

Cleaners (2019): Analyzing Glenn Barit’s Way of Navigating Familiarity and Nostalgia Through Visual Treatment, Aesthetic, and Space-Time Relations in the “New Normal”

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ABSTRACT

Three years have passed since the onset of COVID-19. Now, the world is slowly shifting towards a post-pandemic routine, the ‘new normal.’ Consumer behavior, workplace practices, learning styles, and lifestyle habits have changed and will never be the same. In this paper, we suggest how *Cleaners* can be viewed as a post-pandemic film that would benefit from being reintroduced to the Filipino masses. We explain how *Cleaners* effectively utilizes film language to create a visual simulation of the Filipino high school experience and how all those elements led to making a chronotope where Filipinos can go back and reflect on their pre-pandemic life—hanging out with friends until dawn without stressing about losing their face masks, going to prom without overthinking how many people you have come into contact with, or casually visiting your sick classmate’s house just because they caught the ordinary flu. In this paper, we frame how and why *Cleaners*, a film that tells a series of bittersweet tales and ends with a glimmer of hope that shows how people find solace in one another even on the gloomiest of days, deserves a nationwide commercial run.

Introduction

Contrary to popular belief, high school is not necessarily the best time of our lives. For some, it might be true. But for most, high school was a time when we experience a rollercoaster of emotions, unsolicited opinions from people we do not know, and societal pressures; all bottled up inside a delicate teenage body, pretending that we have everything figured out. Besides the film's themes, in this paper, we also textually analyze *Cleaners* from different perspectives to discuss the constraints and deliberate creative decisions of Glenn Barit, the director, in creating a film that shows another reality that made us look back through a different take on nostalgia.

First, we delve into the Social Production of the film (Wolff, 1993) by discussing how it came to fruition despite its limited resources. It remarkably achieved a distinctive visual style by embracing Aesthetics and Formalism (Manovich, 2017), primarily through the ingenious use of color and texture. This visual treatment was further magnified during post-production through the application and optimization of existing digital tools. Secondly, we explore how the film effectively serves as a Simulacra (Baudrillard, 1994) or simulation of a typical Filipino high school experience. The film accomplishes this by embedding a sense of familiarity and seamlessly connecting it with the current socio-political issues in the Philippines, as derived from Macapagal's (2021) take on chronotope, which originated from Mikhail Bakhtin (1984). This analysis focuses on how the film utilizes a unique take on film production while probing into characters' story arcs to explore space-time relations.

Cleaners is a film that encapsulates the struggles of the Filipino youth through realistic characters and a raw, honest, and ironically unfiltered narrative despite its highly filtered visuals. Being the day's "cleaners," perhaps an experience specific to the Filipino school system, was a simple concept, yet the film shows how life could get complicated in a day. As echoed by Filipino film critic Fred Hawson (2019): "We may not have the same coming-of-age experiences as wacky or as angsty as these characters had, but watching this will remind us of our own tricky transition from not-quite children to not-quite young adults, and make us smile and misty-eyed at the same time." Watching *Cleaners* was a breath of fresh air from the cliché high school teen dramas and formulaic romantic comedies we are used to seeing in mainstream cinema.

Unfortunately, *Cleaners* lacked the commercial reach and accessibility it deserves. After its local festival run, it competed in several film festivals outside the country, and then the pandemic happened. The dynamic of over-the-top (OTT) platforms has replaced theaters as a medium for consuming films. Media practitioners, producers, and investors had to adapt to this change. During the

height of the pandemic, *Cleaners* managed to give Filipino viewers an accessible but quite a limited time offer of bliss and comfort through online streaming in KTX.ph and Upstream. Although, as we all know, online screenings differ from cinema screenings. For this reason, in the paper's final section, we offer a rationale for how Filipinos deal with nostalgia, particularly in the context of the pandemic. We emphasized the role and how *Cleaners* can play in supporting this coping mechanism.

Understanding the Social Production of *Cleaners*

Despite its unique storytelling, the team behind this film has struggled a lot to make the director's vision come to life. Through the lenses of Wolff's (1993) Social Production of Art, we look beyond what *Cleaners* has to offer through its narrative and aesthetic. We unfold how the film's behind-the-scenes events and processes were all essential in producing this art. We look at the overall process of how Filipino films are made; from the pre-production stage to their distribution, and finally, how it relays a wake-up call to society. Through this perspective, we understand how social pressure, hierarchy, power relations, and organizations are all involved in producing art and production of culture.

