

Camera EDSA Obscura

JPaul S. Manzanilla

Twenty years after the EDSA uprising, 20 independent filmmakers created 20 films showing different images of the country. Ending the project with the film *Mistulang Kamera Obskura*, the omnibus film project self-critically staged its representation of the social and the political. The camera obscura has a long and fraught history as a metaphor of ideology, most prominently broached by Marx in his discussion of being, consciousness, and ideology. This paper discusses the relation of the camera obscura to discourses of visibility, knowledge, and ideology. Reading the moving images as concretizations of ideas, it seeks to limit those ideas as constitutive of the various ideologies of the EDSA uprising which the filmmakers represent in the process of “depicting truthful images of the nation.”*

Keywords: EDSA, image, nation, independent cinema, camera obscura, history, ideology, the youth, people power, memory

*Dahil ngayon,
tayo ay nilimot ng kahapon.*

--Minsan, Eraserheads

The cinematic project *ImaheNasyon* ends with the film *Mistulang Kamera Obskura* (“like a camera obscura”). We are presented with an old man locked up in what looks like a prison cell. A flashback of his conversation with someone gives the meaning of the Latin term camera obscura as “*madilim, kulob na silid*” (dark, enclosed room). He peeps through a hole in the wall, scratches it for a wider opening and then light passes through. He sees a young man, crouching atop a box, imprisoned like him. With this uncanny piece capping the collective opus, the makers of *ImaheNasyon*¹ have offered a deeply imaginative approach to contemporary Philippine history.

What is interesting is that Karl Marx (1998[1845]) used the camera obscura to describe the work of ideology. His case for a materialist conception of history—that being determines consciousness—argues that our ideas emanate from our actual immersion in the world. This passage in *The German Ideology* raised controversy concerning ideology's relation to reality:

The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men – the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men at this stage still appear as the direct efflux of their material behavior. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of the politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc., of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc., that is, real, active men, as they are conditioned by definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness [das Bewusstsein] can never be anything else than conscious being [das bewusste Sein], and the being of men is their actual life-process. If in all ideology men and their relations appear upside-down as in a camera obscura, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from the physical life-process. (p. 42)

The falsity and deceptiveness that ideology embodies in this metaphor of the camera obscura poses significant problems on men's perception of reality and the actions which they have to take in changing that reality. *ImaheNasyon's* use of the camera obscura cogently draws attention to the reality that our understanding of EDSA and the nation's history is determined by ideology.

Camera Obscura: Vision, Ideology, History

ImaheNasyon's ending might be taken as a beginning. What the final piece does is submit the sense of sight conjoined with the camera apparatus as a “central intelligence in the apprehension of the social” and historical.² Foregrounding the image of the nation as resembling the work of the camera obscura, the filmmakers critically reflect on the artistic and technological determinations of their collective opus.

Vision is a conceptual kernel of the omnibus film and film itself is primarily a visual medium of communication. Visual images constitute the way filmmakers present their respective images of the nation and the motion picture is the choice medium of representing their imagination. In this sense, *ImaheNasyon* is suitable since film is a very popular form of entertainment. Tackling a serious historical event by means of a movie project would presumably reach a wider public than, say, purely verbal or print forms such as brochures detailing the importance of the uprising. The significance of vision in comprehending one's context has a remarkable history. For the film to end with a self-reflexive performance of staging vision as vital to historical understanding is to begin appreciating history through the moving image. It also highlights the process of making images as constitutive of imagining the nation.

It is to be noted, though, that the 20 films do not form a history of EDSA in the strict sense of being a record of a past event, but are, instead, the makers' approaches in understanding such history. For this reason, the camera is a necessary instrument for composing a visual text in the construction of a history of EDSA. Filmmakers see a historic event through the use of a gadget most attuned to their imaginative act. The camera is an appropriate apparatus because of its specific relation to the practices of representation. Its technological development is tied to a fraught history of representing self and reality and, in the framework of the film, society and history.

The use of the camera obscura is thought-provoking for it evokes the discourses of visual representation. Jonathan Crary (1994) discussed its development in Western thought based on the human subject's observation of the world and the consequent re-presentation of this world to and for the observer. According to Crary, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the camera obscura "was an apparatus that guaranteed access to an objective truth about the world" (p.25). The exterior world passing before the observer and it is the observer's mind that perceives reality. However, this sanguine view of an unproblematic, ever-progressing technique of positively representing the observed reality was challenged in the nineteenth century, when the human body entered the discourses of vision.

Martin Jay (1993) has pointed out vision's relation to knowledge, reviewing that "Western thought has long privileged sight as the sense most capable of apprising us of the truth of external reality" (p. 134). However, Jay adds, vision does not confer only truth and fidelity to the real, but is also capable of deception and falsehood: "In fact, if anything, confidence in the truth-telling capacity of vision in any of its various guises has become a widely reproached mark of ideological mystification" (p. 135). Analyzing vision's denigration in

20th century French thought, Jay identifies the following as objects of attack in the ocular-centric bias of ideology critique: “the totalizing gaze from above, the God’s eye view of the world, and the practices of surveillance and discipline to which it contributes” (p. 135), “specularity and speculation, mirroring and the metaphysics of reflection” (p.136). All these practices demonstrate that vision has been complicit in ideologies that repress modern men. When filmmakers declare that their goal is to “depict a truthful image of the nation” (Bautista, 2006), viewers must be cognizant of how the images they see are, indeed, ideology-laden.

