

# Cinema and the Archives in the Philippines

Fittingly released at the cusp of Philippine Cinema's marked centenary, this special issue of *Plaridel* is a critical reminder that the country's archival crisis persists in its complexity. The archival litany of loss, the romanticism around it, and the call to action it demands (Del Mundo, 2004) need to be uttered and reuttered. The collection of essays in this issue, however, goes beyond that as it aims to primarily bridge the discursive gap between cinema and the archives in the Philippines.

There is a divide between those who think about archives and those who work in them, archivist and scholar Rick Prelinger (2019) asserts. This leads to a disconnect between how the archives are imagined and the ways they actually work. It forms a problematic discourse that limits the archival endeavor to custodianship, conceptualizes the archives as mere physical things and storage spaces, and treats archival objects as carriers of heritage rather than as mechanisms in the politics of heritage formation (Harris, 2002). There is then a need not only to address the dearth of local literature on cinema and the archives, but also to broaden, critique, and reframe our conversations around them.

In response, the selection of papers in this issue gives voice to archivists as both authors and subjects of Philippine Cinema's archival crisis and advocacy. Drawing from a range of disciplines, situated across changing sociopolitical landscapes, and featuring archivists, archives, and archival collections in various contexts, the essays collectively interrogate the breadth and complexity of this "frustrating history of an urgent task that cannot ever seem to be completed" (Cua-Lim, 2013).

The issue opens with Bliss Cua-Lim's critical and reflexive historiography of the closure of the Philippine Information Agency's Motion Picture Division. She reconstitutes institutional narratives and tensions by weaving a vast array of grey literature, archival materials, and oral histories. Through such, she illustrates how the archiving endeavor – its archivists and the collections they are tasked to preserve – is shaped by advocacy, perseverance, and survival through and amidst political entanglements.

Bernadette Patiño traces similar political entanglements surrounding the very notion of heritage and how it has framed and driven the audiovisual archiving movement in the Philippines. She historically points out and critically questions how various stakeholders continue to buy in and perpetuate the privileging of feature-length narrative films as de facto expressions of national heritage. This, she argues, consequently marginalizes the preservation of other forms of moving image works. Ultimately, she calls for the disruption of archival gatekeeping while cultivating diverse independent audiovisual archiving initiatives.

*Sineng Bayan* (People's Cinema) is a salient example of counterhegemonic audiovisual heritage and the focus of Rosemarie Roque's piece. The article centers on the documentary works of AsiaVisions Media Foundation and Alternative Horizons during the 1980s and the contemporary activities that aim to preserve them. She draws parallelisms between these political film collectives and community archiving initiatives as they share in the struggle and build coalitions toward national freedom and genuine democracy.

This special issue also includes a bold reconceptualization and vision of a rhizomatic archive brought forth by Nick Deocampo. Echoing points raised by the authors in this collection and that of its sister issue (Knee, 2018), Deocampo, influenced by Deleuze and Guattari, evokes an image of the archive that is open and fluid questioning rigid hierarchal structures.

Conversations around cinema and the archives in the Philippines can and have been mired in romantic notions of loss and yearning. Perhaps its Sisyphean character is sustained by grief and dreams. But as this collection of essays demonstrates, the archiving endeavor is driven and hampered by praxis as much as it is broadened and constricted by theoretical nuances. The archives do not exist in a teleological vacuum. The archivist has a voice. As Philippine Cinema enters its second century, may our conversations change and our actions with it.



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Issue Editor

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