The film *Cleaners* was produced in 2019 through a famous local film festival in the Philippines, QCinema. Of the limited number of local film festivals in the country, QCinema is considered one of the most generous in giving grants and cash prizes. In 2019, the usual financial grants film festivals provided would be around 750,000 pesos to 1,500,000 pesos, while QCinema's grant amounts to 2,000,000 pesos. For some film practitioners, this amount is workable depending on the screenplay and its production needs. However, most filmmakers would echo that this amount is still not enough. This was also the case for *Cleaners*, where director Glenn Barit had a very specific visual treatment for the film. This required him to spend a considerable amount of funds and resources in the post-production process after shooting all the necessary footage for the film. He had to print every frame, photocopy each frame, color each frame with colored highlighters, scan each frame to produce a digital copy, put together the scanned copies, and arrange them to turn the still images into moving pictures once again. Plus, he still needed to prepare the final cut of the film for pre-grading, post-grading, sound design, and musical scoring (Limos, 2019).

Other than the QCinema grant, the team had other sponsors that covered other expenses. However, as the festival run became nearer, they still had to raise additional funds. As many filmmakers would do in times of financial crisis, the team launched a crowdfunding campaign that would reach other people and help them complete the film. This is proof to how several independent filmmakers go to great lengths in hopes of creating art, which is, in reality, expensive and difficult to perfect.

It is always expected for Filipino filmmakers to be creative and resourceful. Hence, many independent filmmakers spend their energy and resources going to other countries to pitch, seek funding, and secure partnerships so that their films' vision and production value would not be compromised. However, there is also this discourse that not all filmmakers are as privileged and can book a two-way ticket from the Philippines to other countries, pitch to foreign investors, and strengthen their connections. For Filipinos, the only way to visit neighboring countries is by plane. Europeans and Americans have the luxury of experiencing film festival hopping because some states and cities are a one-hour train ride away. These situations prove that making a film has many underlying factors that may affect its final form. May it be the money, technological prerequisites, or the required personnel, all essential in making the art ready for recognition and consumption. However, as much as we do not want to romanticize the hardships of filmmakers and want to give proper solutions to these never-ending crises, Barit has become one of those struggling Filipino filmmakers who always manage to produce films without compromising their vision.

Analyzing the Aesthetic and Form of *Cleaners*

It could have been a standard colored film, but it was not. It could have been blue, but it was green. We found ourselves digging deeper into the visual aesthetics of *Cleaners*, all while naturally making us contemplate the narrative aesthetics of the film even more thoroughly. In this section, we employ textual analysis to examine and dissect the visual elements within the context of our everyday lives, making sense of them and delving deeper into how they can be interpreted in the cultural construction of our view of the nostalgic Filipino high school experience and the politics that come with it (McKee, 2001).

First, we looked at the filtered black-and-white vintage camcorder effect or photocopy-like texture used in the film (see Figure 1), which amplified its nostalgic setting. This unique aesthetic characteristic of *Cleaners* proves how digital tools significantly contribute to visuals and augment the story for a more immersive viewing experience. Manovich (2017) described how these techniques using technologies started in the 1990s when the industry gradually adopted digital tools, and software workflows eventually led to an "aesthetic revolution." We can see these adopted editing techniques using digital tools and software in *Cleaners*, where the film distinctively used specifically identified colors as accents for the different storylines that ultimately unified into a single narrative shown at the beginning and the end of the film. We point out how the film appeals visually, how the film is edited with overlaid colors on the characters' clothes, and how other elements gave a unique accent to a supposedly then-standard black-and-white video. In this way, Glenn Barit could control aesthetic nuances in the film

Figure 1.

Still image from *Cleaners* showing the film's title card



by singling out characters through colors. “Now, every pixel, every line, frame, face, and body can be edited to achieve the desired aesthetic effect. Never before in the modern period were we surrounded by so much engineered beauty and perfection as today, especially in the visual sphere” (Manovich, 2017). This engineered aesthetic effect of the film not only added to the visual experience but also made us contemplate the implied meanings that the filmmaker might be conveying.

