regulating and contesting visions of audience. Across vari-

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

ous sectors (exhibitors, audiences, the film community, the state), the multiplex became an arena for envisioning the transformation of Manila's crowds into consumers, taxpayers, antipiracy vigilantes, and, in their most idealized projection, the egalitarian publics of a new national cinema. The tensions among these competing visions demonstrate how the multiplex exhibition space mediated debates about what a domestic cinema's public could and should be, within the contexts of a neoliberal cityscape. For the Independent Filmmakers' Multipurpose Cooperative (IFC), this public should include the vast crowds to be found in the mall's arcades, and the multiplex became a strategy for attracting them. Scholars in both geography and cinema studies have argued that publics are made possible through chance and contingency. Framing the mall as a space of chance, where passersby might happen upon the screening space, the IFC established Indie Sine, a mall multiplex screen dedicated to alternative cinema. This project was ultimately short-lived, but it left behind a trail of images and discourse—speculation about what alternative cinema's mall publics might become.

The second chapter also traces reactions to the neoliberal, revanchist city, though they take a different form. The chapter examines Quiapo, a working-class district in the "old city" that became synonymous with Manila's pirated DVD trade in the early 2000s. Against the backdrop of a neoliberal cityscape, Quiapo is a nationalist emblem of the city's past. Its former life is visible in its repurposed midcentury architecture, surrounded by the informal stalls that marked its socioeconomic decline. Dominated by the Muslim ethnic minorities who had fled the southern regions to escape war and poverty, the DVD trade brought middle-class cinema shoppers to the area for the first time since its midcentury heyday. Narratives of the Quiapo DVD journey created a new imaginary for the neighborhood, grounded in a rhetoric of authenticity that portrayed a democratizing space for a highbrow culture of consumption. Authenticity is a common trope of alternative art and its consumers, distancing them from mainstream, industrial production; outsiders also ascribe authenticity to urban spaces, where it connotes an imagined, prelapsarian past. Many cinephiles came to Quiapo seeking not only cheap DVDs but also the experience of shopping in a space of authenticity and difference—an underdeveloped part of an overdeveloped city that offered a safe, celebratory vision of the country's multiculturalism. I trace two forms of urban-cinematic authenticity at work in millennial Quiapo: fantasies of media access, which

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

envisioned Quiapo as a site of globalized media abundance available to all; and pluralist images of multiculturalism, which saw it as a site of cross-class, interethnic interaction through media commerce. Cultivating new networks of affinity and dissociation among cinephiles, ethnic minorities, and the modernizing, regulatory state, these dimensions of urban-cinematic authenticity allowed Quiapo to be held up as the site of a more utopian, inclusive, and speculative *counter*public for alternative cinema. At the same time, however, this vision of placid multiculturalism sometimes attenuated histories of interethnic violence and Muslim suppression.

Chapter 3 negotiates the tensions between alternative film culture's speculative and asymptotic dimensions, shifting to film initiatives located in small-scale exhibition sites. Like Indie Sine, the idea behind these initiatives was to bring nonmainstream films to the city's wider publics, a move that engaged with the inherent contradictions of alternative cinema—their political and aesthetic radicalism versus their narrow, sometimes privileged reach. However, the small, sequestered art enclaves that housed these initiatives were hardly accessible; nor were they spaces already populated by a mass crowd, as with Indie Sine and Quiapo. The fantasies of access that structured the previous two chapters were more difficult to maintain in these cloistered settings. Here, the initiatives I analyze harnessed the temporalities of film dissemination as a strategy toward reaching their audiences. As I discuss, many scholars of industrial film distribution argue for the significance of temporality as a means of staggering or synchronizing release dates, thereby creating patterns of affiliation or difference across space. In these spaces, more artisanal, semi-industrial modes of film dissemination used temporality to different ends: as a means of constructing prospective publics. I focus on two initiatives: Cinekatipunan, a daily screening series held at Mag:net Galleries and Café, a venue located in an area dense with universities and NGOs; and the Mogwai Cinematheque, a microcinema and café established in 2007. I trace three temporal modes that characterized these film circulation projects. I examine how Mogwai's sequestration in the city constructs a spatialized timeline, moving from an overdeveloped mallscape dotted with billboards of mainstream media stars to a hidden area of the city that evokes a previous era of cinemagoing. I examine the Cinekatipunan screening series and the Mogwai Film Festival in terms of regularity and ritual, engaging with performance studies work on how the

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

repetition of the series format enables the cultivation of "micropublics." The final, shorter section of this chapter examines Sinemusikalye, a music and media event. Because of its open-air plaza setting, passersby in the district—club goers, workers, vendors, and street children—participated in the screening alongside Manila's bohemians. This participation occurred on their own terms, as viewers fleetingly engaged with the films in a state of distraction. While Indie Sine aimed to bring alternative cinema to the people via the multiplex, here the street allowed passing viewers to construct their own ludic, transitory experiences of alternative cinema. This mode of engagement projected another utopian possibility for cinemagoing's speculative publics, one that looked very different from more cinephilic visions. Each of these cases demonstrates how temporality constructed speculative publics based on shared urban rhythms and local histories rather than the global simultaneity of industrialized distribution networks.