Images are the constitutive elements of ideology. W.J.T. Mitchell (1986) explains that ideology is deeply connected to the image:

The concept of ideology is grounded, as the word suggests, in the notion of mental entities or “ideas” that provide the materials of thought. Insofar as these ideas are understood as images—as pictorial, graphic signs imprinted or projected on the medium of consciousness—then ideology, the science of ideas, is really an iconology, a theory of imagery. (p. 164)

Analyzing ideologies, then, entails looking at the ideas that become visible or, more broadly, sensible (for we are dealing not only with sights but also the simulations of other sensations by the two-dimensional medium of film) through images. Mitchell himself says that in his historical analysis of the figurative language which disputes in the theory of ideology employ, he is following Marx’s “correct method for analyzing concepts” which is “the method of making concepts ‘concrete’ by turning them into images” (p. 160).³ In this manner, understanding the state of the nation in *ImaheNasyon* as specific ideologies of the EDSA uprising requires figuring out the images that the films construct. What do those images signify? What do they enact? If the central question of the omnibus is “What happened after EDSA 1986?,” then its project is to suture “nation” and the “people power revolution” indissolubly together, with the event as necessarily making an impact (positive or otherwise) on the nation’s society, politics, and culture. With the country’s present state causally linked to the EDSA uprising, the filmmakers’ answers to the question are presumably the ideologies of EDSA: what did it accomplish for us? How does the present relate to the past? Why is there a need to problematize the past’s connection to the present? These are just some of the questions that the project as a whole inevitably raises.

But first, what is ideology? According to Williams (1997), there are three broad definitions of ideology present in all Marxist thinking: (1) a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group, (2) a system of illusory beliefs—false ideas or false consciousness—which can be contrasted with true or scientific knowledge, and (3) the general process of the production of meanings and ideas. (p. 54)

The controversy over ideology's definition as false consciousness has been addressed in many ways. Williams himself says that "the analogy is difficult" because both the brain and the camera obscura rectify the inversion (p. 58). Jay (1993), on the other hand, differentiates the eye's vision and ideology in that "the mind, after all, has no problem setting its images straight, whereas ideology's inversions are not so easily dispelled" (p. 135). A different note is being sounded by Slavoj Žižek (1994), though, in recasting the category of falsity:

An ideology is thus not necessarily 'false': as to its positive content, it can be 'true', quite accurate, since what really matters is not the asserted content as such but *the way this content is related to the subjective position implied by its own process of enunciation*. We are within ideological space proper the moment this content—'true' or 'false' (if true, so much the better for the ideological effect)—is functional with regard to some relation of social domination ('power', 'exploitation') in an inherently non-transparent way: *the very logic of legitimizing the relation of domination must remain concealed if it is to be effective*. In other words, the starting point of the critique of ideology has to be full acknowledgement of the fact that it is easily possible to lie in the guise of truth. (p. 8)

The efficacy of ideology rests on its ability to hide the truth of its purpose. For example, it is not that we falsely see EDSA as the people's triumph against the dictatorship – for this is really the truth. It is that one (or the) truth of EDSA is that it is the political system's way of replacing a tyrant with someone from the same class of rulers, thereby ensuring the perpetuity of a system by ending the dictator's dream of perpetual rule.⁴

Critics trace Marx's description of ideology to the positivist, objectivist, and historicist thinking that there is a direct and positive access to reality. Louis Althusser (1994) identifies that Marx's conception of ideology as bereft of history is in a "plainly positivist context" (p. 121). He then theorizes that what is ideological is man's imaginary relation to existence:

[I]t is not their real conditions of existence, their real world, that 'men' 'represent to themselves' in ideology, but above all it is their relation to those conditions of existence which is represented to them there. It is this relation which is at the centre of every ideological, i.e. imaginary, representation of the real world. It is this relation that contains the 'cause' which has to explain the imaginary distortion of the ideological representation of the real world... it is the *imaginary nature of this relation* which underlies all the imaginary distortion that we can observe (if we do not live in its truth) in all ideology. (p. 124)

This conception of ideology as really imaginary gives reasons for the imaginings which the filmmakers perform as they strive to represent the nation. They relate to social conditions by imagining their own relations to them. Ideology is *necessarily* imaginary.

These putatively "negative" conceptions of ideology as mainly "false consciousness" and "imaginary relation" need to be scrutinized in how they *effectuate* certain conceptions of reality. While being indeed determines consciousness, one's consciousness of being can decisively transform or preserve that very being. Such a consciousness invariably develops with the imagination of one's relation with reality, an imagination that necessarily undergoes the process of imaging.

Reviewing the Nation, After EDSA

One may then appraise the all-too important historical ideological functions of the EDSA uprising in the discourse of the nation by looking at its images. The way these images are worked out through the process of imagining serve to illustrate the formation of ideology in showing, following Mitchell's (1986) reading of Marx, how "concrete concepts originat[e] in a concrete image" (p. 169). What is being attempted here is a tentative conception of the ideas of EDSA that are formative elements in the formation of ideologies. A rapid review of how the films image and imagine the nation within the limited space provided here, this essay limns the ideologies of EDSA and the nation through their images.

5 Minutes, the first film, shows a man waking up to sing the national anthem. The five minutes that it refers to is the usual five-minute snooze one cheats on a wake-up call, or perhaps the five-minute interval we do whenever

we sing the national anthem. A fitting opening to the entire collection, as when one watches a last full show in a public cinema, is this actual performance at the start of *ImaheNasyon*. Filmmaker Ogie Sugatan says that “in this film, I try to question patriotism and the Pinoy’s ‘Juan Tamad’ attitude” (Arevalo, 2006). The proverbial indolent Filipino Rizal pointed out more than a hundred years ago is here, too lazy to sing the national anthem, with patriotism shown as a cut-and-dried ritual for public viewing. This relates to *La Pula* when a man is roused from sleeping in his tent and a “native” suddenly appears, film reels coiling around the awakened man’s feet as music plays. The viewer observes the nightmare (of the film reels strangling the man) and then a painting of a *vinta*. The awakened man wears a native costume, faces a mirror and enacts a Lapu-Lapu versus Magellan fight. It is this kind of commentary on symbols and traditions that always invites a sneer from many audiences.