Glenn Barit displayed how form and content combine to establish a unique storytelling aesthetic that systematically uses colors for social representation. “Forms and the relations between form and content are what make art (including forms of modern mass media and user-generated content) a unique type of human communication and experience” (Manovich, 2017). We believe *Cleaners* provided a nostalgic and unique sensory experience without compromising the social or cultural representation that Glenn Barit wanted to magnify. For instance, in the film's first segment, we saw how the characters were introduced one by one while their clothes were edited with corresponding colors assigned to them (see Figure 2). As media critics, we considered this aspect of the film's aesthetic not just of visual value but of social or political significance. Throughout the film, these colors stay with the characters, effectively accentuating them from the black and white background and the other elements in every frame, but what about their meanings? To gain better context, we looked at how Miller (2014) analyzed the movie *Hitchcock* in her article “He” *Had Me at Blue: Color Theory and Visual Art* to explain the sensory effects of colors, particularly blue. According to Miller (2014) “Whether aesthetics or taste, illusion or hallucination, our responses to

color run a gamut. Color perception, however, can also elicit intense sensory responses.” However, we simply want to imply how colors, burst or omission, affect the aesthetics of *Cleaners*. This critique does not aim to delve into the ever-confusing discussion of color perception but rather touches on the meanings that it can possibly imply and how the overall aesthetic of the film created a sense of nostalgia.

Figure 2

Still image from Cleaners showing the protagonists and their assigned colors



We fundamentally want to emphasize how the use of colors in *Cleaners* transcends beyond the visual. To briefly discuss the nuances we observed, we looked at each segment in terms of the color associated with the characters. In the film’s second segment, “Nutrition Month”, the main female character is assigned the color green. Her short narrative entails how she needed to grow her own plant in compliance with the teacher’s class requirements. According to research, green positively signifies pleasantness, calmness, and happiness and is also associated with growth and fertile natural environments (Gil & Le Bigot, 2014). However, the female character ironically translates to the opposite, especially at the beginning of her story. This unique take on form and content drew our attention from the start. In the film’s third segment, “*Buwan ng Wika*”, Glenn Barit assigned orange to the three male characters that form a group. At the beginning of the segment, their short narrative already shows their rebellious tendencies by not complying with the school’s hair length policy and not cooperating in the folk dance practice. In design, orange is associated with youthfulness, energy, and happiness. Moreover, it is also known to inspire creativity and uplift people’s

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moods. On the other hand, orange can also denote impatience, domination, and even rebellion (Adobe, n.d.). The male group of friends identifies themselves as *emo*. A unique concept or subculture that pertains to individuals who adopt a specific appearance and style characterized by black dyed hair, dark eyeliner, skinny jeans, and t-shirts resembling punk rock bands. Emos are known to be overly emotional, sensitive, and full of angst—traits opposite to what orange positively exudes and somehow leaning more towards the negative meanings behind the color. Glenn Barit also interestingly added another female character in this segment and assigned her the color yellow. Her short narrative displays how she unexpectedly struggled when mixed with this group of males for a folk-dance number. Yellow positively signifies happiness and optimism while negatively representing cowardice and caution (Olesen, 2020). The female character exhibits the negative meanings of the color, especially when she is seen as hesitant to be included in the group of males. In the fourth segment of the film, “Prom”, Glenn Barit assigned two colors for the main characters: blue for the male and pink for the female. The color blue positively symbolizes confidence, peace, and reliability while negatively representing depression and passiveness. On the other hand, pink positively symbolizes compassion, love, and femininity while negatively representing immaturity and timidness (Olesen, 2020). Their narrative shows a love story of high schoolers in a society full of opinions and pressures that essentially affect their relationship. The characters exuded the negative meanings behind the colors assigned to them, such as depression and immaturity – realistic struggles of teenagers nowadays that the film visibly mirrors, which the characters ultimately overcome in the end. In the fifth and last segment of the film, “SK”, Glenn Barit assigned the color purple to the main male character. His narrative encapsulates the dark reality of Philippine politics rooted from early adolescence under the consent and encouragement of corrupt parents and family members. Purple is positively associated with luxury and royalty. Being born to the purple also denotes being born to royalty. Negatively, the color symbolizes vigilance and immaturity (Olesen, 2020). The male character in this segment is naturally born into a politically inclined family. His parents plot to start a local political dynasty by passing their mayoral reign to him.

In the end, the film concluded by showing all the characters from the different narratives unified into one activity as the day’s “cleaners.” This is where the aesthetic nuances chosen by Glenn Barit were confirmed. It finally all made sense. Suddenly, one character burst into a hysteria of screams, followed by the rest, who also screamed and raged freely inside the four corners of their classroom with the colors bursting out (see Figure 3). Everyone just wants to clean up their mess and scream.