As the first three chapters relate, the state often acted as an obstruction to film circulation initiatives. The Movie and Television Review and Classification Board (MTRCB) entered the multiplex through antipiracy measures and threatened the Cinekatipunan screening series. Chapter 4 investigates the competing speculative publics that emerged through conflicts between the MTRCB and the alternative film scene. Here, these speculative publics produce different versions of the body politic and the state. While the alternative film scene's activist sectors produced a vision of Philippine publics as liberating, educated, and informed, the Arroyo state produced a view of these publics as infantilized and hostile to the current order. Each side's case hinged on assertions of the other's irrationality and parochialism. I call the alternative film scene's constructions of a rational, potential public for independent cinema "strategic rationality," a tactical maneuver that responded to the Philippine state's historic instability. To assess these conflicts, the chapter unpacks a series of confrontations among filmmakers, social movements, and the MTRCB that took place between 2007 and 2008, a point when the Arroyo regime's vulnerability made it particularly draconian. As both an object of debate and a setting for events, circulation space again became an arena where speculative publics took shape. The confrontations I examine focused on the question of public exhibition, pointing to the significance of the live cinemagoing event for fostering public culture. The first two cases investigate the banning of *Rights*, a human rights anthology film set to screen at

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

the activist Kontra-Agos Film Festival, and the domestic censorship of internationally lauded independent features. The discourses surrounding them rendered the MTRCB a provincial backwater within a cosmopolitan cartography of world cinema, depicting local audiences as more educated and rational than the state that governed them. While these first two cases deployed strategic rationality to make their cases against censorship, the final case presents a more complex picture. It focuses on the MTRCB's encroachment on the University of the Philippines Film Institute (UPFI), one of two censorship-free zones due to its educational mandate. The UPFI became a target because of its screenings of sexualized "gay films" to large, unruly audiences, raising questions about the kinds of speculative publics precluded in both state *and* alternative film discourse.

Despite its history of repression and instability, a more aspirational view of the state persists. The book's final chapter continues this discussion of the state and its relationship to film circulation and prospective publics. It covers a transitional period in the alternative film scene's early stage, when a desire for the state to take up its role in domestic film circulation emerged—despite its history of instability and repression. This desire was partly a response to the perceived paternalism of the transnational festival circuit, a critique made in two films the chapter analyzes: *Ang mga kidnaper ni Ronnie Lazaro* (*The Kidnappers of Ronnie Lazaro*, dir. Sigfreid Barros Sanchez, 2012) and *Ang Babae sa Septic Tank* (*The Woman in the Septic Tank*, dir. Marlon Rivera, 2011). While transnational festivals and funding agencies had fueled the film scene's early years, these films parody the foreign festival circuit. They depict a transnational prestige economy that encourages art cinema homogeneity, thereby excluding domestic publics. This turn away from transnational festival circuit led to calls for greater domestic support; surprisingly, fantasies of the state as an "institution ideal" surfaced as a counterpoint to this transnationalism. They emerged in controversies that developed around the Cinemalaya Philippine Independent Film Festival and Foundation. Cinemalaya had been one of the key players in the new wave of production, funding new works and acting as a gateway to foreign festivals. But in 2012, many began to question Cinemalaya's partnership between the state and commercial media industry interests. For many filmmakers, Cinemalaya's connection to the state Cultural Center rendered it an institution "for the people," revealing the persistent view of the state as representative of

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Philippine public culture. This idealized vision of the state continues in the final section, which examines the Film Development Council of the Philippines (FDCP) and its Sineng Pambasa (National Cinema) project. Building state-owned cinematheques in several provincial centers, the FDCP aimed to reach outside the capital city, creating a decentralized, state-run system of film circulation whose speculative publics spanned the archipelago. The notion that alternative cinema's speculative publics should be housed under the wing of the state suggests the persistence of the state as an imagined ideal for institutionalizing local film culture, especially within transnationalized contexts.

