

tagahangang nagtitinda ng sampagita, kung hindi man tuluyan nang simbolikong pagkalugmok muli ng isang babae sa mga pakana ng isang lugmok na lalaking mangingibig.⁵ Sa kabilang banda, gayunpaman, ang hindi tumaya sa ibayo ng tukso nitong madali (at kung tutuusin, may ilang ulit na rin) na pagbasa ay maaari lamang isang pag-urong ng kritika sa sarili nito, isang pagtatakwil ng krisis na isinasadiwa nitong praktika upang mapasimulan sana ang pagharaya ng mga kaibhan. Kung gayon, *kung* ang kritika ay susulat nang taliwas sa karaniwan, ang posibilidad ng pakikiramay sa pasya ni Dorina ay maaari lamang maisigagis: ang unawain ito, marahil, bilang kanyang taktika kasabay ng sariling ahensiya,⁶ na may puwersa ng kanyang debosyon bilang isang tagahangang kasangkot ang kanyang idolo sa isang hindi mapapatid na ekonomiya ng paghanga.

Samakatwid, maaaring ipanukala ng isa ang pagsulat muli ng nabanggit na sandali sa ibang paraan: sa halip na pag-urong, marahil ay isang paglalabis, tulad ng: ito ang sandali kung kailan ang tinaguriang copycat ay kritikal na pinatutunayan ang kanyang sarili bilang nalampasan na nga ngayon ang pinaghalawan. Sa ibang salita, sa sandaling ito ng waring pagsuko, ang pagtalikod ni Dorina mula sa pagiging superstar at tungo sa maaaring domestisidad ay sa katunayan kanyang pagpapaigting ng sarili sa ibayo ng anino ni Lavinia, ang doble sa pagbubukas ng kanyang sarili sa maaaring lansakan, hindi dahil sa payak niyang pagganti ng pagtatangi kay Nico, kung hindi sa nalilirip na kalakasan ng kanyang loob sa pasiya niyang humaraya at tumaya upang maangkin para sa sarili ang isang kinabukasan matapos ang katanyagan.⁷

Sa pag-awit kung gayon ni Dorina ng kanyang huling awit, sa pagtawag niya kay Lavinia upang samahan siya sa entablado upang maisabit muli sa leeg ng kanyang karibal ang isang kuwintas ng sampagita sa huling pagkakataon, at sa paghaya sa kanyang idolo na tapusin ang awit nang mag-isa, tulad ng ilang ulit na rin nitong nagawa noon—ang mga penultimang kumpas ng paglisan, sa kanilang karingalan, ay parikalang nakapaglalarawan kay Dorina bilang ang pinakabagay pa ring kanyang kasalukuyang tinatalikuran: isang superstar, na ang bombastikong drama gayunpaman ay nakapagsasalin sa kanya mula sa pagiging pigurang sonoriko tungo sa isang mapagkumpas. Iyon ay isang *aktres*: Habang marahang lumalakad si Dorina kay Nico para sa isang yakap, ang nailalahad ay ang sinematiko, na sinaliwan ng paawit na pagsasalaysay ni Lavinia ng pangyayari sa gilid ng entablado.

O, upang maging higit pang tiyak: ang nailalahad ay ang sinematiko *bilang* sinematiko, ang pelikula sa paghuhudyat nitong muli sa sarili bilang isa ngang pelikula. Sapagkat ang nagaganap ay isang pag-uulit kung papaano nagbubukas ang pelikula, samakatwid isang pag-amin sa isang banda ng isang pagsasara sa wakas: ang pinagmumulan ng saliw na awit ng eksena ay nasa loob nitong muli, tulad kung papaanong sa gitna ng sampagitahan ay natagpuang tumutugtog ang isang radyo. Subalit sa pagkakataong ito, ang tagahangang nagtitinda ng sampagita ay sa wakas higit

nang malapit kaysa kailanpaman sa kanyang pinakaiibig na idolo—ang sandali kung kailan titigil ang pelikula, ikukuwadro ang sandali sa isang bituin, at pasisimulang ilista ang mga nagsipagganap; ganap na kung gayon ang pelikula. Na nangangahulugan, marahil, na ang pinakapuso ng pelikula ay sa kung papaano, matapos ang lahat ng pangyayari, ang debosyon ni Dorina para sa kanyang idolo ay nananatili pa rin sa isang banda: siya ay isang bituing walang ningning sapagkat siya ay isang bituing hindi isang bituin, subalit isang bulaklak, may limang talulot at puti, isang pagpapahayag kung gaano humahanga ang isa.