Figure 3

Still image from *Cleaners* showing the bursting of colors.



Ultimately, *Cleaners* was able to magnify the reality of teenagers struggling with their identities, pressures, and relationships through the aesthetic nuances and narratives in the film that came together for a more immersive and nostalgic visual experience. The uniquely vintage camcorder black and white images accented with the intentionally chosen colors for each character and element gave the whole film a distinctive and bittersweet nostalgia of looking back at a time in one's life. These are the nuances that make the film charmingly relatable, realistic, and impactful. This is what the Filipino masses should be exposed to.

***Cleaners* as a Simulation**

The sequences that were shown in the film also make us question a lot of things. How was life when we were just teenagers? What were our problems? Struggles? Even joys? When we reminisce, particularly our high school years, we tend to have a romanticized view of “the good old days,” but in reality, it was a difficult time.

Through Baudrillard's (1994) theory of “simulacra,” we are to expound how the film *Cleaners* was able to visually stimulate a compelling sense of longing and familiarity that we can only equate with nostalgia. *Cleaners* simulated reality through the narrative of a group of high school students through a fictional narrative set in 2007. Like many coming-of-age stories, *Cleaners* showed how this group of teenagers dealt with their struggles while finding their identities and navigating complicated relationships. *Cleaners*, from the film's title, emphasizes

how messy and dirty the world can be. Later in the film, we see that the main characters share a connection by being the assigned “cleaners” for the day, where they must stay behind after class and ensure the classroom is tidy. Yet as each of the characters’ narratives in the film progressed, it showed just how messy life could be.

“I never knew life is a mess. I’m scared.”

“Me too.”

(Barit, 2019)

The film opens with the story of a neat freak girl who soiled herself publicly and ends with the story of the student with a familial affiliation with the dirty mechanics of politics. Despite tackling mature themes and hardships, *Cleaners* was able to evoke a light-hearted and charming effect due to its creative aesthetic and narrative decisions, some of which we have previously discussed. It offered a hyperreal representation of the coming-of-age story that it wanted to tell. Baudrillard (1994) claims that simulation differs from representation by stemming from the utopia of principle equivalence. It focuses on imagery that emphasizes appearances that could transcend reality.

Cleaners had a consistent visual texture throughout the film, emulating the aesthetic of photocopied paper, making the film visually monochromatic. The only visible colors in the film are those of each main character, who have designated neon colors similar to the colors of highlighters. The imagery of the Xerox copy texture and highlighters are familiar and significant, especially for a high school student before the digital age. Using such elements, *Cleaners* could evoke that familiarity while crafting its simulacrum. The film *Cleaners* is not necessarily an attempt to represent the reality of a high school student in 2007, but rather, an attempt to simulate the experiences of high school students to emphasize its overarching themes. The film’s visual texture served as a narrative motif and a distinct indicator of its simulacrum. This simulacrum demonstrates the film’s attempt to distinguish between reality and simulated reality. Another clear indication of the film’s aim is to simulate, instead of recreating or representing the era of 2007, is the usage of the song “*Apoy ng Kandila*” by the indie artist UNIQUE. To contextualize the year of the film’s setting, most of the songs used were familiar Filipino popular music around the mid-2000s. However, the final song in the film’s epilogue was “*Apoy ng Kandila*,” a contemporary song released in 2018. The drastic difference in the release date is intentional because the role of the music in the film during the epilogue is no longer an attempt to contextualize a specific era. The epilogue shows all its main characters together, bored, not saying a word to each other until one starts screaming out of frustration, inspiring the others to do the same.

Uusbong ang realidad sa pagdungaw ng legalidad (Salonga, 2018).

The song “*Apoy ng Kandila*” is played as the characters proceed to release their angst by screaming and vandalizing the classroom. As the film gradually ends, shots of someone cleaning up the mess are juxtaposed with a contemporary song that thematically encapsulates what it feels like to “come of age.” The choice of a recent piece is an intentional attempt to ground its audience back to reality, thus breaking the illusion of the film’s simulacrum. Through *Cleaners*’ unique and creative filmmaking techniques, the audience is given a moment to separate themselves from the material and see it for what it is, a film, a fictional narrative, and a simulated reflection of reality during high school. This separation creates a degree of detachment that enables the audience to empathize with the story without becoming saturated with its heavy themes. The simulacrum of *Cleaners* lets its audience revisit their memories of simpler times through rose-tinted glasses that remind them not only of their youth but also their lives before the pandemic while ultimately slowly coaxing them back into reality.