Each of these chapters unpacks the logic of speculation underpinning early-aughts Manila's film publics. The exhibition and distribution initiatives that follow were grounded in prospective, Filipino audiences yet to come. They were spatial manifestations of "wishful thinking," as Alexis's post had put it. Just a few years after he wrote his list, Quiapo and *Criticine* were gone. In 2011, Manila mayor Alfredo Lim cracked down on Quiapo's DVD vendors, in an effort to comply with the U.S. Office of the Trade Representative (USTR). The mayor worked with the state's Optical Media Board (OMB) to seize his own constituents' wares, raiding the district with armed OMB teams in a fierce display of state muscle. With the availability of torrents and streaming, the market's heyday had passed; the shutdown was perhaps more performative than strategic. Still, the vendors, many of them migrants from the wartorn south, were left uncertain about their options. Some gave tearful or angry testimony in TV news segments. Behind them, OMB teams threw sacks of confiscated discs onto trucks as U.S. Embassy representatives looked on.[121]

But by far the greatest losses were the deaths of Alexis and his partner, the Slovenian film critic Nika Bohinc, who were murdered during a robbery in their Quezon City home in September 2009.[122] Upon news of their deaths, tributes from around the world surfaced across the internet, from festival programmers, filmmakers, critics, journalists, and friends who remembered their generosity and commitment to film cultures in their respective homes.[123]

I unexpectedly encountered Alexis's wish list years after its initial publication, through the DVD commentary on Quark Henares's film *Rakenrol*. A coming-of-age story set within Manila's early-aughts music scene, the film was released in 2011, two years after Alexis's death. It played to a standing-room-only crowd at the Cinemalaya Film Festival.

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Henares and Tioseco had been close, and as the credits rolled, the film's dedication read, "In loving memory of our good friends Alexis Tioseco and Nika Bohinc. And in fulfillment of Wishlist Item #98." *Rakenrol* was one of the few independent works distributed through a major studio, Regal Entertainment, Henares's former employer. Referencing his past status as a director in the studio system, Henares describes his move to the more personal *Rakenrol* as something Alexis would have valued, framing its release in the tragic temporality of "so close, but too late": "I really feel bad that we didn't get to show it. . . . And he was so close. We shot at his house. When I think about it, so close." *Rakenrol* itself had become a document of an obsolete, postmillennial arts scene. Seventeen minutes into its commentary, Henares and his cowriter Diego Castillo decide that they should take an inventory of the film's vanished spaces. They track eight shooting locations that had closed since filming, such as the Futures Café, Mogwai, and Mag:Net Bonifacio. Virtual spaces enter their catalog as well, as a character mentions Friendster. Just a few years after its production, the film had become an accidental record of art world precarity; but it had also become an artifact of collective filmmaking, as Henares and Castillo described the friends who lent them music, labor, and shooting spaces. *City of Screens* has become a similar document, a record of a specific, transitional era, when these short-lived spaces conjectured about what alternative cinema's publics might become. As the chapters that follow suggest, for those involved, this public culture of domestic film production, circulation, and reception was wishful thinking, but it was something worth working toward—impossible but necessary.

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

NOTES

Introduction

1 Tioseco, "Wishful Thinking for Philippine Cinema," *Criticine*, March 15, 2009, https://alexistioseco.wordpress.com/2009/03/15/wishful-thinking-for-philippine-cinema/.
2 Tioseco, "Wishful Thinking."
3 Comment by Misha, April 11, 2009. Tioseco, "Wishful Thinking."
4 *Criticine*, home page, accessed July 20, 2014, http://criticine.com/main.php.
5 Even on the post itself, one commenter was skeptical of this earnest call to arms. Writing in Taglish, they offered their own wish that Alexis would be less "elitist" ("wish ko lang maging less elitist *si* alexis Tioseco"), reflecting competing bids for Philippine cinema's futures. Comment by pokwang, April 11, 2009. Tioseco, "Wishful Thinking."
6 Dudley Andrew has noted the speed with which new Philippine films became a known quantity in international film festivals, in comparison to new Taiwanese cinema of the 1980s, which took years to develop. See Andrew, "Forward," *Global Art Cinema*, vii.
7 Ruben V. Nepales, "Redd Ochoa Is Hopeful about RP's Indie Scene," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, August 24, 2007, http://showbizandstyle.inquirer.net/entertainment/entertainment/view/20070824-84554/Redd_Ochoa_is_hopeful_about_RP%92s_indie_scene.
8 Nepales, "Redd Ochoa Is Hopeful."
9 Armes, "Context of the African"; Robinson, *Satyajit Ray*.