- 1 Ang materyalidad ng pelikula bilang pelikula, at samakatwid hindi katumbas ng realidad, ay idiniriin sa pagpapahalaga ni Joi Barrios sa mga pelikula ni Cuneta: "Oo, pinapanood ko pa rin ang mga pelikula ni Sharon. Ngunit, hindi upang ako'y mag-ilusyong Sinderela ring gaya niya. Sa bawat pelikula, nauunawaan ko kung bakit nananatiling atsay, basurera, o martir na babae ang mga Pilipinang kasabay ko sa pila." Tingnan kay Barrios, "Kung Bakit Lagi Kong Pinapanood ang mga Pelikula ni Sharon Cuneta," sa *Kritikal na Espasyo ng Kulturang Popular*, pat. Rolando Tolentino at Gary C. Devilles (Lungsod Quezon: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2015), 285.
- 2 Tingnan ang pagbasa ni Bliss Cua Lim sa nasabing eksena bilang metonimiya ng kanyang tinatawag na "digmaang pangwika" ("language wars") sa pelikulang Filipino noong 1980s, sa "Sharon's Noranian Turn: Stardom, Embodiment, and Language in Philippine Cinema," *Discourse* 31.3 (2009): 337-44.
- 3 Roland Barthes: "Subalit mga bulaklak? Marahil ang esensiya ng luho, ng karagdagan: ano ang lumalabis o nagkukulang sa pagiging kapaki-pakinabang na bunga." ("But flowers? Probably the essence of luxury, of the supplement: what exceeds or falls short of being a useful fruit.") Tingnan kay Barthes, "Fleurs/Flowers," *How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces*, salin ni Kate Briggs (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 87.
- 4 Barthes, "Dédicace/Dedication," *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, salin ni Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 75-9.
- 5 Tingnan ang mga katulad na pagbasa mula kay Rolando Tolentino, "Sharon Cuneta at ang Perpetwal na Birhen," sa *Richard Gomez at ang Mito ng Pagkalalake, Sharon Cuneta at ang Perpetwal na Birhen, at Iba Pang Sanaysay Ukol sa Bida sa Pelikula Bilang Kultural na Texto* (Lungsod Pasig: Anvil Publishing, 2000), 63-81; at Cesar Orsal, "Sharon Cuneta: Ang Romansa ng Komiks Movies at Ideya ng mga Pangarap," sa *Movie Queen: Pagbuo ng Mito at Kapangyarihang Kultural ng Babae sa Lipunan* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 2007), 96-101.
- 6 Michel de Certeau: "Ang *taktika* ay isang sukát na kilos, tinitiyak ng kawalan ng isang angkop na luan... Kinakailangan nitong maingat na gamitin ang mga guwang na binubuksan ng mga partikular na dugtungan sa pagmamatyag ng mga kapangyarihang pang-angkop. Nagnanakaw ito mula sa mga ito. Lumilikha ito ng sorpresa sa mga ito. Maaari itong maging kung saan hindi ito pinakinaasahan. Isa itong mapanlinlang na lansi." ("[A] *tactic* is a calculated action, determined by the absence of a proper locus. . . It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the propriety powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse.") Tingnan kay De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, salin Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 36-7.
- 7 Tingnan ang pagbasa ni Neferti X.M. Tadiar sa naunang sinasangguniang sanaysay ni Barrios kay Cuneta, sa "Women Alone," *Things Fall Away: Philippine Historical Experience and the Makings of Globalization* (Lungsod Quezon: University of the Philippines, 2009), 97-102.

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SHAPING FILIPIN* REGIONAL C1NEMA:

FILM FESTIVAL PROGRAMMING IN CINEMA REHIYON

Katrina Tan



This essay examines Cinema Rehiyon’s contribution to the formation and development of regional cinema in the Philippines by looking at its festival programming. Cinema Rehiyon (CR) is an annual non-competitive film festival devoted to screening films collectively known as “regional cinema.” The latter nomenclature generally refers to films made in and about places outside Metro Manila, the film industry’s base. The festival benefits from being mainly funded by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) since its first edition in 2009. For more than a decade, CR has brought attention to films from different parts of the archipelago. In doing so, it has generated discourses on regional cinema that, in turn, provoke a rethinking of Filipino cinema.