What may be gleaned is the identification of a nation with those of its symbols. The man who is hailed to sing the national anthem is, not surprisingly, the lazy man who is *the* Filipino. *La Pula* is a pun on the almost mythical figure Lapu-Lapu, the first Filipino who defeated a European invader. Contrary to governmental decrees on public ceremonies, the youth are digging at the insipidity of civic and culture lessons as they manifest how history itself has been degraded into caricatures. Objects and figures may serve as idols, totems, and fetishes, depending on how they are used.⁶ One danger faced here is that a crude reduction into objects – more than simply representing the imagined community of heroes, customs, and traditions – would replace the nation effectively. The two films may appear to be mocking the historical symbolic figurations of the nation, but presenting several objects in their identificatory relation with the Philippine nation provides an opportunity to precisely critique how those figures perform in our daily imaginings as a nation. The *vinta* perhaps serves as a fetish in that it comes to incarnate what we conceive of as “native” and, thus, “purely” Filipino. The flag and the anthem serve as totem in that they “regulate social identities and proper names” (Mitchell, 2005, p. 192). Lapu-Lapu conceivably serves as both idol (being an exalted figure in Philippine nationalist imaginary) and totem (our collective identification with his example of Filipino heroism). He may more problematically be a fetish in that he signifies what is for Philippine history a trauma of colonialism, of failing to sustain his heroic action in resisting the colonizer.

Other films, meanwhile, stage the multiplicity of images cohering into a single entity.⁷

In Neil Daza’s *Biyaheng EDSA* and EJ Salcedo’s *Talahib*, politicians are shown to be above the law and made prosperous by public office. *Biyaheng*

EDSA shows Our Lady of EDSA and Philippine flags as a holdaper (robber) escapes. Wounded from his crime, he rides a taxi and initiates a conversation with the driver as he dies. He asks “*may mga anak ba kayo?*” (Do you have kids?). He says his job is no different from government officials who steal and murder, but only people like him get apprehended by the law. This near-death remark, uttered as they speed away from the scene of the crime, judges the justice system of the country. The EDSA uprising itself was carried out to remove a thief in the highest office in the land yet graft and corruption continue because the nation’s biggest thieves are not punished. In *Talahib*, the softdrink can a young man sees on the road propels him to recall childhood playfulness. He used to play *tumbang preso* (hitting cans with slippers) with other kids in a remote grassy part of the village. While having a break, they encounter a candidate campaigning for public office. The film flashes forward to the present. The man who solicited votes before is now a politician inside his car, staring cruelly at the guy who obstructs his way. The dreaming child remains poor, now collecting recyclable materials to trade. The punctum that remains contingent with the before (childhood playfulness) and after (adult responsibility, need to earn money to survive) is the man’s abnormality, the winking eye: this eye that winks involuntarily marks his physical condition but also sneers at the bureaucrat’s incessant capitalization of poverty to enrich himself.⁸ The politician who steals the people’s money without the blink of an eye has no shame.⁹

How does one utter this fact of poverty and other social ills? How must a filmmaker, sensitive to a generational sensibility to be socially relevant, regard the pain of others? *ImaheNasyon* skillfully examines its own conditions of production by having the memory of EDSA grounded on specific places and times.

Articulating social problems with emanations of images presumably pertaining to the subject of revolt as in *Imagining EDSA* where the character contemplates atop a building overlooking the city. The man is confused, he hears the babbling voices of protest in EDSA 1986, and he thinks of many things but cannot see what is said to be “EDSA” – *’yong espasyong maliit na ’yon* (that small space). We are shown images of protests, a birthing of a child, and pictures of the past – disturbing images and sounds. Then suddenly he sees what is being called “EDSA.” Something is brought alive from within him. He knows that he will return to that place and will see the subject of his address. He just knows that he will do more things and has to pass by that place. This conjuration of EDSA by a young man takes on insane proportions not only because the historic event is a very imposing force impacting on his consciousness. Akin to the remembering that is being performed in *Tsinelas*, the mind here becomes

the arena (though tending to the metaphysical because it is bereft of the process of concretization of images/ideas) where reflection of the past takes place. This film articulates the camera obscura model in a particular sense for the man's mind serves as a dark chamber into which images from the past are projected.

Imagining EDSA resembles *Mistulang Kamera Obskura* in that both recall the past by means of reflection. In *Mistulang Kamera Obskura*, the past is brought forward through the instrumentation of the room as a camera obscura. In *Imagining EDSA*, the past is reflected upon in the protagonist's mind and images of it necessarily assume spectral characters: the sounds and visual images that haunt him in the present. In her reading of Marx's metaphorical use of the camera obscura, Sarah Koffman (1999) deals with its occult usage:

The camera obscura functions, not as a specific technical object whose effect is to present, in inverted form, real relationships, but, rather, as an apparatus for occultation, which plunges consciousness into darkness, evil, and error, which makes it become dizzy and lose its balance. It is an apparatus which renders real relationships elusive and secret... Thus, the camera obscura isolates consciousness, separates it from the real; enclosed, the latter constructs a sort of neoreality, analogous to that produced by psychotics. Marx characterizes this world as ghostly, fantastic, phantasmagorical or even fetishistic... The camera obscura of ideology simultaneously maintains a relationship to the real (which it reflects in inverted form) and occults, obscures it. The camera obscura functions like an unconscious which can, or cannot, accept the sight of this or that reality. What is it that ideology refuses to see? Who is refusing? What is missing, in the real, such that it cannot be recognized? (pp. 14-17)

Camera obscura, therefore, does not only refer to the literal dark room but performs as a metaphor for the reflection of a social and historical reality upon and into consciousness. Owing to isolation, the man can only call to mind abstract and fleeting images of the EDSA uprising. While trying to reach out to the past, his certain removal from that event, owing to his location in the present, obscures it. His attempt to form a historical consciousness necessarily conjures phantom-like images. This "presencing" of the past through its traces—phantom-like images and echoes—means that haunting happens

(the past lingers into, and could not totally leave, the present; thus rendering indefinite its status as the past) because justice is not carried out.

A similar thing happens in the dream-like *Silid* which exhibits a man painting on a canvass. A voice is heard while the man's shadow is cast in the background. Suddenly, someone cries for help. He opens the door but there's a wall outside it, a dead end. The canvass then transforms into a door showing the painter entrapped in glass. He adheres to the glass wall and moves as though trying to escape. The man who paints erases what is on the canvass and hears a knock on the door. When he opens it, a woman asks "*Tapos ka na ba?*" (Are you finished?) and says that he can now leave. Again, an attempt is made to represent what is being seen and heard but one is blocked by the overpowering presence of the object of representation which is seemingly absent, impalpable and, thus, un-representable. The artist can only try to represent but will never succeed as he is *nakasilid* (enclosed) in the room and inside the glass; he is imprisoned and removed from the outside world.