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

10 The terms "north" and "south" are admittedly imperfect shorthand. I use them to describe the divides between wealthy, industrialized nations (the G8, members of the UN Security Council) and the rest of the world. However, I realize that there are areas of poverty and deindustrialization within northern countries, as well as areas of extreme wealth in the global south. In those instances, the demographic majority/minority dynamic becomes a defining factor. See also Walter Mignolo's historical analysis of the concept in "The Global South and World Dis/Order." Mignolo argues that the metaphor north/south works in that the global south provides resources for the north, while also being the locus for the emergent political society that will eventually liberate even those wealthier countries.

11 Ross, "Film Festival as Producer"; Shackleton, "Indian Film's Tender Shoots"; Peranson, "First You Get," 42.

12 De Valck, *Film Festivals*; de Valck, Kredell, and Loist, *Film Festivals*; Wong, *Film Festivals*.

13 See Choi, "National Cinema"; Hjort, "On the Plurality of Cinematic Transnationalisms."

14 Harbord, *Film Cultures*, 14.

15 Harbord, *Film Cultures*; M. Newman, *Indie*.

16 Robbins, *Phantom Public Sphere*.

17 See Joel David's collection of essays, *The National Pastime: Contemporary Philippine Cinema*.

18 Tiongson, "Audiences," 99–100.

19 See Tiongson, "Best of Times."

20 Fair Trade Alliance, "Clipped Wings Prevent Philippine Cinema from Soaring," FairTrade Web, June 20, 2007, http://fairtradeweb.wordpress.com/2007/06/20/clipped-wings-prevent-philippine-cinema-from-soaring/.

21 Philippine Information Agency, "Philippine Film and Video," Philippine Culture and Information, May 21, 1998, http://www.pia.gov.ph/philinfo/phfilm.html.

22 Tiongson, "Best of Times," 9.

23 Tiongson, 427.

24 Bello, "Neoliberalism."

25 Flores makes similar claims, without the ethnic markers.

26 Tiongson, "Best of Times," 8.

27 Tiongson, 8.

28 Flores, "Philippine Cinema and Society," 427.

29 Tiongson, "Audiences," 99–100.

30 Caroline S. Hau points out that the Chinese presence in mercantilism was due to the American colonial state imposing the Chinese Exclusion Act in the Philippines, which pushed the minority into a niche trade. See Hau, *Chinese Question*, 149.

31 Hau, 147.

32 The following chapters touch on this topic. See the conclusion of chapter 1, for example.

33 Fair Trade Alliance, "From Reel to Real," FairTrade Web, June 21, 2007, http://fairtradeweb.wordpress.com/2007/06/21/from-reel-to-real/.

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

34 "Movie Spending Contributes 0.06% to GDP-NSCB," *Rappler*, February 13, 2012, http://www.rappler.com/business/1505-movie-spending-contribute-0-06-to-gdp-%E2%80%93-nscb.
35 For more on Cinemalaya and debates about what constitutes "independent cinema" in the Philippines, see Patrick Campos's chapter on the festival and congress, "Cinemalaya and the Politics of Naming a Movement," in Campos, *End of National Cinema*, 217–76.
36 I discuss Cinemalaya further in chapter 5.
37 Don Jaucian, "Why All the TV Stars Are Going Indie," CNN *Philippines*, August 9, 2016, http://cnnphilippines.com/life/entertainment/film/2016/08/09/benjamin-alves-janine-gutierrez-dagsin.html.
38 Elizabeth Kerr, "Imburnal—Film Review," *Hollywood Reporter*, March 24, 2009, http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/imburnal-film-review-92993.
39 Romulo A. Virola, "Now Showing: Panday nag-shake, Rattle and Roll," Philippine Statistics Authority, National Statistical Coordination Board, 2012, accessed July 20, 2014, http://www.nscb.gov.ph/headlines/StatsSpeak/2012/021312_rav_mpg.asp.
40 *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v., "speculative," accessed July 23, 2020, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/186115?redirectedFrom=speculative&.
41 Uncertain Commons, *Speculate This!*, n.p.
42 Uncertain Commons, *Speculate This!*, n.p.
43 Uncertain Commons, *Speculate This!*, n.p.
44 See Shatkin, "City and the Bottom Line."
45 Bello, *Anti-Development State*.
46 Harvey, *Brief History of Neoliberalism*.
47 Bliss Cua Lim writes about the effects of the late-1990s crisis on the commercial film industry in "Gambling on Life and Death: Neoliberal Rationality and the Films of Jeffrey Jeturian."
48 Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 279n43.
49 *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v., "asymptote," accessed November 19, 2019, https://www.oed.com/oed2/00013928;jsessionid=0EBADC8A9226996DCFB520259599FD59. While the mathematical definition describes movement toward a fixed curve, rather than receding one, I am using the term more generally, as an illustrative metaphor. I am grateful to Mette Hjort for suggesting this term.
50 Buck-Morss, "Democracy: An Unfinished Project."
51 Mouffe, "Democratic Citizenship."
52 Larkin, *Signal and Noise*, 78–80. One recent collection that problematizes the metro-centrism of much early cinema scholarship is Kathryn H. Fuller-Seeley's *Hollywood in the Neighborhood,* which focuses on rural and small-town moviegoing.
53 Neves and Sarkar, *Asian Video Cultures*, "Introduction," 2.
54 Neves and Sarkar, 5.
55 Buck-Morss, "Democracy: An Unfinished Project," 46.
56 Tolentino, "Nations, Nationalisms," 122–23.