In this essay, I analyze CR’s festival programming practices to identify the ways it has shaped regional cinema as a concept and a practice. I propose that CR can be understood as a crucial site in conceptualizing regional cinema and in influencing its production and exhibition practices. I argue that this festival has produced an evolving discourse on regional cinema that is anchored on its articulation of local specificities and sensibilities. CR programming emphasizes local cultural markers, such as setting, language, as well as authorship by filmmakers who have intimate links to regional places. Together with the textual elements, these markers convey the local sensibility in films that CR programmers

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CinemaRehiyon 2013 held at UP Los Baños.
Courtesy of UPLB PelikuLAB.

constantly look for. In addition, I argue that CR has helped sustain the practice of regional cinema by creating and nurturing a network of filmmakers, programmers, festival organizers, and audiences.

The essay starts with a brief discussion of CR’s history then analyzes its programming practices. The analysis focuses on how the selection process, curatorial policies, and resulting film programs have introduced ways of understanding and practicing regional cinema. Sources of data include the CR festival catalogues, Project Assessment Reports (PAR) written by NCCA monitoring and evaluation officers, and interviews with CR’s founding festival director, programmer, and the NCCA Cinema Committee members. I also rely on my first-hand experience of working in various capacities in CR as a regional programmer from 2010 to 2016, festival director in 2013, programmer for Luzon in 2014 to 2015, and a committee member from 2014 to 2016. As a festival insider, I am aware that this position affects the kinds of observations I make about the data. It informs and, to some extent, complicates my critical analysis of CR’s festival programming. Together, these data point to CR’s capacity to produce knowledge about regional cinema and, more broadly, enable a rethinking of Filipino cinema.

A ‘Practical’ Beginning

Conceptualized in 2008 by the NCCA Cinema Committee (hereafter referred to as Committee), CR has since been the Committee’s flagship project. Miguel Rapatan, former Committee Chair, describes its beginning as “practical rather than conceptual.” He relates that the Committee was asked to come up with a project in line with the National Arts Month (NAM) celebration. NAM’s theme during the inaugural CR in 2009 was *Ani ng Sining* (Harvest of Arts), and the Committee thought that a festival presenting a harvest of films from the regions suits this theme perfectly.¹ To gather films from the regions, the Committee sought help from region-based partners and funded local film festivals in Baguio, Naga, Bacolod, Cagayan de Oro, and Davao.² Some of these areas are home to established filmmakers—Kidlat Tahimik resides in Baguio and Peque Gallaga in Bacolod—while some have small filmmaking communities within and outside schools.

Rapatan and Teddy Co, the Committee Vice Chair and CR programmer, selected films from these festivals and programmed them in CR’s maiden edition in 2009.³ Films outside these local festivals were also programmed. Co enlisted regional features produced mainly by competitive film festivals in Manila, such as Cinemalaya Independent Film Festival and Cinema One Originals. These programming practices were retained in the succeeding festival editions.

The first two editions of Cinema Rehiyon were directed by Gabriel Fernandez and were held at the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP). Both carried the provocative theme *Alter Nativo: Films from the Other Philippines*. CR’s logo—three overlapping film strips forming an asterisk—similarly conveys a strong visual identity for the festival.⁴ It symbolizes the festival as an intersection of the diverse film communities around the country. CR’s identity, thus, positions itself as the primary exhibition venue for the often-neglected regional cinema. Fernandez conveyed the latter point in his stirring speech during the closing program of the first CR:

We regional film-makers have come far and wide to gather here at the national center of the arts, the CCP, to declare with our collective voices, said in various languages and tones, that regional cinema has arrived. We will no longer allow regional cinema to be relegated to the back pages in the annals of Philippine cinema. We come to claim what is truly ours: the right to be included in the national discourse on film. We have arrived and we are here to stay.⁵

Such sentiment would have resonated strongly among region-based filmmakers in the audience as most writings on Filipino film history have neglected accounts of regional filmmaking. For instance, the Visayan cinema, which was active in the 1930s until the 1970s, has been absent in many standard Philippine film history books.⁶ CR has, thus, been claimed as the site where Filipino film history could be rewritten.

On its third year, CR was brought to Davao City in southern Philippines, and since then, the festival has been hosted in different towns and cities in the regions: Bacolod in 2012, Los Baños in 2013, Cagayan de Oro in 2014, Cebu in 2015, Dasmariñas in 2016, Nabunturan in 2017, and back to Manila in 2018. After its 10th year, Dumaguete hosted it in 2019 and Naga, in 2020. In these editions, the festival consisted of feature and short film programs, panel discussions, fellowship and networking events, and a local tour. Invited filmmakers, festival organizers, programmers, and other guests would be flown in the host city or town to soak in hundreds of films and enjoy the company of their fellow filmmakers. Because each festival edition is different, each one presents a new festival experience. More recently, the festival has added side events for pitching and even a book launch. In my analysis, I demonstrate how these activities enable regional cinema to thrive and develop as a formidable component of current Filipino cinema.