The Highschool and Nostalgia Chronotope through *Cleaners*

Barit utilizes the high school setting as its critical milieu and location. Even though the film was explicitly set in 2007, it still leaves striking images of what we fondly call our “high school life.” This is similar to what was mentioned by film critic Jason Tan Liwag (2021), who said that *Cleaners* is “a collection of reassembled and recolored photocopies that create a cinematic time-capsule – an approximation of provincial high school life.” The film showcases the typical annual events (e.g Nutrition Month, *Buwan ng Wika*, and Prom) that we hold at school, planting as a school project, falling in love with a classmate or schoolmate, punk rock or emo music, and different types of social groups. While borrowing elements from Hollywood’s stereotypical portrayal of high school life, all these elements, nevertheless, scream Filipino—which the film successfully depicts through its visual storytelling. Liwag (2021) adds that “Barit reinvents the coming-of-age stories by creating recognizable archetypes that serve as counterparts, reflections, of people from everyday life, especially if you grew up in the provinces. But more than that, he chooses non-actors to fulfill these roles.” For these reasons, we use the lenses of chronotope to analyze and emphasize the importance of space-time relations and how that was utilized adequately to make the film compelling—a realistic portrayal of Filipino culture and sociopolitical issues. The concept of chronotope, originated from Russian linguist and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1984), emphasized that particular activities, development, and processes can be explained by spatiotemporal (space and time) patterns and how they can be used to study real encounters and conflicts through narrative. In

this way, the chronotopes of a narrative can shed a unique light on the real world (Lawson, 2011). One notable study that used chronotope was *Slum Imaginaries and Spatial Justice in Philippine Cinema* by Katrina Macapagal (2021). The film scholar analyzed Filipino films such as Aureus Solito's *Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros* (2005), Jeffrey Jeturian's *Kubrador* (2006), Brillante Mendoza's *Kinatay* (2009), Hannah Espia's *Transit* (2013), and Treb Monteras II's *Respeto* (2017), to explore how Philippine urban cinema frames all walks of Filipino life, from women to the youth, amidst the "global urbanization of poverty signified through the heightened visibility of slums" (p. 2), eventually connecting it to neoliberal global capitalism. In *Cleaners*, instead of probing into Philippine urban cinema, we are offered a glimpse into one of the many facets of Philippine regional cinema.

The events in *Cleaners* prove how actions between protagonists and occurrences in certain places and a specific time identify a specific Chronotopic narrative (Ritella et al., 2020). We break down how the setting assembled and connected socially relevant messages in the context of Philippine culture while jumping from one character to another. We also analyze how aesthetics and other film elements contribute to the idea of "a blast from the past" and how it becomes a nostalgic chronotope for every Filipino. This also supports Montgomery's (1993) notion that "chronotope references real-life situations rife with everyday associations for audiences, helping to create a sense of shared place" (p.5).

In Stephanie's character arc, the film immediately gives a glimpse of what a typical Filipino high school student would do daily: go to school, attend classes, do extracurricular activities in between, have catfights with classmates, and then go home. However, through her character, we also understand how high school can be cruel. Her teacher warns her how her grades would be affected if she is incapable of caring for a plant as if everyone is proficient in gardening—a subtle critique of how unfair grading systems could be in Philippine education. Her arc also emphasizes how teenagers can be mean. This was magnified when Stephanie ran in the middle of a presentation after experiencing severe diarrhea and did not want to go to school due to embarrassment. Surprisingly, Stephanie's feces magically helped her plant grow in an instant. As a result, she does not have to worry about her grades anymore. She also had a new-found appreciation for her plant and its soil, which she used to dislike because she thought it was disgusting. These sequences imply how we can use our insecurities and hardships to empower ourselves and prove to society that its notions are wrong.