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

57 Writing on the United States and United Kingdom, respectively, Michael Z. Newman and David Hesmondhalgh each observe that categories like "indie" carry a fundamental tension between their democratic and elitist tendencies. As Newman argues, this contradiction is difficult to overcome. Popularity threatens independent artists' credibility, their works' status as outsider art, and, most crucially, their consumers' sense of being separate from the dominant culture. Similarly, Janet Harbord has described the paradox of art cinema as a conflict between its political potential and its place within circuits of value. Harbord's *Film Cultures* is particularly useful because it shifts emphasis from film texts to spaces and networks of exhibition. Harbord describes film cultures as "social practices, materially rooted and connected to larger networks of exchange and flow" (56). Harbord's analysis of the mutually defining arthouse-multiplex binary draws from James Clifford's art-culture system. Culture refers to all routine and symbolic activities in its widest application; it is "collective, material, reproduced." Its ubiquity leads to a devalued meaning in relation to art, which is premised on "individual production, originality, transcendence." Hence its contradiction. As Harbord writes, "The discourses through which oppositional identity is produced reinvade the *social status of art as distinct*, in contrast to its *political remit to invoke a more pluralist agenda* for filmmaking" (emphasis added). Like Newman and Hesmondhalgh, Harbord identifies this incongruity as the core that underlies notions of independent film, art cinema, and other labels that claim distance from a discursively constituted mainstream. See Thornton, *Club Cultures*, for more on the subcultural production of the idea of "mainstream."
58 Ingawanij and McKay, *Glimpses of Freedom*.
59 Dennison and Lim, *Remapping World Cinema*; Grant and Kuhn, *Screening World Cinema*; Ezra and Rowden, *Transnational Cinema*.
60 Galt and Schoonover, "The Impurity of Art Cinema," 7.
61 Galt and Schoonover, 7. See also Steve Neale's classic essay, "Art Cinema as Institution."
62 Nagib, "Towards a Positive Definition of World Cinema," 31.
63 Edgar O. Cruz, "French Connection," Stir: Showbiz Talk, May 14, 2009, accessed May 29, 2009, http://www.stir.ph/LM/articles~level2/id-1242267214271_4/ai-null/French_connection.html.
64 Similar concerns arise in the context of Latin American filmmaking, as noted in Ross, "Film Festival as Producer."
65 De la Cruz, *Philippine New Wave*, 111.
66 "Fonds Sud Cinema," Films from the South, accessed May 12, 2012, http://www.filmfrasor.no/en/program/Fondsud. Interestingly, the funding body changed its name to Aides aux Cinemas du Monde, in early 2012, placing less emphasis on its developing country focus. On public funding for film and audiovisual works in Europe, see "Fonds Sud Cinema," Korda: Database, accessed June 1, 2015, http://korda.obs.coe.int/korda.php/organisation/indexType1/id/49.
67 Edgar O. Cruz, "Cannes 'Formula' Exposed," Stir, accessed May 15, 2009, http://www.stir.ph/LM/articles~level2/id-1242267214271_4/ai-null/French

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

_connection.html. These are long-standing debates. See also Nicanor Tiongson's history of the filmmaker Manuel Conde's *Gengis Kahn*. Tiongson quotes Conde saying, "I went out of the Philippines like a country bumpkin eager to know more about the art of motion pictures. I found out that the Philippines was a wealthy country in [terms of] culture and traditions. . . . I resolved never to make a movie of foreign origin [again]." Tiongson, *Cinema of Manuel Conde*, 83.