As a state-funded film festival, CR is constantly in a precarious state because changes in leadership and policies can suddenly mean its end. It is highly commendable, then, that NCCA has supported it for more than a decade already. In 2015, however, NCCA’s commitment to the festival was put to the test when a change in policy stripped Cinema Rehiyon of its flagship status, removing it from the annual NAM celebration. At that time, NCCA restructured its competitive grants scheme and removed funding allotted to flagship projects. In the new scheme, unless someone submitted a proposal for CR in the competitive grants, NCCA would not fund it. The Committee decided to continue conducting the festival and refused to demote it from its flagship status. Its members wrote a position paper addressed to the NCCA Board of Commissioners asking for funding and explaining why NCCA should continue supporting CR. It helped that

the Project Assessment Reports (PAR) contain generally positive evaluation of previous festival editions. Fortunately, NCCA listened and allotted funding for the festival that year. It was held in Cebu City in August, several months after its usual February schedule.

In the following year, CR faced another threat as a change in application procedures made it impossible for many organizations, groups, and individuals to apply for NCCA grants. Because of the national controversy on fraudulent disbursement of funds to non-government organizations and foundations, the Commission on Audit required all organizations asking funds from government agencies to obtain certification from the Department of Social Welfare and Development. But in order to get this certification, an organization has to submit documents that take a long time to accomplish. The next host of Cinema Rehiyon failed to accomplish this new requirement, so they had to give up on hosting the festival. The Committee, however, wanted to conduct the festival, especially after the threat of discontinuing it the previous year. The Committee managed to find an eligible organization to host it, and Cinema Rehiyon was held in November 2016 in Dasmariñas City, Cavite. These two instances show that while having state funding is advantageous, relying on it can threaten its continuity due to sudden policy changes and bureaucratic politics.

After more than a decade of existence, Cinema Rehiyon has developed an audience for regional cinema comprised mainly of students, filmmakers, programmers, and cineastes. The large attendance of students could be attributed to the fact that CR, which is a publicly-funded festival, offers free film screenings. Its highest record of audience attendance was almost 10,000 when it was held in the university town of Los Baños in 2013.⁷ This was the first time that CR had two screening venues to accommodate the growing number of regional films programmed in the festival. More screens were added in the succeeding festivals—a sign of regional cinema’s continuous growth.



Juliet Cuizon (second from left) from Dumaguete accepts the torch from Cinema Committee Chair Teddy Co (left) and Jag Garcia (right). Photos from Cinema Rehiyon Facebook page, unless noted.



Cinema Rehiyon 2019 poster.



As part of its festival program, CR holds post-screening discussions with filmmakers.

Film Festival Programming

As the “core activity of film festivals,” programming enables film festivals to produce knowledge on cinema and shape audience’s experience of it.⁸ Peter Bosma describes programming as the “activity of selecting films and scheduling them purposefully for screening to an audience, whether at a film, theatre, film festival or film archive.”⁹ This description captures the basic tasks involved in programming, but this activity involves complex processes performed by festival programmers in selecting and scheduling films. Roya Rastegar explains that programming involves editorial and curatorial processes. She relates that the editorial stage requires sifting through a large pool of submissions to narrow down the number of films for consideration. In the curatorial stage, the festival programmer selects the festival line-up of films and arranges it in programs.¹⁰ In both instances, the festival programmer evaluates the film’s quality, and several factors influence her final selection.

Perhaps foremost of these considerations is choosing films that address the festival’s mission. The programmers’ cinematic knowledge and taste also play a part in this regard.¹¹ In bigger international film festivals, commercial sales agents who hold authority over the film rights are another factor.¹² The final festival line-up is, thus, a product of complex interplay of subjectivities, taste, and the business of cinema.

Programming varies in purpose depending on the festival’s nature. For instance, big international film festivals, like the ones in Cannes, Venice and Berlin, serve as “cultural gatekeepers” that shape global cinematic trends.¹³ These competitive film festivals shine light on new auteurs or ‘new waves’ in world cinema. They also influence film distribution by disrupting it.¹⁴ Smaller, specialized festivals, like CR, operate differently, however.