The narrative then shifts into a more dynamic storyline, showcasing how clashing personalities can hinder building relationships with other people and how time can make that disconnection disappear. In the story arc of Angeli, the class president, and the classroom emos Eman, Arnold, and Lester, the film

takes us back to how class presidents should be treated with respect because of an established temporary hierarchy and how emo or punk music was a crucial part of kids and teenagers who grew up in the early 21st century. Despite their differences, they are forced by their adviser to present a folk dance. This scenario is another nostalgic memory, similar to Stephanie's storyline, on how the system forces individuals into experiencing and doing things they are uncomfortable with. One scene shows the Prefect of Discipline scolding the emo boys for their long hair. She trimmed their hair as she scolded them, regardless of failing to justify the relevance of hair and learning. As for Angeli, as the high-achieving class president, she chases the emo boys from morning until night just to make them participate and practice folk dance. The emo guys only appreciate her efforts when she is involved in an accident. Like the previous storyline, this arc also concludes positively by showing how the emo boys manage to go through their folk dance number by customizing it and making it their own, transforming it into a punk-rock modern version of *tinikling*—the perfect way to rebel.

The film then transitions to a storyline that depicts the usual trope wherein a boy is hopelessly in love with a girl, despite her being the school outcast. However, through Britney and Francis' storyline, the film delves into a more serious tone as it tackles gender roles and the sexist point-of-view of how society views women and teenage pregnancy. As a predominantly Catholic population that generally promotes purity and kindness, we look at how Filipino women are expected to be innocent and modest. Yet, we also look at the irony of how people tend to gossip in churches and closed spaces where they could quickly spread gossip. Meanwhile, through Francis' character, we see his peers bully him because of his uncircumcised penis, a testament to how the patriarchal society has determined that a man's genitals are a confirmation of his manhood and masculinity. We can also look at this story from another perspective, wherein there is an apparent lack of sex education in the Philippines. Ironically, these issues happen before prom, when students are expected to have fun because it is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. However, in reality, it is an event wherein boys are expected to "man up" and choose girls they want to dance with, and in return, girls are expected to be respectful and say yes to these propositions. For some, it is another enjoyable trip down memory lane, but for some, it could be the other way around.

In Junjun's storyline, we veer away from the school setting. This arc shows that there is life outside of school; your family and friends that are not necessarily your classmates. However, our life outside school is more complicated than we all think. Junjun's parents are politicians and have high expectations that he will continue the family legacy. The concept of a political dynasty in the Philippines is already a norm and tolerated in our democratic government. At first, Junjun was

enthusiastic about winning the *Sangguniang Kabataan* (SK) Federation elections. However, he discovers that his parents were involved in causing a fire in the noodle house that his best friend's family owns. Junjun's parents own the land where the noodle house stands, so he already knew why it happened after his father told him he planned to build a basketball court there. He did not dare to face his best friend. To pay back for his parents' sins, he anonymously delivers the money that his parents allotted to buy the votes of the SK chairpersons so he can become president of the organization to his best friend's house. This story arc was brief but powerful. It showed how the Philippine government is built by dirty money and corruption in different levels and sectors. This storyline does not evoke positive nostalgia, but its familiar story has become an alive and existing memory that we cannot eliminate.

Through chronotope, we analyze and break down these social occurrences and visual cues that contribute to the idea of "high school nostalgia." Through this, we also see how *Cleaners* succeeded in discussing socially relevant issues through different characters, different times, and various locations despite it being school-centric, proving that human learning is dynamic, ever-changing, and multi-faceted.

***Cleaners* and Coping Through Nostalgia**

As life continues to be unpredictable and chaotic, the film *Cleaners* serves as a reminder that life has always been messy. As an adult, one may see the youth's problems as trivial. Nevertheless, if we recall our hardships during childhood, we will understand that those problems did not feel so trivial back then.

Studies have shown that people become more motivated to consume nostalgia-inducing media in times of crisis as a coping mechanism (Wulf, et al., 2022). To say that the COVID-19 pandemic was difficult would be an understatement. Moreover, after going through one of the longest COVID-19 lockdowns in the world (See, 2021), the Philippines is facing extreme inflation that could easily lead to a recession (Chipongian, 2022). These are just some macroeconomic factors that contextualize the current state of life as of 2022. Nostalgia is a predominantly positive social emotion evoked from longing or yearning for the past (Sedikides et al., 2015). According to Chrostowska (2010), capitalism saw nostalgia's potential for profit, especially during the emergence of consumerism. Nostalgia serves as a spectacle and commodification of the past, but this is not necessarily bad. *Cleaners* elicited nostalgia by packaging itself as a spectacle of a commodified fictional past. The commodity of spectacle regards itself in a world it has created, one where the workers seek temporary leisure (Debord, 1992).

