

# Reading The Critical: Film Critical Practices of the Manunuring Pelikulang Filipino and the Young Critics Circle

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**F**ar from being negative in the sense of disparaging or, condemning, the practice of criticism is inherently an entreaty to progress. There is always an implied error or mistake, a fault, absence, failure or misgiving whenever criticism is undertaken. Criticism is analysis: a practice of breaking down the whole into its parts; examining the components; probing the causes, effects, and implications. Yet precisely because flaws are revealed, we manifestly elect standards and these standards refer to forces that determine the making of the object of criticism. Criticism's severity, therefore, is also its salvation.

Film is a dynamic field for the study of critical practices. This is the so-called national pastime of a viewing public lured by the popular. Its tremendous influence on the lives of its audience makes it a valuable object of study. What does a film *film*? How are we to characterize the people who consume its representation? The activity of watching a film is a human practice of experiencing ourselves.

This paper studies Philippine film critical practices by the two main critics' organizations in the country – the Manunuring Pelikulang Pilipino (MPP) and the Young Critics Circle (YCC) – in the hope of essaying a preliminary view on the history and

historiography of Philippine film criticism. Academe-based critics are the subject in that their position of power – the critical role of schools in knowledge production – seriously affects the understanding of films on a continuing level. Pierre Bourdieu's elaboration on the notion of *habitus* as “structuring structures...which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations in order to attain them” (53) is significant in this regard. It draws attention to the penetrating hold of academic discourse in film and cultural reception.<sup>1</sup> These critics' groups are the most organized in terms of advocacy, critical output, and institutional supervision. To read the critical in this regard is to examine the ways in which the critics under study position themselves apropos art and society.

Political criticism is a challenge, not only for the aforementioned critics mention, but for anyone who watches film. Following the practice of analysis, the critic assembles reality as we view it and reorders the scheme of things according to his project of foisting the most feasible truth and the most incontestable reality the world of film and the world in film deal with.

## Beginnings

According to the volume on *Philippine Film* of the Cultural Center of the Philippines *Encyclopedia of Philippine Art (Vol. 8)*, film criticism only began in the 1960s. Before this, there were merely disparate publications such as those by Delfin Gamboa on Filipino directors and Vicente Generoso's *Movies and Public Interest* (108-109). A survey of films in the years 1960 and 1961, literary critic Bienvenido Lumbera's “The Tagalog Film and the Logic of Irony”<sup>2</sup> was the first piece published in an academic journal. Newspapers such as the *Manila Chronicle* had, in the second half of that decade, printed reviews by Nestor Torre, Behn Cervantes and Ishmael Bernal who later on became pioneering directors. As for wider audience reach, Clodualdo del Mundo, Jr. wrote for the komiks magazine *Pilipino Reporter* (108).