Some festivals aim to challenge stereotypes¹⁵ or diversify the kinds of representation in mainstream media.¹⁶ In CR’s case, programming has aimed to challenge the privileged position of Tagalog cinema in Filipino cinema

discourses. This relates to Rastegar’s point that film festivals can contest “exclusionary formations of film culture.”¹⁷ CR showcases various cinematic expressions and circulates new representational and aesthetic practices, opening up Filipino cinema to become more inclusive. Moreover, the festival participates in the formation of Filipino national cinema. Liz Czach argues that “film festival programming informs canon formation” in a nation’s cinema and as such, it functions as one of the mechanisms that defines a national cinema.¹⁸ CR programming can, thus, be considered as a form of “cultural intervention.”¹⁹ The festival intervenes in Filipino film culture by introducing regional cinema and locating the latter’s place in the country’s cinematic discourse.

Shaping Regional Cinema

CR’s festival programming has shaped regional cinema in two ways. First, it helped sustain this cinema, not only by providing a regular exhibition space, but by nurturing a network of filmmakers, festival organizers, and programmers. Second, it has generated an evolving discourse on regional cinema anchored on its articulation of local specificities and sensibilities. In the next sections, I discuss the programming practices that illustrate these points.

Nurturing a Network of Regional Cinemas

Even in the early years of CR, regional film communities have played a role in festival programming. As mentioned earlier, local film festivals serve as catchment for films that can be programmed in CR. In 2010, the Committee on Cinema put up the Cinemas in the Region program, which funds several of these festivals. This program is distinct from Cinema Rehiyon film festival, but it serves an important role in CR’s programming – it is where films are first gathered and selected.²⁰ Other film festivals not funded by NCCA also play this role. In this respect, regional film programming relies



Cinema Rehiyon’s festival program includes other events such as the concept pitching held during its tenth edition in 2018.

on what Rastegar calls a “deeply collective approach”²¹ and a “democratized process”²² since the film selection depends on its archipelagic network of film festivals. Aside from this, however, this network also forms a secondary circuit where regional films can circulate. Films from one local film festival can be programmed in several others, thus, expanding their audience reach.

As film catchments for CR, regional film festivals demarcate their scope based on geographical boundaries. For instance, the Cinemagis film festival in Cagayan de Oro City accepts entries from directors working in northern Mindanao. Some festivals cover a broader scope, such as the Mindanao Film Festival held annually in Davao City. It accepts entries from all over Mindanao, so its scope covers that of the other festivals on the island. In other instances, regional film festivals consider a shared ethnolinguistic identity as basis for their scope. One example is the Binisaya Film Festival in Cebu City, which accepts film entries that use the Binisaya language spoken in the Visayas islands and some parts of Mindanao. Others are themed, such as the Ngilngig Film Festival in Davao City that specializes on short horror films, and the Sinulog Film Festival, which shows religious-themed films. The variety of these festivals corresponds to a variety of programming practices bound by festival guidelines, competition rules, and taste of programmers and jury members serving in these film festivals. These film festivals applying different programming practices ultimately affect CR’s festival programming.

Most NCCA-funded regional film festivals are competitive in nature. Because they receive funding from NCCA, these festivals can give out prize money to the winners. Their competitive nature ensures that short films submitted in the next programming stage of CR have reached a certain quality. These films also abide by certain demands of local film festivals—some require themes specific to a regional place or the use of local language. After eligible directors submit their films, the festival either has an in-house selection

committee, or it convenes a selection jury. From the submitted entries, the assigned panel selects the finalists which will compete in the festival. Then, the programmer arranges the films in film programs and schedules the screening. During the festival proper, a jury comprised of invited filmmakers, actors, NCCA Committee members, critics, and scholars evaluates each film and chooses the festival winners. Prizes include Best Film, Best Screenplay, and awards for technical excellence: Best Editing, Best Cinematography, Best Sound, Best Production Design. Some festivals give awards for outstanding performances of actors. Others hand out a Jury Prize award. Winners of the festival’s top prize are automatically programmed in CR. Then, the regional festival directors submit other outstanding films in their festival, usually the other winning films, to CR’s festival programmer.²³ In this stage, the regional film festival acts like a clearinghouse for short films.