The spectral character of an ideological view of history and contemporary society that begins in *Mistulang Kamera Obskura* presents itself all throughout the collection in the form of phantoms, echoes, simulations, reflections, and repetitions. In *Ang Manunulat*, a writer is being closely watched. He walks in an old part of the city and is suddenly followed by a horse. A haunting scene emerges as he is stalked by a butcher riding the horse. There are many corpses lying on the street, and then there are ghosts. Death stalks the writer as he tries to fulfill his role. Perhaps alluding to threats on life confronted by writers working to expose the misery of their surrounding, this film by Topel Lee powerfully raises the question of 'commitment to represent' at the heart of every project. If the writer is the secretary of death (Berger, 1986), in the sense that he constructs a story out of the protagonist's death file handed onto him, the survival of the writer as protagonist in this film foretells a chronicle of precarious life obliging our utmost protection.

Perhaps the most trenchant critique of the nation's state is offered by Mes de Guzman's *Tsinelas*. It shows a street-cleaner with the strap of his slipper always getting unlatched as he walks and moves. The man looks afar and images of the past are flashed, such as the Mendiola Massacre where poor folk like him were murdered by the newly-constituted post-dictatorial government. Upon returning home, he cleans an old set of slippers and replaces the torn ones. Remembering here is enabled by a cessation of movement. What initiates the work of memory is an impediment in the literal forward movement of the poor man. Recall that torn and scattered slippers of peasants littered the scene of the crime at Mendiola, less than a year after Cory Aquino was catapulted into

power. Age-old issues surface and their lack of resolution impairs the forward movement of the present. In a hauntingly symbolic manner, de Guzman hints that progress may be achieved by working out and healing the trauma. Eduardo Cadava's (1997) reading of Walter Benjamin's conception of history focuses on the philosopher's idea that history is "constructed from images" (p. xxi). He identifies that, for Benjamin, photography is the technology which performs the work of history itself because of its arrest of images.¹⁰ It is salient to use Cadava's reading here because the past's remembering happens through a recollection of images enabled, once again, by the camera (with the movie camera developing from the photographic camera which, in turn, was developed out of the camera obscura)—footage of events in the past serving as ingredients in the making of history.

There were films that decide to depict EDSA by setting it in the micropolitics of the basic unit of society. Family members who fight among themselves are the focus of *One Shot* by Paolo Villaluna. The depiction of squabbles that take place at each happening of EDSA only demonstrates that nothing has changed. In the first uprising, husband and wife quarreled on its relevance, of how EDSA can deliver a new life for them. The film then shows the mid-90s electricity crisis hinting at an incestuous relationship between the father and his daughter. EDSA's iteration in January 2001 shows the family in dispute once again, over the children's requests. In the final and much-maligned EDSA Tres of May 2001, the wife leaves to join a game show that offers huge cash prizes. It ends in the gruesome murder of the father by his son who is resigned to their situation. EDSA's promise of change never happened because society's basic unit was never united. While family history ends in death in *One Shot*, it concludes in emptiness in *Nang Matapos ang Ulan*. The camera's frame shows the father leaving, followed by nothing happening within the frame. Then a mother leaves while a child is shown looking for something. Absence haunts what is supposed to be a crowded and warm family scene and dominates the motion picture.

One film, *Lugaw* by Milo Paz, utilizes the literal camera by putting on view media's intrusiveness on the plight of the poor. A neophyte reporter interviews a vagrant who gets free soup from a church charity activity. The poor man does not speak to him and evades his questioning. Forcing the subject to articulate his condition, the reporter fails to report anything and demonstrates his inutility. His work thus unfailingly reflects the failure of representation on the part of media itself.¹¹ The use of the camera in this regard is a fitting act for it renders visible the mass mediation of the masses and the fraught relation of that mediation with social transformation. Usually, the poor are treated as objects of curiosity and charity. When they do speak and revolt on their conditions,

the camera is pushed to the limits to adequately handle the situation, but fails miserably.

Other films articulate the social through comedy, a time-tested genre of social commentary.¹³

Performance and mimicry, which is also a kind of reflection, are staged in the music videos *Public Service Announcement* and *Aksyon Star*. The first admonishes freedom to express – *bawal mag-isip, bawal magtanong* (thou shall not think, thou shall not question) – as footage of social problems including the faces of *desaparecidos* and the equation *pera = karapatan* (money = rights) are flashed. The final words become an angry song of protest as it is the prisoner, facing execution, who sings the ironically upbeat line “that’s society...the high society rules.” When those on top of the social hierarchy lord over the impoverished majority, the subjugated usually express laments that are also fantasies of emancipation. In *Aksyon Star*, a lumpen sings a love song with the EDSA monument serving as his set. This film shows image-text news clippings of the past EDSA uprisings and an action-comedy cartoon depicting his emotional travails. His song is actually an apology for not being the typical action star that would redeem the love of his life: “*pasensya na, mahal/kung di ako ang action star/ng iyong mga dasal/pasensya na, mahal/kung di ako ang action star/na ibig mong mapakasal*” (I’m sorry, my love/for I am not/the action star of your prayers/I’m sorry, my love/for not being the action star/that you would love to marry). This music video criticizes that pining for action star redeemer among the people, which may be attributed to the rise of action star politicians, including Joseph Estrada and Fernando Poe, Jr.¹⁴

The omnibus reaches the points of conceptual labor and popular culture in its evocations of Filipino imagination. One other film tersely comments on the state of the nation by proffering a disgusting object to rebuke the fantasy production of beautiful images. *Barado* shows the relation of past to present through a man who uses the school restroom and recovers ugly remains used by a student from the past. The protagonist rushes to the toilet while a flashback to 1966 plays, where the class is preparing to interview the president. One of the students goes to the toilet, practices his interview, and composes the question “*Paano magkakaroon ng magandang imahe ng nasyon sa mga banyaga?*” (How can we have a good image of the nation to foreigners?) as he moves his bowels. Forward to 2006 when the man of the present time flushes the toilet bowl and finds out that his waste fails to pass. A *trapo* (dirty rag and, also, the Filipino derisive term for traditional politicians) blocks the duct. He removes it, swings the thing on the wall, and reads the question written on a piece of paper by the idealistic boy of 1966. The man nastily remarks, “*nasa inidoro, nangangarap!*”