68 Charlie Samuya Veric, "Who's Afraid of Philippine Cinema?," *Philippine Star*, June 18, 2001, http://www.philstar.com/arts-and- culture/85938/who%C3%A3%C2%A2%C3%A2%E2%80%9A%C2%AC%C3%A2%E2%80%9E%C2%A2s- afraid-philippine-cinema.

69 This is not a situation specific to the Philippines. Bangkok-based filmmaker Aditya Assarat has noted, "For us [independent] filmmakers in Thailand, a theatrical release is more for the heart than for revenue—our market is Europe with other bits here and there." Quoted in Shackleton, "How Independent Filmmakers in Southeast Asia Are on the Rise."

70 For an analysis of how filmmakers use terms like "feudalism" and "revolution" to discuss independent cinema, see Campos, *End of National Cinema*, 225–26.

71 R. S. David, *Nation, Self and Citizenship*, 266.

72 David surmises, "Our collective representations beyond the family are blurred, and we do not see the nation-state as possessing any moral authority over us." R. S. David, *Nation, Self, and Citizenship*, 281. Similarly, in an essay titled, "Toward a Community Broader than the Kin," the sociologist Fernando Nakpil Zialcita poses analogous questions regarding the nature of community in Philippine culture: "The kindred too, has constituted the moral universe of many Filipinos, whether in the lowlands or in the uplands." Zialcita, *Authentic though Not Exotic*, 40. Zialcita contends that the notion of a broader community called the Philippines was created as a reaction to and as an outcome of Spanish imposition, though this product of colonization was inevitably localized and transformed. The historian Mina Roces parallels this contention, arguing that *politica de familia*, or values of family solidarity, underpin structures of factionalism and patron-client ties. Roces, *Kinship Politics*, 185. The word "family" does not necessarily mean "household," the demographic definition; nor does it mean kinship per se, as ethnographers generally use the term; rather, to describe the political role of the family, Alfred McCoy offers the phrase "kinship network," described as "a working coalition drawn from a larger group related by blood, marriage, and ritual." McCoy, *Anarchy of Families*, 10. These ideas of kinship and national community are divisive subjects within Philippine studies scholarship, and while it is outside the scope of this introduction to discuss the extensive debates surrounding them at length, they merit mention here. Historians who emerged out of the martial-law-era Left, such as Zeus Salazar and Reynaldo Ileto, critiqued works by U.S. authors that blamed the failure of the Philippine state on Filipino values. (Salazar founded the Pantayong Pananaw school of indigenous historiography.) For example, in his provocative 1999 essay on Orientalism in American Philippine studies, Ileto contends

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

that these works frame Filipinos as doomed to failure, due to being ruled by passion and personal loyalties. His piece generated a range of responses, both supportive and critical. Ileto, "Orientalism and the Study of Philippine Politics." Priscelina Patajo-Legasto uses Ileto's critique as a framework for defining Philippine studies: see Patajo-Legasto, "Introduction." Critiques include Curaming, "Beyond Orientalism?"; Sidel, "Response to Ileto"; Claudio, "Postcolonial Fissures."

73 Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure*; Muñoz, *Disidentificaitons*.
74 Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure*, 88.
75 Halberstam, 88.
76 J. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, quoted in Halberstam, 9–10.
77 Macdonald, "Filipino as Libertarian," 430.
78 See also Azurin, *Reinventing the Filipino*, 99; Garrido, "Civil and Uncivil Society," 459; Pinches, "Working Class Experience," 186.
79 Tadiar, *Things Fall Away*, 265.
80 Hau, *Necessary Fictions*, 100.
81 Hau, 100. In this context, Hau is discussing the idea of the "Great Divide" in Philippine history, marked by Teodoro Agoncillo's watershed 1948 book, *Revolt of the Masses: The Story of Bonifacio and the Katipunan*. This was the beginning of a historiography of the Philippines that constructed Filipino society in both Marxist terms (as economically and socially divided into elites and masses) as well as nationalist orientation (as unified through national identity). It argues for the idea of nation as an ideal, if not realized, possibility, with nationalist discourse as a means to heal this rift.
82 Hau, 125–26. This nationalist imaginary is a stabilizing force, and this has won the argument some criticism. Charlie Samuya Veric particularly takes issue with what he sees as Hau's conflation of elite and underground literatures. See Veric, "Fiction of Necessity."
83 While Habermas himself later acknowledged the model's limitations, subsequent revisions have noted an underlying nostalgia for the public sphere as a forum for cultural debate, rather than cultural consumption. See the collections Robbins, *Phantom Public Sphere*; Calhoun, *Habermas*. For Habermas, the latter condition was brought about through the advent of mass media. But as film historian Dana Polan argues in an essay published in the initial wave of revisions, the capitalist public sphere has never been rational—rather, it is far more often grounded in spectacle and affect. In addition, as Polan points out, this condition is not necessarily antidemocratic. As this wide range of scholarship suggests, the public sphere's original formulation has long been established as an ideal type rather than a historical artifact. See Polan, "Public's Fear." See also Miriam Hansen's discussion of Kluge in her discussion of early cinema as an alternative public sphere in *Babel and Babylon*.
84 Crisp, *Film Distribution*; Lobato, *Shadow Economies* and *Netflix Nations*; Perren, "Rethinking Distribution"; M. Lim, *Philippine Cinema*.
85 Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere."
86 Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*.