The second stage in CR programming commences when the festival programmer receives the films from the regions. In its first three years, Co served as the main programmer who gathered all films and made the final call on which films to include and exclude. From 2012 to 2017, CR had more festival programmers, with one or two assigned to make the final film selection for each major island grouping: Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. This programming structure was inaugurated in CR 2012, which had the theme, Empowering Regional Cinema. The more democratized nature of festival programming was seen to empower the regions as regional curators select films for the festival line-up. The curatorial policy formalized in 2011 declares its adherence to empowering regional programmers. It gives them “the freedom to thresh out the selection process unique to each region and in a process that will best serve the subregions.”²⁴ This statement implies that regional programmers can assess a film better since they understand its cultural context, and they can locate it within regional filmmaking trends. In other words, programmers can ascribe cultural value to films aside from the critical capital that Czach proposed.²⁵

Emphasizing Local Specificities and Sensibilities

CR programming has defined regional cinema in relation to its articulation of local specificities and sensibilities. This emphasis on cinema’s relation to a local place is apparent in both formal and informal curatorial guidelines applied in CR programming. In a personal interview, Co outlined four criteria he used when selecting films to be programmed. In determining whether a film can be considered “regional,” it should (1) be set or shot outside Manila, (2) use local language, (3) have a director who is connected to a regional place, and/or (4) contain a regional point of view. Co considers the last as the “supreme, most important” criterion among the others. He explains this concept as something that can be felt or discerned while watching the film. Co cites a Polish-directed film as an example which uses Ilonggo spoken in

Bacolod, where the film was shot. He relates that some film crew members were from Bacolod, too. He considers these regional elements enough for him to judge that film as containing a regional point of view.²⁶

Co’s idea of regional point of view is similar to the local sensibility that the formal curatorial policies developed in 2011 emphasized. These guidelines, which was meant to inform the programming team in 2012, was democratized and conveyed a more flexible understanding of what can be considered regional films. In this new framework of regional cinema, sensibility becomes one of its defining characteristics. While the cultural markers that Co mentioned remain crucial determining factors for a film to be considered regional, the new policy gives a leeway for films that do not contain all of them. The guidelines state that films reflecting “the spirit, voice and color of the region” can be programmed even when they do not use the local language or are made outside the filmmaker’s home region.²⁷ Another condition set in the guidelines is if the films exhibit “the sensibilities of the filmmaker’s region or...the sensibilities of a regional filmmaker.”²⁸ However, what “sensibility” means in this context and how it is determined are not explicitly stated in the curatorial policy.

By looking at the cited passage above, one can deduce that regional filmmakers can acquire sensibility of a place other than their own. Filmmakers can imbibe a region’s sensibility by doing research on and immersing in the local culture.²⁹ In CR’s early editions, programming reflected this idea as illustrated by the inclusion of Tara Illenberger’s *Brutus: Ang Paglalakbay* (2008) in the program. Shot on Mindoro Island by a Manila-based Iloilo-native, filmmaker, the film is about Mangyan children smuggling logs from the mountains to the lowlands. *Brutus* demonstrates that a filmmaker who is a cultural outsider to the place she is filming can indeed learn about a region’s particular realities and present it with fidelity in a film. In addition, the short films programmed in the Crossing Regions section in CR attest to the capacity of filmmakers to imbibe local sensibility of a place outside their own hometown. This program shows films shot by directors in places outside their own region and may be about cultures different from their own.³⁰

The guidelines suggest, moreover, that regional filmmakers embody a sensibility, which manifests in the films they make no matter where they make it. In this case, sensibility is seen as something that sits deep within the regional filmmaker. This view considers the centrality of the film’s authorial aspect in determining a regional film. It works under the assumption that because sensibility is embedded within regional filmmakers, they will always produce films that are “regional.” This expands regional cinema’s definition, one which relates to an understanding of cinema as created by auteurs.³¹ As stated in its curatorial policy, CR’s first objective—to “develop and promote the regional filmmaker and showcase their works on a national-level”—supports this

view.³² The policy defines a “regional filmmaker” as someone who is either based in the regional cities or provinces working with the local filmmaking community in making their films.

In addition, a regional filmmaker may be based in Metro Manila “but have regular engagements with their home provinces and regions beyond simple residency.”³³ These “regular engagements” presumably maintain the filmmaker’s regional sensibility. To illustrate, *Amok* (2011) is a film set in Manila about the intertwining lives of its lower-class residents. Directed by Manila-based Lawrence Fajardo, the film was programmed in CR 2012, when it was held in the director’s home province of Negros Occidental. Vicente Groyon supposes that the film’s inclusion “was presumably predicated in Fajardo’s roots, and continuing professional connections, in Negros Occidental.”³⁴ While it is arguable that *Amok* has the Negrense sensibility, its inclusion in the festival line-up indicates that regional film’s authorial aspect has defined “sensibility” in this instance.