(Dreaming while sitting on the toilet!). This remark raises the disjuncture of action and setting, of how ridiculous it is to dream while attending to the call of nature. In addition, one should not only dream or fantasize in the wrong place but, to the man of the present, the nation gaining a good image is just a fantasy. It also highlights the incompatibility of dreaming and bowel movement. What you desire is irreconcilable with what you expel. It fundamentally strikes a chord with viewers that the *trapos* (corrupt politicians) are the scourge of the nation and they thwart our progress.¹⁵ The survival of the *trapo* allegorically raises the question of a blockage that disrupts the smooth functioning of the system.

Almost everything in the human body, from the head to the feet, has been used to construct specific perceptions of the nation's images. In one sense, this responds to the limits of the camera obscura model. Privileging the body instead of an instrument (the camera obscura) radically changed the terms of human perception of reality. The camera itself is monocular while human vision is binocular. Crary (1994) identifies the "metaphysic of interiority" bound up with the camera obscura:

It is a figure for the observer, who is nominally a free sovereign individual but who is also a privatized isolated subject, enclosed in a quasi-domestic space separated from a public exterior world. It defined an observer who was subjected to an inflexible set of positions and divisions. The visual world could be appropriated by an autonomous subject but only as a private unitary consciousness detached from any active relation with the interior. The monadic viewpoint of the individual is legitimized by the camera obscura, but his or her sensory experience is subordinated to an external and pre-given world of objective truth. (p. 26)

Developments in the 19th century, especially in physiology and optics, put the body in central position in the perception of reality and effectively replaced the camera obscura model of knowing the outside world, that is, reality outside the human body. Johannes Müller's "doctrine of specific nerve energies" (Jay, 1994, p. 30) which argues that one cause would cause different sensations in the body's nerves (e.g., electricity generating the experience of light for the optic nerve and sensation of touch to the skin) renders arbitrary the relation between stimulus and sensation. According to Crary, the human body's "visionary capacities" (p. 27) developed to be the central element in a new conception of vision that ultimately replaced the camera obscura. He elucidates that

[t]he theory of specific nerve energies presents the outlines of a visual modernity in which the “referential illusion” is unsparingly laid bare. The very absence of referentiality is the ground on which new instrumental techniques will construct for an observer a new “real” world. It is a question of a perceiver whose empirical nature renders identities unstable and mobile, and for whom sensations are interchangeable. (p. 31)

The myth of the independent and isolated sovereign individual observer is therefore debunked. Man can no longer appropriate the visual world privately ensconced in his camera obscura (dark room). It is now the body, loosed upon the world, that becomes the agent of knowledge and, consequently, of power.¹⁶

It is interesting how this is played out in the collection because, curiously, only one actor (Ping Medina) and, hence, one body serves as protagonist in all twenty individual films. By using a single corporeal entity to act upon as central character in all the motion pictures, *ImaheNasyon* concentrates the apprehension of the social and political into this young man who most probably represents the Filipino youth. Here, the human body perceives his society by being deeply embedded in it. The human body which engages in actual conditions all throughout the omnibus attests that conceptions of the nation are grounded in the material reality of human relations; being indeed determines consciousness. The various perspectives presented in the films, at times seemingly disorganized and, in many cases, decidedly conceptual and self-reflexive in their representational practices, make it difficult to form a unitary vision of the nation. What is certain is that the past continues on to (by haunting) the present, its unresolved problems become obstacles to the moving on of the nation. Further, the present image of the nation can only be ideological because it takes mediation—reality is always-already interceded and intervened¹⁷ —to recognize it and such mediation relies on the fraught representational practices highly subjectivized by the human body that unceasingly tries to grasp the social and the political.

Conclusion

ImaheNasyon's use of the camera obscura in the final piece of the omnibus film project reflexively stages its own practices of representing history and social reality. Used in the observation of the world, Western thought considered the camera obscura as a prime instrument for accessing direct positive reality. It later on lost that prime status with the ascendancy of the human body in knowing the

outside world. Crary (1994) points out that “the collapse of the camera obscura as a model for the status of an observer [as] part of a much larger process of modernization even as the camera obscura itself was an element of an earlier modernity” (p. 33). If, for the makers of *ImaheNasyon*, the camera obscura performs as a conceptual means to reflect vision’s centrality in knowing one’s reality, then they may also be positing the significance of visualizing images as part of Philippine modernity. This modernity is exemplified in the anticipation of progress some time after EDSA. Nonetheless, it came to embody ideology’s inversion of social reality in human consciousness. This consciousness resides in the human body which comprehends the world by being deeply immersed in it. Concluding the collaborative work with *Mistulang Kamera Obskura*, the filmmakers set out that their creations are ineluctably ideological conceptions of Philippine social reality. Ideology is not a malevolent thing but is a distinct set of ideas which images concretize. The moving images (motion picture) that the filmmakers have made are the constitutive elements of the ideologies of the nation and revolution that they construct in responding to the challenge of “depicting a truthful image of the nation” 20 years after EDSA.

What the 20 films demonstrate is that the present state of the nation is tethered to the EDSA uprising. The survival of the past in the present—its living on—explains the (im)possibility of progress expected to have happened as the consequence of ousting a tyrant. One thinks of Walter Benjamin’s (1999) admonition on the concept of progress in this regard as he argues that “the concept of progress must be grounded in the idea of catastrophe. That things are ‘status quo’ is the catastrophe. It is not an ever-present possibility but what in each case is given” (p. 473).