With all the current hardships in the world, indulging in nostalgia-inducing films such as *Cleaners* can serve as a refreshing breather. It is a reminder that no matter how chaotic and messy the world can be, the things that we thought to be the worst moments of our lives will still pass, and another day will come for us to clean up a whole new different kind of mess.

Conclusion

Glenn Barit has always been known as an experimental filmmaker who explores form. He is also vocal in his stance that films in the Philippines should be seen as a “*cultural output, not as business products*” (Lariosa, 2020). Like many filmmakers in the country, he aspires that all directors and all types of film should be made available for public viewing. However, we cannot deny that most of the accessible cinemas or theaters in the country are from conglomerates that only cater to films that would generate income. We are not saying that independent films cannot convince audiences to watch in theaters. Still, most conglomerates (e.g., SM, Robinsons, and Ayala) want sustainable initiatives that guarantee that if they invest time and resources in these film screenings, they will be able to regain it. Mainstream films can stay in the theaters for a long time because their executives support them and have the means to pay for the theater space. Further, mainstream films can stay in theaters because they exhibit famous stars that already have a fixed audience. However, it would be a struggle for new and independent filmmakers that big film studios do not support.

A curious case that is somewhere in the middle of these circumstances would be the virality of *Heneral Luna* back in 2015. Technically, the popularity of the film was because of word of mouth. Although it should be noted that before the film went viral, it lacked audiences in its first or two weeks, but it could stay in the theaters for that long because TBA Studios had the means to sustain it. The said studio also had enough resources consistently to promote and market the film. TBA Studios is known for filling the gaps in Philippine independent filmmaking by catering to independent directors, new stories, and different platforms by investing millions in their upcoming films and investing in microcinemas like *Cinema 76*. Microcinemas in the Philippines are very limited, but it is still a massive help by becoming a safe and multipurpose space for independent filmmakers to screen their films and organize their talkbacks (Soliman, 2022).

These situations show how the Philippine film market depends on a system that relies on private entities' social powers. For us, the social production of art does not critique the art itself but rather the system that eyes art and film with unequal treatment given the circumstances. Consequently, this continued behavior and structure also affected the quality of other films. Some studios

settled for less time and budget on their films because they could not generate enough income from the last film they invested in.

The Film Development Council of the Philippines, a government agency responsible for managing film policies and programs in the country, has initiated efforts to transform Philippine filmmaking into a better atmosphere. However, it still has a long way to go when it comes to closing the gap between how the Philippine economy and the Filipino masses perceive all forms of Filipino films. Generally, the visual critiques discussed in this paper amplify the effectiveness of *Cleaners* as a visual medium. Yet it also points out how the Philippine film industry is capitalistic because of the economic value of films and how it fails to support local filmmakers and film ambassadors to a greater extent.

The authors' overall analysis also underscores Barit's bold experimentation and unique style in portraying the distinct high school experience in the Philippines without being alienating, vague, and incomprehensible. It serves as a testament and a reflection of our adventurous and momentous days. However, beyond these moments of joy and excitement, the film also candidly depicts the harsh realities of life that we all must confront, and this is masterfully amplified by Barit's conscious and intentional creative choices within the film. Since *Cleaners* has not received the commercial recognition it deserves, it can be considered a post-pandemic film that can offer us an opportunity to reflect on our actions in the past and contemplate how we can collectively strive for a better future. It also has the capacity to connect the Filipino audience back to their pre-pandemic life, especially for those who are longing for simplicity and innocence.

Cleaners is a film that transcends time, portrays heartfelt stories, is socially relevant, has high production value, evokes different levels of emotions, and reflects Filipino culture and values. As an art form, it is a sensory experience that everyone would enjoy and relate to. It has been part of the highest-rated films in *Letterboxd*, the highest-rated directorial debut, and the highest-rated comedy film in 2021. It shows how the film is enjoyed and well-received by ordinary viewers and film critics alike. As Philbert Dy (2020) mentioned, "This is one of those miracles of Filipino cinema, one of those weird projects that defies all expectations, that transcends whatever limitations are given to the filmmakers," and we share the same sentiment.

Now that the Filipino people and the economy are recovering from an adverse economic event, this is also a call to action for private entities to start supporting and investing more in improving the state of Philippine art and culture by supporting artists who allow their audience to immerse in their art. It is a huge step in promoting initiatives that put the spotlight on well-made Filipino films.

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