For the audience, the way they discern local specificities and sensibilities is through the arrangement of film programs. For many years, CR has programmed films according to geographical categories, i.e. it screened films coming from the same city, province, or region in one program. This way, the audience gets to view different facets of regional places through the films. Each festival day is dedicated to films of one major island grouping. For example, films from Luzon will be shown on Day 1, from Visayas on Day 2, and from Mindanao on Day 3. Within each day, the film programs are arranged by regions, provinces, or regional film festivals. To illustrate, a day for Luzon films would have four or five film programs, and within each program, films are arranged in a way that allows for unexpected connections to take place.³⁵

Arranging the viewing schedule as such casts wide views on each place, region, and the nation, in general. This way, regional films become a vehicle of cultural information where audiences gain awareness and understanding of regional cultures, issues, or concerns. Groyon discusses, for instance, short films from Baguio City in the 2009 festival that reveal a preoccupation among filmmakers in filming the social changes they observe in their city.³⁶ Another example are films from Nabunturan in Mindanao that inevitably feature mining as the town is home to gold mining. Bryan Jimenez’s *Pasuan* (Greed) (2015), for instance, tells a story of an indigenous person who keeps from his friend the location of a river where he freely mines gold. In the end, their greed leads to their death. The geographical focus of CR’s film programming exhibits the variety of regional sensibilities in the country.

In some editions of the festival, its programming for short films shifted to a thematic one. Features continue to have standalone screenings, in general, though in 2015, Co included short films that were shown before a full-length feature. Co explains that this strategy was motivated by a rather practical observation that “filmmakers were just

viewing films from their own regions.”³⁷ Nonetheless, the resulting programming practice offers the audience a viewing experience to identify cultural similarities found in the films. In this arrangement, the film program’s theme is drawn from similarities among the short films selected, unlike in other cases when programmers start with a curatorial argument in coming up with a program.³⁸

In the case of CR 2015 film programs, for instance, some focus on local characters (‘Character (Quite A)’), queer characters (‘Gender Blender’), or male lovers in a same-sex relationship (‘True Bromance’). Some programs contain films that show how broader social issues, like in education (‘Yearning to Learn’) and environment (‘This Land is Mined’), are experienced in regional contexts. Various filmmakers across the archipelago contemplate on the pervading influence of religion in daily life as demonstrated by the films in the ‘Holy Art Thou’ program. The curatorial shift to thematic programming encourages the audience to notice cultural and thematic similarities and differences in the films. It allows them to observe how films from different places articulate common themes or issues. In other words, films grouped thematically make it easier to see how stories, cultural beliefs, or practices resonate in other places. More important, it enables a relational view in which overlapping and intersecting themes, connections, and relations are recognized.

Conclusion

From its “practical” beginnings, CR has established itself as a crucial site in shaping regional cinema as a concept and a practice. In its more than a decade of existence, this festival has built a network for regional film communities that helps sustain its practice. This is significant as exhibition and distribution opportunities for regional films remain limited.

In addition, CR’s programming practices have framed regional cinema in relation to its emphasis on local specificities and sensibilities. This allows a plurality of cinematic expressions and cultural identities to thrive. In this way, CR unsettles a unitary view of Filipino cinema and the nation. It disassociates Filipino cinema from being defined by Tagalog cinema and carves a space for regional cinemas across the archipelago in the country’s film landscape. As more images from different cultures in the nation circulate through CR, ideas on national identities become more complex and not fixed on dominant cultural groups.

What Cinema Rehiyon has shown through its programming is that a film festival can create new consciousness in Filipino cinema—one that recognizes the regions as constitutive of the national film culture. Moreover, it demonstrates that a film festival is more than just showing films gathered in different places. These films also provoke reflection on Filipino cultural identities and our relations.