In many films, problems in the past remain unresolved, causing the country’s backwardness: worsening poverty, graft and corruption, family disunity and separation, political killings, showbiz politics, the insipidity of civic practices, and many others. Truth becomes the prime objective of all the filmmakers and they have used the movie camera, itself developed from the camera obscura, to reflect Philippine social realities based upon their ideological (because they are highly subjectivized) lenses. It is commendable that the films presented their own takes on the problems of the country. Mitchell (1986) raises difficult questions in his discussion of the rhetoric of iconoclasm centering on the appropriateness of the camera obscura as a model for ideology:

It [camera obscura] was appropriate only as a model of false understanding, that is, for ideology. Yet that is just the paradox of ideology: it is not just nonsense or error, but “false

understanding,” a coherent, logical, rule-governed system of errors. This is the point Marx captures in his stress on ideology as a kind of optical inversion. In one sense, the inversion makes no difference at all; the illusion is perfect. Everything is in the proper relation to everything else. But from a contrary point of view the world is upside down, in chaos, revolution, mad with self-destructive contradictions. The question is: what does one do with or to the inverted images of ideology? How does one imagine an iconoclastic strategy that is likely to have force as a means of dispelling or criticizing the illusion, getting outside it so as to struggle against it? (p. 172)

Tellingly, against the drive to make postcard-perfect images, the films are iconoclastic works themselves because they portray unpleasant images of the nation. It remains open to the varied viewing subjects of *ImaheNasyon* to imagine and carry out a strategy to get out of the illusion, in the process of changing reality itself. This is a challenge so that the next project of depicting truthful images of the nation will be an omnibus reflecting a genuinely progressive Filipino society.

References

- Althusser, L. (1994 [1970]). Ideology and ideological state apparatuses (Notes towards an investigation). In Slavoj Zizek (Ed.), *Mapping ideology* (pp. 100-140). London and New York: Verso.
- Arevalo, R. (2006, October). 20 after-EDSA shorts ignite 'Imahe Nasyon.' *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. Retrieved May 27, 2008, from http://showbizandstyle.inquirer.net/entertainment/entertainment/view_article.php?article_id=25232.
- Barthes, R. (1981). *Camera lucida: reflections on photography* (Richard Howard, Trans.). New York: Hill and Wang.
- Bautista, J. (2006). Philippine cinema's hope: Imahe Nasyon. (September 27, 2006). Retrieved May 27, 2008, from <http://bigredbakulaw.livejournal.com/12540.html>.
- Bautista, J. (2006, July 4). "Aksyon Star." Retrieved December 28, 2011, from http://bigredbakulaw.multiply.com/journal?&page_start=140&show_interstitial=1&u=%2Fjournal.
- Bautista, J. (2006, September 23). Omnibus film by 20 indie filmmakers launched!!! Retrieved December 26, 2011, from http://bigredbakulaw.multiply.com/journal?&page_start=140&show_interstitial=1&u=%2Fjournal.
- Benjamin, W. (1999). N [On the theory of knowledge, theory of progress]. In Walter Benjamin (Ed.), *The arcades project* (Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Trans.). Cambridge, MA and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

- Berger, J. (1986). *The secretary of death*. In Lloyd Spencer (Ed.), *The sense of sight: writings by John Berger*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Cadava, E. (1997). *Words of light: theses on the photography of history*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Crary, J. (1994). Modernizing vision. In Linda Williams (Ed.), *Viewing positions: ways of seeing film* (pp. 23-35). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Jay, M. (1993). *Force fields: between intellectual history and cultural critique*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Koffman, S. (1999 [1973]). *Camera obscura: of ideology* (Will Straw, Trans.). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Marx, K. & Engels, F. (1998 [1845]). *The German ideology*. New York: Prometheus Books.
- Mitchell, W.J.T. (1986). *Iconology: image, text, ideology*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Mitchell, W.J.T. (2005). *Totemism, fetishism, idolatry. what do pictures want?: The lives and loves of images* (pp 188-196). (2005). Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Project 28 Days. (1986). *Bayan ko!: images of the Philippine revolt*. Hong Kong: Project 28 Days, Ltd.
- Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271-313). Urbana and Chicago, IL: The University of Illinois Press.
- Williams, R. (1997). *Ideology, Marxism and Literature*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press..
- Žižek, S. (1989). *The sublime object of ideology*. London and New York: Verso.
- Žižek, S. (1994) *Mapping ideology*. London and New York: Verso.

Filmography

5 Minutes

2006

Viva Video, Inc.

Direction and screenplay: Ogie Sugatan

Cast:

Ping Medina *young man singing the national anthem*

Aksyon Star

2006

Viva Video, Inc.

Direction and screenplay: Sigfreid Barros-Sanchez

Cast:

Ping Medina *Young man*

Glenn Ternal

Caloy Santos Jr. *BJ Geokk*

Frank Caronna *Goon 1*

Miguel Pancho *Goon 2*

Jools Kalanyag *Goon 3*

Rene Guan *Goon 4*

| | |
|--------------------|---------------|
| Manie Magbanua Jr. | <i>Goon 5</i> |
| Jojo Mililante | <i>Goon 6</i> |
| Goldray Gallinero | <i>Goon 7</i> |
| Giovanni Esposito | <i>Goon 8</i> |
| Rene Fuentes | <i>Goon 9</i> |

Ang Manunulat

2006

Viva Video, Inc.

Direction and screenplay: Topel Lee

Cast:

| | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Ping Medina | <i>young man</i> |
| Malay Javier | <i>Unnamed person</i> |
| Karr Cotamorra | <i>Unnamed person</i> |
| Ting Diaz | <i>Unnamed person</i> |
| Cedric Hornedo | <i>Unnamed person</i> |
| Patrick Josef Asuncion | <i>Unnamed person</i> |
| Hector Macaso | <i>Unnamed person</i> |
| Andrew Topacio | <i>Unnamed person</i> |
| Carlos dela Torre | <i>Unnamed person</i> |

Barado

2006

Viva Video, Inc.

Direction and Screenplay: Robert Quebral

Cast:

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| Ping Medina | <i>Student in the past and present</i> |
| Bodjie Pascua | <i>Teacher</i> |
| Paolo Villaluna | <i>Student</i> |

Between Intersections

2006

Viva Video, Inc.

Direction and screenplay: Poklong Ananding

Cast: None

Biyaheng EDSA

2006

Viva Video, Inc.