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

87 These scholars' works oppose Habermas's original view of circulation as circular and tightly bound. For example, Janet Newman describes "the mobile, elusive, and problematic character of publicness." J. Newman, "Going Public."
88 Barnett, "Convening Publics."
89 Gray, *Show Sold Separately*.
90 Gray, *Show Sold Separately*.
91 The films I am speaking of here are the independent films that circulate primarily in international festivals. Other nonmainstream films like political news documentaries and activist works have much more successful dissemination within their own, localized networks. Tolentino, "Cinema and the State." These kinds of works do come into discussion in my examination of censorship in chapter 4.
92 Massey, *For Space*, 153
93 Massey, 168.
94 Online distribution is a possibility that filmmakers sometimes point to in lamenting the state of theatrical exhibition; experiments have been mixed. In 2014, controversy emerged when Cinemalaya film festival entries were surreptitiously uploaded to YouTube. See "Cinemalaya Films Uploaded to YouTube without Authorization," GMA *News Online*, August 10, 2014, https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/lifestyle/artandculture/374186/cinemalaya-films-uploaded-to-youtube-without-authorization/story/; Marga Deona, "Cinemalaya Movies Uploaded Online, Filmmakers Livid," *Rappler*, August 10, 2014, https://www.rappler.com/entertainment/news/65756-cinemalaya-online-angry-filmmakers. NETPAC, the Network for the Promotion of Asia Pacific Cinema, also tried digital delivery with AsiaPacificFilms.com, a website launched in 2010. The collection has since been integrated into the online, ProQuest-affiliated streaming service, Alexander Street. The Singapore-based Viddsee platform has taken up the mantel since 2013, exhibiting Asian short films in partnership with film festivals. Adapting festival language, the company held the Viddsee Juree Awards in the Philippines at the Film Development Council Cinematheque in Manila in 2018.
95 Quoted in de la Cruz, *Philippine New Wave*, 71–72.
96 Quoted in de la Cruz, 30.
97 Quoted in de la Cruz, 30. Bautista's more working-class background may explain his consciousness about these questions. His father was a policeman and his mother worked in catering. Bautista grew up in Cavite, a province outside Manila. See also Alexis A. Tioseco, "A Conversation with Ato Bautista." *Criticine*, January 30, 2006, http://criticine.com/interview_article.php?id=20.
98 The film was produced with a budget of less than $40,000 and shot in thirteen days.
99 The term itself is a portmanteau of the Tagalog words for woman (*babae*) and man (*lalake*). Manalansan, *Global Divas*, 25.
100 Oggs Cruz, "*Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros* (2005)," *Lessons from the School of Inattention*, September 25, 2006, http://oggsmoggs.blogspot.com/2006/09/ang-pagdadalaga-ni-maximo-oliveros.html.