1 Miguel Rapatan, Interview with author (Manila, September 24, 2018).
2 Miguel Rapatan, “Regional Cinema: 1938-2014,” *CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art*, ed. Nicanor Tiongson (Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines, 2018), 82-91.
3 Vicente Groyon, “Cinemarehiyon 2009,” *A Reader in Philippine Film History and Criticism*, eds. Jonathan Chua et al. (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2014), 177.
4 Gabriel Fernandez, Interview with author (Laguna, July 20, 2018).
5 February 21, 2009, Cultural Center of the Philippines, Manila.
6 Some scholars have recently sought to fill in the gap. See Nick Deocampo, *Films from a “Lost” Cinema: A Brief History of Cebuano Films* (Manila: National Commission on Culture and the Arts, 2005), and Paul Douglas Grant and Misha Boris Anissimov, *Lilas: An Illustrated History of the Golden Ages of Cebuano Cinema* (Cebu City: University of San Carlos Press, 2016).
7 Bernadette David, “Cinemas in the Regions: Nurturing Regional Stories and Audiences,” *Arts Management Workshop: Marketing and Audience Building for ASEAN Arts and Culture*, October 20-24, 2014.
8 Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong, *Film Festivals: Culture, People, and Power on the Global Screen* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, 2011), 1.
9 Peter Bosma, *Film Programming: Curating for Cinemas, Festivals, Archives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 5.
10 Rastegar, “Seeing Differently,” 176.
11 Bosma, *Film Programming*, 6; Czach, “Film Festivals,” 84.
12 Mark Peranson, “First You Get the Power, Then You Get the Money: Two Models of Film Festivals,” in *Cineaste*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2008, 37-43.
13 Marijke de Valck, “Finding Audiences for Films: Festival Programming in Historical Perspective,” in *Coming Soon to a Festival near You: Programming Film Festivals*, ed. Jeffrey Ruoff (Fife, Scotland: St. Andrews Film Studies, 2012), 26.
14 Iordanova, “Introduction,” 2.
15 Skadi Loist. “A Complicated Queerness: LGBT Film Festivals and Queer Programming Strategies,” in *Coming Soon to a Festival near You: Programming Film Festivals*, ed. Jeffrey Ruoff (Fife, Scotland: St. Andrews Film Studies, 2012), 157-72.
16 Mahen Bonetti, “Programming African Cinema at the New York African Film Festival,” in *Coming Soon to a Festival near You: Programming Film Festivals*, ed. Jeffrey Ruoff (Fife, St. Andrews: St. Andrews Film Studies, 2012), 189-200.
17 Roya Rastegar. “Difference, Aesthetics and the Curatorial Crisis of Film Festivals,” *Screen*, vol. 53, no. 3 (Sept. 2012), 317, doi:10.1093/screen/hjs022.
18 Liz Czach. “Film Festivals, Programming, and the Building of a National Cinema,” in *The Moving Image: The Journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2004), 85.
19 de Valck, “Finding Audiences,” 30
20 Teddy Co, “Luzon Films: Curator’s Notes,” in *Bacollywood Cinema Rehiyon 2012 Festival: Empowering Regional Cinema Festival Catalogue*. National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 2012, pp. 8-9.
21 Roya Rastegar. “Difference, Aesthetics and the Curatorial Crisis of Film Festivals,” *Screen*, vol. 53, no. 3 (Sept. 2012), 317, doi:10.1093/screen/hjs022.
22 Fernandez, Interview by author (Laguna, July 20, 2018).
23 In 2014, the Committee instituted the Sulyap Kultura Award, which is a special award given to films that provide a perspective on the local culture depicted. Winners of this award were also automatically selected for Cinema Rehiyon.
24 National Commission on Culture and the Arts [NCCA], “Cinema Rehiyon Curatorial Policy,” 2011, 1-2.
25 Czach, “Film Festivals,” 82.
26 Teddy Co, interview by author (Makati, August 13, 2018).
27 NCCA, “Cinema Rehiyon Curatorial Policy,” 1.
28 NCCA, “Cinema Rehiyon Curatorial Policy,” 2.
29 Co, interview by author.
30 Rapatan, “Regional Cinema: 1938-2014,” 83.
31 Filipino film scholar Nicanor Tiongson views the recent rise of Filipino digital independent films as part of the Second Cinema, which centres on art cinema and its auteurs (34).
32 NCCA, “Cinema Rehiyon Curatorial Policy,” 1.
33 NCCA, “Cinema Rehiyon Curatorial Policy,” 1.
34 Groyon, “Cinemarehiyon 2009,” 178.
35 Rastegar, “Seeing Differently,” 182.
36 Groyon, “Cinemarehiyon 2009,” 182.
37 Co, interview by author.
38 Laura Marks. “The Ethical Presenter: Or How to Have Good Arguments over Dinner,” *The Moving Image*, vol. 4, no. 1, (2004), 38.

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