Direction and screenplay: Neil Daza

Cast:

| | |
|--------------|---------------|
| Ping Medina | <i>Robber</i> |
| Rey Ramos | <i>Driver</i> |
| Jun Sabayton | <i>Friend</i> |

Imagining EDSA

2006

Viva Video, Inc.

Direction and screenplay: Emmanuel dela Cruz

Cast:

Ping Medina
Miriam Lacaba

Young man
Young woman

La Pula

2006

Viva Video, Inc.

Direction and screenplay: Roxlee

Cast:

Ping Medina *Young man dreaming and Lapu-lapu*
Malay Javier

Local Unit

2006

Viva Video, Inc.

Direction and screenplay: Tad Ermitaño

Cast:

Ping Medina *Young man*
Jepoy Santos *The buyer*
Bito *Family member*
Zeny Ferraz *Mother*
Karen A. Ferraz *Katang*

Lugaw

2006

Viva Video, Inc.

Direction and screenplay: Milo Paz

Cast:

Ping Medina
Bombi Plata *Beggar*

Mistulang Kamera Obskura

2006

Viva Video, Inc.

Direction and Srenplay: Raymond Red

Cast:

Ping Medina *Young man*
Pen Medina *Old man*
Raul Morit *Person explaining camera obscura to old man*

Nang Matapos ang Ulan

2006

Viva Video, Inc.

Direction and screenplay: Lav Diaz

Cast: None

One Shot

2006

Viva Video, Inc.

Direction and screenplay: Paolo Villaluna

Cast:

| | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Ping Medina | <i>Son</i> |
| Janice Jurado | <i>Mother</i> |
| Soliman Cruz | <i>Father</i> |
| Madeleine Red | <i>Young daughter</i> |
| Mara Paulina Adlawan Marasigan | <i>Daughter</i> |
| Eman Dayao | <i>Young son</i> |

Public Service Announcement

2006

Viva Video, Inc.

Direction and screenplay: R.A. Rivera

Cast:

| | |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| Ping Medina | <i>Twisted Halo</i> |
| Vin Dancel | <i>Twisted Halo</i> |
| Jason Caballa | <i>Twisted Halo</i> |
| Joey Odulio | <i>Twisted Halo</i> |
| Buddy Zabala | <i>Twisted Halo</i> |
| Monmon Lopez | <i>Twisted Halo</i> |
| Nestor Abrogena Jr. | <i>Terrorist</i> |

Silid

2006

Viva Video, Inc.

Direction and screenplay: Yeye Calderon

Cast:

| | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| Ping Medina | <i>Young man</i> |
| Camille Ansaldo | <i>Lady</i> |

Speci Men

2006

Viva Video, Inc.

Direction and screenplay: Ellen Ramos

Cast:

| | |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|
| Ping Medina | <i>Young man-turned-transvestite</i> |
| Bella Flores | <i>Beautician</i> |
| Elmo Redrico | |
| Mads Adrias | <i>Parlor girl</i> |
| Liza Jacinto | <i>Parlor girl</i> |
| Lanie | <i>Newspaper girl</i> |
| Eric dela Cruz | <i>Customer</i> |

Talahib

2006

Viva Video, Inc.

Direction and screenplay: EJ Salcedo

Cast:

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Ping Medina | <i>Young man paying tumbang preso with children</i> |
| Joaquin Cariño | <i>Magbobote, used bottle collector</i> |
| Rein Cortez | <i>Little Gary</i> |
| R.J. Reynaldo | <i>Bong Bong</i> |

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Madeleine Red | <i>Young girl</i> |
| Jayson Red | <i>Politician</i> |
| Luane Dy | <i>Vendor</i> |
| Kenjie Villacorte | <i>Magbobote, used bottle collector</i> |
| Karl Mendez | <i>Son of magbobote</i> |
| Gary Rada | <i>Politician's driver</i> |

Tawa

2006

Viva Video, Inc.

Direction and screenplay: Dennis Empalmado

Cast:

| | |
|------------------|------------------|
| Ping Medina | <i>Young man</i> |
| Yeye Calderon | <i>Stranger</i> |
| Camille Ansaldo | <i>Stranger</i> |
| Leonila Montilla | <i>Stranger</i> |

Tsinelas

2006

Viva Video, Inc.

Direction and screenplay: Mes de Guzman

Cast:

| | |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| Ping Medina | <i>Young man</i> |
| George Barraca | <i>Street sweeper</i> |

W.I.P.

2006

Viva Video, Inc.

Direction and screenplay: Lyle Sacris

Cast: None

Endnotes

- * An earlier version of this paper was presented to the panel on Media Studies at the Eighth International Conference on Philippine Studies (ICOPHIL) on 25 July 2008 at the Philippine Social Sciences Council, Diliman, Quezon City.
1. "IMAHE NASYON is a groundbreaking, conceptual omnibus film by 20 alternative filmmakers who were tasked to present their personal visions on national issues. It is underlined by a conceptual question asked by line producers Jon Red and Carol Bunuan Red: 'WHAT HAPPENED AFTER EDSA 1986?' In 2006 IMAHE NASYON attempts to answer the question. That question also became a thematic and uniting thread across the films, but each film is made of different cinematic genres that is representative of the filmmaker's style, stressing the concept that in spite of individual visions we share the same goal: to depict a truthful image of the nation" (Bautista, 2006).
 2. The term is derived from Patrick Flores' blurb (back cover) on Flaudette May Datuin's book (2002) *Home, Body, Memory: Filipina Artists in the Visual Arts, 19th Century to the Present*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press.

3. Introducing his discussion of the image, Mitchell makes clear that “[a]ny attempt to grasp ‘the idea of imagery’ is fated to wrestle with the problem of recursive thinking, for the very idea of an ‘idea’ is bound up with the notion of imagery. ‘Idea’ comes from the Greek verb ‘to see,’ and is frequently linked with the notion of the ‘eidolon,’ the ‘visible image’ that is fundamental to ancient optics and theories of perception” (Mitchell, 1986, p. 5).
4. According to a journalist who explains the EDSA political narrative, “[r]evolt became the only way to salvage the ‘moderate alternative’ – disposing of Marcos without chasing the cities further Left” (Project 28 Days, 1986, p. 12).
5. “Ideology is conceived as a pure illusion, a pure dream, i.e. as nothingness. All its reality is external to it. Ideology is thought as an imaginary construction whose status is like the theoretical status of the dream among writers before Freud... Ideology, then, is for Marx an imaginary assemblage [bricolage], a pure dream, empty and vain, constituted by the ‘day’s residues’ from the only full and positive reality, that of the concrete history of concrete material individuals materially producing their existence (Althusser, 1994, p. 121).
6. According to Mitchell (2005), one object may serve more than one of the three roles “depending on the social practices and narratives that surround it” (p. 188) and “totems, fetishes, and idols need not be works of art, or even visible images” (p. 189).
7. Between Intersections gives us numerous images of many scenes on a road while W.I.P. shows faces of various people. What we have in the former are various unrelated scenes like a cockfight, a street intersection, pig-butcherer, a rally, and a slum area. Later these are presented alternately as backward movement and present sights, with the screen divided in two frames. Director Lyle Sacris shares that in W.I.P., he “was trying to figure out a way to make a portrait that is representative of every Filipino from all walks of life” (Bautista, 27 September 2006).
8. Following Roland Barthes (1981) who thinks of the punctum as “this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me” (p. 26.). Barthes’s discussion, however, pertains to the photographic detail naming the “wound,” the “prick,” and the “mark” punctuating our look at a photograph, which is still, unlike moving images, which is the medium of film. I have used it here because the winking eye pricks our viewing.
9. The winking eye might also be a pun on the word “kurap” which sounds like “corrupt.” Winking the eye (pagkurap) serves to inform the corrupt official that his actions are being seen, by a playmate who knows precisely how he has come to enrich himself. It is a private pact between the two of them where secrecy of the crime, for the meantime, precludes the public official’s apprehension (arrest and, more significantly, anxiety and fear) by the law.
10. “As Benjamin explains, it is because historical thinking involves ‘not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well’ that photography can become a model for the understanding of history, a model for its performance” (Cadava, 1997, p. xx).
11. According to Paz, “[t]he statement I want to make with Lugaw is that in the end you have to be sensitive to your subject” (Bautista, 23 September 2006).

12. Applying Gayatri Spivak's critique of the ability of the subaltern to speak to this specific media practice, the poor man's speech can only buttress the media's exploitation of his pitiful condition by making him dependent on its apparatus, thus making him complicit to his very own exploitation. People like him need to speak for themselves within their own terms, perhaps using a medium that is rightfully their own. See Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. (1988). *Can the Subaltern Speak?* In Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (pp. 271-313). Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
13. *Speci Men* by Ellen Ramos exhibits a literal inversion through a sex-change operation performed by the hilarious Bella Flores. A guy buys a tabloid, follows a sexy lady into the parlor, is captured by Flores, and undertakes surgery. A broadsheet reads "female population soars" while a tabloid shouts "mga babae, dumadami" (females, increasing). Suddenly, our protagonist emerges as a pretty woman, smiling at the man who has just bought the tabloid and, thus, affirming the news with his/her biological transformation. This simulation of the real takes on a disturbing extent when traffic in human brain in Manila of 2072 happens in *Local Unit*. Brain drain, which happens with the migration of the educated workforce, does not transpire if, perchance, trade of the body's most important organ commences. In this film, creepy citizens emerge once their brain content is erased. A seemingly absurd situation happens in *Tawa* when disparate scenes cohere into laughter as a man pees on a wall, a used condom falls from the sky, and a man asks whether he can ask a question.
14. Filmmaker Siegfried Sanchez laments: "Twenty years after EDSA I, the worst thing it has created for the Philippine nation is that it made politicians out of action stars – thus forever declaring that the system has really gone to the dogs. What's worse than this is that it created a mentality amongst politicians that they, too, can become action stars themselves! The Philippine government, Senate, Congress, and probably soon the judicial system is now reserved for action stars and wannabe action stars. Thanks to EDSA I and Philippines 2000!" Bautista, Jude. (2006, July 4). "Aksyon Star." Retrieved (28 December 2011) from http://bigredbakulaw.multiply.com/journal?&page_start=140&show_interstitial=1&u=%2Fjournal.
15. Thinking that the *trapos* are "the" reason for our backwardness is also a kind of ideology in that it is a "social fantasy" (Zizek, 1989, p. 126). One step in the criticism of ideology which Slavoj Zizek advises is "to detect, in a given ideological edifice, the element which represents within it its own impossibility" (*ibid.*, p. 127). It is not that our country does not improve because of the *trapos* but that those *trapos* are mere symptom of our social disease. His discussion of the role of Jews in European society is instructive and applicable in a sense to our situation. "Going through the social fantasy" (of the *trapos* as the cause of our regression) necessitates "identification with the symptom," and so the corrupt politicians are the very "product of our social system" (p. 128), that we, in a serious way, are the cause of their continuing existence and their being says something about the truth of our way of life.
16. "The body which had been a neutral or invisible term in vision now was the thickness from which knowledge or vision was derived. This opacity or carnal density of the observer loomed so

suddenly into view that its full consequences and effects could not be immediately realized. But it was the ongoing articulation of vision as nonveridical, as lodged in the body, that was a condition of possibility both for the artistic experimentation of modernism and for new forms of domination, for what Foucault calls the “technology of individuals” (Crary, 1994, p. 34).

17. As Cadava explicates, “in the era of technological reproducibility, there is no space or time that is not involved in the reproductive inscription of images. This is why, Benjamin suggests, the techniques of reproduction increasingly can be said to replace living subjects with an “apparatus”—say, a camera—whose work of reinscription and recording demonstrates that there can be no ‘apparatus-free aspect of reality” (Cadava, 1997, p. 50). I have omitted Cadava’s reference to Benjamin’s work, contained in parenthesis in the original, in this direct quotation.

JPAUL S. MANZANILLA teaches in the Department of Arts and Communication, College of Arts and Sciences, University of the Philippines (UP) Manila, Ermita, Manila (corresponding author: jpaulmanzanilla@gmail.com).