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

101 Jay Weissberg, "A Short Film about the Indio Nacional (or The Prolonged Sorrow Of Filipinos)," *Variety*, March 19, 2006, https://variety.com/2006/film/reviews/a-short-film-about-the-indio-nacional-or-the-prolonged-sorrow-of-filipinos-1200517616/.
102 Quoted in de la Cruz, *Philippine New Wave*, 102.
103 This desire for international visibility can sometimes outweigh the desire to censor critical filmic representations. For example, the Singapore state initially censored and then approved Royston Tan's depiction of youth gangs, *15*, in a bid to seem tolerant to foreign eyes. See O. Khoo, "Slang Images."
104 Chow, *Primitive Passions*, 176.
105 Here, ethnicity plays a significant role, as Muhammed is Indian Malaysian, while the independent filmmakers are often, though not exclusively, from the Chinese Malaysian minority who have been pushed out of mainstream filmmaking by postcolonial government policy favoring the Malays, who were economically marginalized under colonization. Khoo sees the indie films' transnational appeal as a part of the films' deep humanism. G. C. Khoo, "Just-Do-It-(Yourself)."
106 Ethnicity is also a factor here, as Anderson points out that most of the Bangkok population is of Chinese Thai descent. Anderson, "The Strange Story of a Strange Beast."
107 Blanco, *Frontier Constitutions*.
108 In his analysis of media cultures in India, Rajagopal has described the Hindu public sphere as fractured along a split between electronic and print media, as well as English-language and Hindi-language print media. Rajagopal, *Politics after Television*, 208. The model he presents is, of course, very specific to the conditions of publicity within Indian media history. The split public marks a moment in which the "spectre of . . . unity remained as a politically potent weapon, even though it came to be acknowledged as an unrealizable goal" (151).
109 Chatterjee, "Beyond the Nation?," 169.
110 Ileto, "Towards a Nonlinear Employment," 101.
111 Ileto, "Towards a Nonlinear Employment."
112 Campos, *End of National Cinema*, 261.
113 When passages I quote come from people whose professional identities tie them with the public culture of film, I name them. Other passages emanate from more casual commenters, many of whose posts are no longer available. To offer them some anonymity, I put their usernames in the end notes but not in text.
114 Grainge, *Ephemeral Media*.
115 See Patajo-Legasto, "Discourses of 'Worlding.'" The most widely read critique of Orientalism in American work on the Philippines is Rey Ileto's "Orientalism and the Study of Philippine Politics." For responses to this work, see Sidel, "Response to Ileto"; Azurin, "Orientalism?"; Curaming, "Beyond Orientalism?"; Hau, "Privileging Roots and Routes."
116 Behar, *Vulnerable Observer*.

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

117 See, for example, Caroline Hau's critique of the Filipina American author Jessica Hagedorn's much lauded novel, *Dogeaters*. For Hau, the novel works from a position of exteriority, trading depth for surfaces. Hau, "Dogeaters."

118 In some ways, this mixture of critical distance and emotional proximity resonates with the "aca-fan" discourse introduced by Henry Jenkins and developed by scholars like Alexander Doty, Abigail De Kosnik, and Jason Mittell. The aca-fan combines academic intellectualism and emotional engagements, but the engagement is primarily around fictional media worlds, and the main form of affective engagement is pleasure, though Mittell has recently countered this with the idea of the "anti-fan." See Jenkins, "Acafandom and Beyond: Confessions of an Aca-Fan," September 30, 2011, http://henryjenkins.org/2011/09/acafandom_and_beyond_alex_doty_1.html.

119 Abu-Lughod, "Writing against Culture," 466.

120 Teddy Co, interview by the author, May 2010.

121 The U.S.-based International Intellectual Property Alliance removed the Philippines from the USTR piracy watch list in 2013. Ben Arnold O. De Vera, "US Anti-Piracy Lobby Wants Philippines Stricken Off Washington's Watch List," *InterAksyon*, February 11, 2013, http://www.interaksyon.com/business/54764/us-anti-piracy-lobby-wants-philippines-stricken-off-washingtons-watch-list.

122 They were murdered in a botched robbery. Author Laurel Fantauzzo wrote a nonfiction book about them, *The First Impulse*. The title of this book is from Alexis's open letter to Nika, in which he wrote, "The first impulse of a good critic must be of love." Titled "The Letter I Would Love to Read to You in Person," the letter was published in *Rogue* magazine's July 2008 issue. The Asian film magazine *Nang* published a special online issue dedicated to the couple on the tenth anniversary of their deaths. See Ben Slater, "2009–2019," accessed May 10, 2020, *Nang*, https://www.nangmagazine.com/ten-years-after/.

123 No arrests have been made.

Chapter One. Revanchist Cinemas and Bad Audiences

Epigraph: Elvin Valerio, "An Interview with Brillante Mendoza," *ASEF culture 360*, November 30, 2011, http://culture360.asef.org/film/an-interview-with-brillante-mendoza-part-1/.

1 Special economic zones (SEZs) are free-trade zones and free ports that operate under different laws than the rest of the country. For a perspective on gendered labor and the SEZ status, see Gonzalez, "Military Bases."

2 Mendoza's films are among those most associated with the "poverty porn" label. See Gonzaga, "The Cinematographic Unconscious of Slum Voyeurism." Mendoza became the cinematic mouthpiece for Rodrigo Duterte upon the authoritarian president's 2016 election, shooting the State of the Union address in a strange mix of extreme angles and close-ups.

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS