

Anatomy of a Decriminalising Locality: The Body of Manila's Slum Dwellers in the Film *Tirador* (Slingshot)

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Abstract

In the Philippines, the squatter is a cultural category pursued in films to dramatise it as an emblem of the country's poverty. It is, however, routinely used as a pre-determined concept of what locality is, which makes for a convenient association of squatter with urban criminality. By delineating place, body, and movement and their bond with each other, a certain locality can be drawn without imposing upon it external and prior concepts that tend to evict the very locality being examined. A locality is premised on living and moving bodies, which is also the basic feature of cinema. The film *Tirador* (*Slingshot*) is an illustrative case. It portrays a decriminalising locality, one in which pardon is premised on a prior commission of an offence. Locality, however, provides a partial understanding of people and place. It needs to account for localogical or the physico-moral dimensions of a given locality.

Keywords: Slums, Locality, Body, Movement, Criminality, Cinema

Introduction: Ideas that found the slum and make it disappear

The slum illustrates the notion that a place is produced as “we create new meanings and rethink or reinforce existing ones”.¹⁾ As an outcome of a post-World War II housing problem in Southeast Asia, the slum was conceived as a “location of informal settlement and a “space where official control was weakest”²⁾ It instigated the invention of the “emergency housing discourse”³⁾ that allowed governments to police the slum. It also provided the justification for building public housing facilities like a relocation site for the squatters. Meant to supplant the slums, the relocation site is nothing but a regulation site.

In the 1970s, the Philippines served as the “venue of the first integrated and slum improvement” programme.⁴⁾ Its failure is memorialised as an “international model” for ‘improving and resettling’ the slum on a national scale. It was implemented in Tondo, Manila, which was ranked as Southeast Asia’s biggest slum area. Here, residents were profiled as the “poorest of the poor,” the “dung heap of society”⁵⁾ and as “garbage people” due to Tondo’s location as the dumping ground of Manila’s garbage for two decades.⁶⁾ Such metaphorical association of people with human or animal waste foregrounds place as a ‘middle point’ where “human subjectivity meets the forces of abstraction and objectification.”⁷⁾ The slum eventually encountered such forces upon government’s declaration that they were “squatters” in order to impress their illegality and to

1) Anderson, Gale, *Inventing Places*, p. 4.

2) Loh, “The ‘Myth’ of the Squatter,” p. 12.

3) Ibid.

4) Executive Order No. 1086 (January 31, 1986).

5) Honculada, *Case Study of ZOTO*, pp. 13-14.

6) Called Smokey Mountain, the dumpsite is now closed. At the time of its closure in 1990, an estimated 30,000 people lived here and depended on scavenging the dumpsite for their livelihood [see ADB, “Smokey Mountain Remediation Project,” 1] <http://www.adb.org/projects/pep/papers/report-smokeymountain.pdf>

7) Adams, *Textures of Place*, p. xxii.

“forge a powerful sense of social crisis.”⁸⁾ Current depiction of slums as “growing faster than official actions and associating them with crime, violence, and urban degradation”⁹⁾ only serve to reinforce the sense of crisis. Numbering around 924 million and extracting that figure from the last five decades,¹⁰⁾ the squatters appear ominous and formidable.

That crisis, however, is crucial to the emergence of the slum as a locality. According to Appadurai (1996), building a house, naming a place, or redesigning a garden is an ‘instance’ of producing locality, which he defines as “both a general property of social life and as a particular valuation of that property.” For anthropologists, building a house or cultivating a garden is ‘spatial production’ but for Appadurai, it is a “technology of localization,’ which is developed in a situation of ‘social, ecological or cosmic anxiety and uncertainty.’¹¹⁾ Indeed, the Philippines was in a state of economic crisis, which provoked massive protest actions that provided the legitimating ground for putting the country under martial law in 1972.

As a response to the economic crisis, Marcos’ martial law regime decided to ‘beautify’ Manila by demolishing or relocating the slums, which were regarded as “eyesores” to potential foreign investors.¹²⁾ It was also around this time that Philippine cinema was “reconceptualised as a social and cultural apparatus” in order to question Manila’s “spatial transformation”¹³⁾ under a regime that (surprisingly) spared cinema from censorship.¹⁴⁾ Manila was portrayed as an “urban location of poverty, despair, exploitation” with the slum serving as the

8) Loh, *loc. cit.*

9) Cities Alliance, *2003 Annual Report*, p. 21.

10) *Ibid.*

11) Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, pp. 180-181.

12) Tadiar, *Things Fall Apart*, p. 147.

13) Salazar, “Projections of an/other Space,” p. 175.

14) David, “The Cold War and Marcos-Era Cinema,” p. 1.

conventional setting.¹⁵⁾ The slums and the squatters became a cultural category pursued in films in order to amplify the country's poverty.

The cultural, however, was considered but never quite made it to the study of the local due to the prominence accorded to structural and geographical factors affecting economic restructuring.¹⁶⁾ The local is also an overlooked aspect in film studies whose concern is on the elements that create meanings but not on the “spaces” where meanings take place—the shot, setting and the film's “lived environment.” Thus, for Shiel (2001), cinema should be approached not as a system of language but as a “spatial form of culture,” particularly of urban “spaces, lifestyles and human conditions” where cinema has had a historical link.¹⁷⁾

For Low (2003), however, the cultural would gain little appreciation without attention to the body, which manifests the physical, psychological and material dimensions of the cultural or every day level. Space is always an “embodied space” upon which a place is created by a ‘moving and speaking body that is also spatially oriented.’¹⁸⁾ Low's concept of embodied space is aimed at breaking the duality and disparity between the objective and the subjective, the physical and the representational that neglected the body as the “location for speaking and acting on the world.” Indeed, the slum is where disembodied figures—objectified as informal settlers, squatters, or the dung heap of society—have been produced. Despite such pre-determined terms that pertain to actual and biological people, the underlying premise is maintained: there is a body (squatter) and it is located in a particular place (the slum), which is local when approached as a cinematic-cultural instance.

15) Salazar, *loc. cit.*

16) Jackson, “Mapping Meanings,” p. 216.

17) Shiel, “Cinema and the City,” pp. 1-6.

18) Low, “Embodied Spaces,” p. 10.

This paper maintains the same underlying premise in order to demonstrate that a locality can be drawn without having to use prior concepts, which tend to efface the very locality being studied. Slum and squatter are pre-determined concepts that have afforded the convenience of associating them with criminality and urban degradation. The use of prior concepts is a weakness of a standard locality studies whose focus is not on the place itself but on a “set of theoretical and empirical issues.”¹⁹⁾ For instance, it became a trend to test if squatters could be mobilised, organised, and empowered so that they can liberate themselves.²⁰⁾ In other words, if the squatters were going to be evicted, might as well train them to do it themselves. There is also the suggestion for policymakers to take seriously the reasons why people find it favourable to live in a slum area, however ‘perverse and limited the benefits may be.’²¹⁾ The global proliferation of slum areas in the last five decades raises doubts to these ‘perverse and limited benefits.’

In the Philippines, the official approach to slum is “spatial” in order to “reflect the operational requirements for clearing danger areas and those affected by government projects”.²²⁾ In this spatial approach, the squatters are presumably integrated into a legal-formal environment where they can be profiled and quantified. They are now officially called “homeless and underprivileged citizens” or “informal settlers”.²³⁾ This approach seeks to disembodify the squatters. ‘Homeless citizen’ is a body without geography, a foreigner in a certain land.

Pratt (1991) calls attention to the consequence of using space and conflating

19) Newby, “Locality and Rurality,” p. 213.

20) Honculada, *loc. cit.*

21) Pieterse, *City Futures*, p. 57.

22) Cruz, “Estimating Informal Settlers,” pp. 1-6.

23) *Ibid.*

“localities from a composite of spatialities of social relations.” A spatial approach tends to lead to an ‘empty abstraction.’ As a result, the process of generating interpretation and meaning is “reduced to a technocratic exercise”.²⁴⁾ Tuan (1979) is of the same view; spatial perspective yields quantifiable data that speak the abstract language of mathematics. But he also demonstrates that this should not be the case because “spatial concepts” are the outcome of the “original pact between body and space.”²⁵⁾ For instance, the spatial dimensions of front, behind, or within correspond to the face, back, head, and mouth or stomach of the body. The vertical or horizontal line finds equivalence in upright or prostrate bodily postures.

In the Philippines, the squatter is also understood as a residential place. Such association of person and place illustrates the concept of “geographical self” or a “human subject actively committed to a habitation that can accommodate nomadic and settled dwelling”.²⁶⁾ Indeed, the squatter’s ‘active commitment’ to a place usually depicted as unsanitary, derelict and dangerous is what baffles and frustrates urban development planners. On account of the over determined notion that a slum area is a site of poverty and deprivation, the vitality of slums has been over looked²⁷⁾ because the primary goal is to rid the city of the slums.

If the goal is to make the squatters geographically disappear, they would not for they are still in possession of a very specific (cultural) space: the cinema. The country’s rising independent cinema has made the body in slum areas more explicit and critics have pointed this out by labelling independent films as “poverty porn.” With some of them winning international awards, the critics

24) Pratt, “Discourses of Locality,” p. 2.

25) Tuan, *Space and Place*, p. 387.

26) Casey, *Between Geography and Philosophy*, p. 697.

27) Pieterse, *loc. cit.*

seem to object to the international exhibition of the squalid and abject condition of the urban underclass. Their sentiment is understandable; we are, after all, pre-socialised to regard the slum as objectionable.

That we are able to discriminate one over the other has something to do with the body's two-sided structure.²⁸⁾ Hertz demonstrated this in his examination of right and left-handedness:

To the right hand go honours, flattering designations, prerogatives: it acts, orders and takes. The left hand, on the contrary, is despised and reduced to the role of a humble auxiliary: by itself it can do nothing; it helps, supports, it holds [emphasis in the original].²⁹⁾

Hertz made it understandable that the tendency to prefer one over the other is not an arbitrary. It is organic to the body's asymmetries--in the brain, in the viscera, in the chemical compositions that make the organic body alive.³⁰⁾

The Body that Can Produce Place and Locality

For Casey (1996, 2001), the local can be drawn without having to use pre-determined concepts. This can be done by examining place, body, and movement and their bond with each other. Knowledge is local because it:

is at one with lived experience if it is indeed true that this knowledge is of the localities in which the knowing subject lives. To live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the place one is in.³¹⁾

28) Tuan, *op. cit.*, p. 396.

29) Cited in McManus, "Symmetry and Asymmetry," p. 176.

30) Ibid.

31) Casey, "How to Get From Space to Place," p. 18.

In Casey's conceptual scheme, the slum is an instance of the "logic of unsuspected abundance".³²⁾ A place does not disappear; it tends to emerge out of attempts to "level down places." If the squatters — in bodies and in places — defy the rationality of urban development plan, then, indeed, they occupy a place.

In *How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Time* (1996), Casey methodically clarifies ways in which locality can be derived from the "connatural" relationship between body and place. He characterises place as "something for which we continually have to discover or invent new forms of understanding, new concepts in the literal sense of ways of "grasping together."

There is much to be 'grasped together' in a place: 1) its active demand for bodily motion; 2) its capacity to gather living and non-living elements like thoughts, history, and memory; 3) its capacity to hold the lay-out, landscape, shapes, and contours; and 4) its capacity to keep its "experiencing or lived bodies" as its "privileged residents." Without these four attributes, it is not a place but a void. Without the lived bodies that move in it, imparting it with possible narratives and memorials, it is not a place. Where there is a place, there is a body.

It is through the body that a place (or the world) is directly perceived and experienced. The body senses a place as its most immediate environment. These sensations become the basis for perception, which is the basis of knowledge formation. The place, thus, provides the body with the "scene for action and thought, feeling and expression". The body "bears the traces of the place it has come to know" while the place becomes the expression of such a body. This is because they form a "habitual bond", which allows a given place to incorporate bodies inhabiting it.³³⁾

32) Casey, "Between Geography and Philosophy," p. 685.

Casey maintains that a place “may not permit, indeed it often defies “subsumption” under given categories.” This is because he does not see place as simply a portion of land. Given a place’s dynamic ability to gather, collect, and keep organic and non-organic matters alike, the place is “more of an event than a thing to be assimilated to known categories.” An event, a place is “unique, idioloal”. Its uniqueness (*idio*) demands that the place/event be seen on its terms. Otherwise, its idiolocality disappears and with it gone so does knowledge. Thus, there is no such thing as a definite place; there is only a type or a style of place such as a “clean, well-lit place”. Places come in phrases — in keeping with its idiolocality that necessarily entails its own idiom — the language unique to the perceiving, knowing, and speaking subject. The body, therefore, acts as the place’s “localising agent”.

Locality can thus be construed as arising from the lived experiences enacted by a type of body in a type of place. That lived experience is always local and could only arise in a habitude that bonds body and place together. Hence, the use of prior concepts becomes irrelevant. What is required is to follow the place’s idiolocality but keeping in mind that no place, locality, or body can be categorically named; only a certain *type* of place, locality, or body can be pointed out. The film *Tirador* (Slingshot) is an instance of such a locality.

Classified as an independent film, *Tirador* is the local slang for a petty thief. Film critics have predictably noted that the film is set in a slum area because the scenery is familiar enough: dilapidated shack, open and dirty sewers, narrow and crammed passageway, dirty bodies in dirty clothes. The film is set in Quiapo, an actual district in Manila known for its crammed and crowded atmosphere, which makes it an ideal location for petty crimes. What makes *Tirador* notable is the seeming absence of a plot that would frame an all too

33) Ibid.

familiar theme.

Unlike other films that depict the same issues affecting the world of the urban poor, *Tirador* does not make any one culpable for the petty crimes that abound in the film's setting. In fact, one could reasonably conclude that the disappearance of stealing would spell the same for the larger forces that continue to vie for the salvation and deliverance of the squatters from criminality. This is because the very word *tirador* implies both a place and a body and their asymmetrical counterparts, which make criminality reliable and rewarding for all.

A Certain Type of Place Yields a Certain Type of Body

The word *tirador* is suggestive of the residual or left-over (*tira*). It can also mean one's residential location or someone who has bumped into something (*naka-tira*). The kind of place the *tiradors* occupy can be derived from these related vernacular terms.

The *tiradors* place, their direct environment, is their residential area, which is found on a narrow piece of land adjacent to a creek. The size of the land dictates the position of their houses, bodily position and the pace of movement. The strip of land was obviously vacant, a residual land prior to human habitation. Arbitrarily occupied, the land also bears the structural design of the houses. They are arbitrarily laid-out on top of each other and form a tall structure the scale of which parallels an adjacent church. The horizontal position of the land and its narrowness dictates that the houses should be built vertically in order to accommodate the numerous residents. Up there, the empty atmosphere seems to make an open invitation that additional houses can still be accommodated.

The houses are made of semi-permanent materials (light wooden materials in

the upper portion and concrete cement in the lower portion). This is indicative of a certain degree of speed in occupying the place, constructing the houses, and dismantling them. Possession of the place was simply a matter of moving in--fast. After all, the occupants are 'outsiders'. Should they be evicted, they can easily dismantle and re-use the housing materials. The houses look humble or rather have been humbled by time and the elements. They look decrepit and dilapidated and appear to be no match to fire, wind, and storm. One can reverse this sight; given that the houses remain standing, it is the elements that have been humbled by the dilapidated houses.

Following the vertical position of their houses, the residents are also almost always on an upright position. The close-up shots of people walking or converging convey a constricted surrounding and explain why residents are generally out of the house — sitting down or standing up — unless they are sleeping or eating. But the constriction proves not a barrier at all. One only has to follow its upward or downward position. Where there is horizontality, there also is verticality. This is dramatised when a couple is caught by the police having sex standing up during a raid.

The verticality of the houses is a movement from the ground up. The resident's upright position is a constructed assertion of their humanity as well as their aspiration, which, from the looks of their houses, is on the brink of a fall and collapse. The strip of land only allows for narrow passageways in and around the area, down and up the houses. Hence, residents are always on a fast move--briskly walking or climbing down and up the stairs leading to the houses. Such fast bodily movement makes the place hectic and bustling. People are always on the move or ready to move. In this kind of place, the pace required of bodily movement is speed. If control of the speed of movement is unique to cinema, speed is also what makes the place of the petty thieves idioclocal.

The camera movement in *Tirador* is frenetic but controlled enough to give the viewers a full sense of the breadth and depth of the place, its boundaries and fixed markings. This is also the kind of movement a *tirador* has to perform when stealing. Snatching or pick-pocketing valuables require a sudden move upon a victim who, in a startled state, is unable to move at all. The small items stolen from the body of the victim further accelerate the movement of the *tirador*. Though a victim usually does not run after them, the *tiradores*, clasping a mobile phone, a wallet or a necklace, run away as fast as they can. In one scene, the *tirador* is still able to go back to the young woman from whom he snatched a necklace. She does not even have the time to be in a state of shock or realise that her necklace has already been stolen. Immediately, the *tirador* returns the necklace and complains that his effort is wasted — the necklace is a fake gold.

A Certain Type of Body Yields a Certain Type of Place

Being a *tirador* is primarily the enterprise of men. In their territory, they usually hang-around without their shirt off. They are usually half-naked or wearing a sweaty and greasy shirt. The men's physical appearance follows the structural appearance of the houses where the upper part is made of light materials and the lower part of concrete. The upper part is fitted with large windows, making it possible to see what's going on inside. On top of the house, one can have a panoramic view of what's going around the place. In their semi-naked bodies, one can also have a full view of the upper part of the men's body. If the light materials of the upper part of the house can easily be dismantled, the men can just as easily put on or take off their shirt. Needless to say, the houses were built by the men themselves.

The significance of the vertical positioning of the houses is indicated by the height of the adjacent church. The camera deliberately registers the visual fact that the houses of the *tiradors* are equal to if not higher than the church itself. A concrete wall separates the houses from the church. The camera zooms down on the wall's average height then zooms up on the empty atmosphere above. This suggests that up there, there is nothing but empty air. The film stresses its significance by withholding from the screen any bodily figure of the priest. Even while it is shown that the *tiradors* do attend mass decently dressed, the priest is not shown. He is a disembodied figure and is represented as a voice emanating from above. It makes the church a bodily congregation presided over by a disembodied priest. Needless to say, the church is not really a place for the *tiradors*. It does not afford them the same degree of mobility and speed as their own place. With a clean shirt on, they can easily mingle with the crowd and courteous enough to make a hit outside the church.

The body of the *tirador* is an anonymous body. It needs to be distinguished by a face, which the police record shows. Apparently, some of them have already been arrested. The police routinely use a piece of paper with their names and faces on it. It is the presence of police that makes the *tirador* a criminal suspect.

The film's opening scene is an event — a night time raid by police in uniform and civilian clothes. As the police quickly move and surround the place, a local official is also moving to make an announcement that a 'sona' is about to be conducted and instructs all to go inside their houses. 'Sona' or zoning is the vernacular term for a police operation in a cordoned off area while homes are searched and suspects rounded up. In the film, only the men are arrested. They are hauled from their homes, instructed to strip off their outer garments and to sit on the ground. Police check their faces if they match the profile

in the search warrant.

The police assume that the evidence of the alleged crimes is on the men's bodies. One officer, finding none on the husband's body supposes that it is on the wife's. The police do not find anything but still arrested the men. After ten minutes and five seconds, which make the audience believe that the raid is a routine police matter, the film finally reveals the reason for the raid: a politician is seeking re-election under a campaign promise to rid the city of criminality. A white utility vehicle pasted over by the politician's poster campaign would take the arrested men to the precinct. This scene introduces the audience to another event that is about to take place in their midst: election campaign period.

The presence of the police follows the rather tautological principle of where there is a police, there is a crime. The police and their superiors instantly transform the entire place as a crime scene. At the time of the raid, there is actually no crime being committed, no criminal being chased. They do not even specify what particular item they are looking for. The residents are letting the night pass by while they go about drinking, having sex, playing, or hanging around.

The crime scene effect evaporates when actual petty crimes are being committed without the presence of the police. After the raid, the film moves to the next scene where young boys are stealing the coins from a video gaming machine. Later on in the film, young *tirador* pretending to be students are conning a real male student into giving up his back-up inside a mall. His resistance creates a minor commotion inside the mall, which attracts the attention of the security guard. His intervention is not only futile but also confirms that only the presence of police could make the commotion a serious occasion.

The police, who are inside the mall promptly, approach the boys and

instantly recognise the suspects. One of the *tiradors* is arrested and brought to the precinct where he is tortured to confession. The young *tirador* subsequently gains his release by turning over to the police all the loots he and his friends have stolen. It seems that the *tiradors* are fully prepared for this kind of situation. They would give to the police goods that have lower value while hiding somewhere those that could fetch a higher price.

A Certain Type of Body Can Hide a Certain Criminality

By now, the film has fairly established that a certain economy of crime is in full swing. The police are not really interested in arresting criminals. They only want to steal what the *tiradors* have stolen. Their official uniform and their official body restrict them from stealing. It allows them, however, access to the goods stolen by the *tiradors*.

The police and the *tiradors* know each other very well. In one particular scene, three men ask each other to strip off their clothes in the same way the police asked them to do so during the raid. They are looking for the wristwatch, necklace, and ring one of them snatched from a decently dressed man outside the church. They are not to be found on any of their bodies.

Just as they would hide from the police expensive items, the *tiradors* would also do the same to their fellow. The stolen goods are subsequently retrieved from a nook on the way out of the house of the *tirador* who evenly divides the money from the wallet between them. The camera deliberately makes a parallel gesture in a later scene: another set of money, which belongs to a local politician, is being counted for distribution. The camera's statement is clear enough: the stolen money by the *tirador* is more or less equal to the money being doled out by the politicians to buy votes. By implication, the *tirador* and

the vote-buying politician are more or less equal in status and position.

One *tirador* (Caloy), who is also a pedicab driver, pedals his way around the street. The front and back of his pedicab are covered by posters of local candidates. Caloy does not have a passenger but the way he pedals and his grim face convey the impression that a heavy weight is aboard. This is not unusual because politicians are also understood as ‘weighty,’ influential, and have the habit of associating themselves with the poor. The faces of the candidates on the poster make them Caloy’s disembodied passengers. In contrast to Caloy’s face, the faces on the poster appear to find the ride agreeable.

Suddenly a voice announces, “Fellows, someone is distributing money at the basketball court!” Expectedly, people scramble to their feet and run to the basketball court. They leave behind a dismayed woman who is also campaigning for another (woman) candidate but distributing another sort of good: religious items like rosary and pamphlets apparently bearing religious words. The candidate has chosen religion as her campaign theme in keeping with a parallel event: the start of Lenten season.

Tirador situates itself between Lenten season and election, which are both occasions for promising a ‘better world’ or a ‘better word,’ in the case of one candidate. He announces his plan to introduce a law that would make it mandatory for students in public schools to study the word of god. By showing only the faces of the campaigning politicians who also promise to exercise honesty when elected, the film suggests that there is no body listening to them.

These two occasions are very body specific: the Lenten season commemorates the suffering of the *corpus* Christi, the election a renewal of mandate of the body politic. Both bear something criminal. The Christ was accused before a representative of the body politic and eventually embodied the very crime of

which he was accused of (the Son of God). Here, we have an event where a *corpus criminalis* became the *corpus Christi* as presided by the body politic. The film pursues the same imagery in order to reiterate its criminal aspect. Towards the film's ending, the audience is positioned to understand the scene as a religious rally. The plaza is afire with candles held up high by people who look like devotees. They are singing the lyrics of a religious song being played in the background. The camera slowly moves to the grandstand—where the campaigning politicians are taking their turn to speak to the crowd. It turns out that it is (also) a political campaign rally.

Expectedly, a *tirador*, holding a candle, quietly slips his hand into the back pocket of a standing ma and snatches his wallet. Then he turns his face to the sky and his hand that holds a candle. The film has already explained the practicality of merging seemingly disparate elements. During the raid, the mistress and the legal wife of one of the thieves make a scene by fighting over him. The wife has been looking for her husband all night long and could not find him. She finally finds him among the arrested thieves. The two women start to pull each other's hair. Slightly embarrassed, the man tells them to stop. Speaking in a subdued voice, he tells the two women "you don't have to fight over me because you can very well divide me between the two of you." The two women did — by slapping him.

The petty criminals are made to hear the promise of a better world — that will only come as a hope. They are made to wear a campaign shirt that announces a candidate as the 'hope of the masses.' Deliberately, the name of the candidate is *Tagasa* (hope). Worn by somebody from the *tirador's* area, that body creates a needy, destitute, and dependent figure, of someone who hopes (taga-asa). Waiting for that hope to materialise, however, proves fatal for one of them.

Wearing a red shirt emblazoned with *Jesus of Nazareth*, the tiradors and the male members of the community participate in a procession that carries the statue of the Christ bearing a crucifix. To participate in this ritual is believed to be a way of atoning one self, of promising to be a better person in exchange for a certain wish or prayer. This procession is usually cramped with male bodies that parade Christ's statue around Quiapo. One is liable to be crushed to death by the massive crowd. The crowd usually slows down the procession but the rush to help someone who has fallen to the ground due to dizziness spells sudden death. This is exactly what happens in the film. Elmo falls into an open sewer and is crushed to death.

Caloy, also wearing the same shirt, rushes through the alley to inform Elmo's son that his father has died. The son impassively accepts the news. He then makes a telephone call to his mother who is away and who presumably works somewhere else. The mother, a disembodied figure, at the other end of the telephone line, is also a voiceless voice. Only the words of the son telling her of the cost of the funeral and burial can be heard by the audience. The son, presumably wanting to ease the cost of his father's death, goes to a lottery stall and makes a bet. His father has the same habit. As if wanting to find out if the bet would be successful, the son walks to a group of boys gambling. Impatiently, he stands up and leaves them.

Life is, indeed, a gamble just like the lottery, which is an officially sanctioned gambling. Philippine laws mandate that profits from lottery are to be dispensed in aid of the poor. The poor are beneficiaries to a crime, which *is not* under the jurisdiction of the government, and *is* if left to the criminals themselves. The lottery, in fact, was specifically instituted to prevent illegal gambling. The lottery is a decriminalised activity to criminalise the same.

The Constitution of a Decriminalising Locality

The *tirador's* speed and agility does not invalidate the function of the law. By running away, even when in most cases the police are not chasing them, the petty thieves confirm that they have done something criminal. If the police catch up with them, the *tiradors* submit their bodies and seemingly willing to go through the process of being booked and released.

This type of locality is not governed by lawlessness. It is a locality where petty criminality is learned by each generation, from father to son in particular. Criminality is a value by itself because it is the people's way of life and living. A sick baby is easily resolved by a couple who enter an electronic shop as prospective buyers. The unknowing shop assistant changes his position in front of the couple when the husband asks to see a digital video player displayed at the far end of the shop. The wife quickly puts inside her bag the same item. Unbeknownst to the couple, the shop owner is watching them from the moment they enter the shop. They are caught and ask for forgiveness citing their sick son — yet another instance of a son's exposure to stealing. The shop owner berates them in front of other customers. It is an embarrassing situation but does not produce the crime scene effect because the police are not called to apprehend the couple. They are sternly told to leave and to never come back. They do and on the way out, the wife still manages to bag a digital video player while pretending to cry inconsolably.

The stolen goods are the most incriminating evidence of decriminalisation in the film. Mostly lightweight, inexpensive, disposable, they are simply not worth the police effort. But when they are stolen, their value symbolically assumes a higher level. One could even say that it would be quite an honour to be robbed by the *tiradors*. There is a popular joke that it is an insult to a snatcher

if he is not able to steal anything of value from one's body. Following the principle of where there is a police there is a crime, where there is a *tirador*, there is something of value — even if their monetary equivalent is low. No arraignment scene is made in the film. It, too, is a wasted day in court given the pettiness of the crime. The *tiradors* are petty thieves; to make a case of out of them is to make a caricature of the justice system. That is why the police are generally lenient. The *tiradors* can have their cake and eat it, too, but it is very small slice of cake.

The body of a petty thief is the converging point of law and lawlessness, conventions and transgression, sin and atonement. They have the best of worlds and they know both of them. That is why they can run very fast and easily merge themselves into the non-criminal body of a crowd. Their speed is accelerated by the voluntary and autonomous nature of their delinquency for there are no gang lords in their midst nor organised crime in the area.

Though the film provides a concise depiction of the political, legal, and moral forces that border the movement and behaviours of the *tiradors*, it refuses to make these forces the cause and criminality as the consequence. A great sense of free will and responsibility permeates the persona of the *tiradors*. Caloy, for instance, gives away to his step-sister the remaining coins from his pocket before he goes to the street to steal. Rex minds that his son is brought to the precinct when his wife fetches him.

During the raid, Elmo is lying on the bed pretending to be sick. Hidden beneath his back are junk goods. His son reminds him again that he has previously reminded him to immediately sell the loot to the junkshop. This scene illustrates the notion that the offender and the victim are of the same value, share the same value — the goods in their possession are of no value. They only acquire value after being disposed and converted into cash.

When the film depicts a politician engage in vote buying or the police helping themselves to the stolen loots, it does not make a case of authorities being more corrupt. When it is shown that the thieves go to the church after being arrested, the film does not make a case of atonement. It cannot because authorities and violators form a habitual bond. The church function is to forgive. When the police let loose the *tiradors*, they are also releasing themselves from culpability.

In *Tirador*, bond between every body — of sinner and non-sinner, the corrupt and the innocent, the criminal and the legal are exchangeable, and therefore renewable just like the energy of the body. It is the very energy that decriminalises every body. The guilt of one is the guilt of all. Pardon, however, becomes desirable upon admission of guilt. Rex immediately goes to the church after signing out in the police log book. Elmo is more determined and confident to steal after attending the mass. After all, he is not arrested but he knows he is guilty.

Body Kinematics

Tirador gives primacy to the movements of the actors in the place by keeping their dialogues to the minimum. To understand the narrative of the film is to follow the movement of the camera as it captures bodily motion in pure kinematics term. This is aptly depicted in the scene where Odie, Elmo's son, stoically accepts the news of his father's death. He does not even shed a tear. In no position to arrange something for the wake, he drifts by the street while able bodied men carry his father's body. Even in death, the body is still in motion.

Bodies in *Tiradors* can competently place themselves in between motion and

stillness because the film lets them use their asymmetrical bodies. To the extent that they know what is right and wrong and because they live on both sides, the thieves' body is whole. That is why they can move fast even without a visible indication where they would go. The film makes it implicit that they simply go back to their residential area. The vote-buying politicians only know in theory the illegality they are committing but they don't know how to make it operational. In keeping with their proper place in society, they need somebody to do it for them — to move things for them, so to speak. The movement of the politician is done by a faceless man. It is the face of the money he is counting that replaces his missing face. This scene brings to the fore the notion of no face, no criminal.

The face, of course, is important to the police's investigative approach. They are looking for the suspect's face, which makes them overlook the body of the thieves. They need the face, its head, and mouth that would supply them with incriminating information. They could not extract it from the body itself. This is because the police are only using the right-write side of the body of laws. They know that there are violations but only in terms recounted to them by the suspects — if they speak at all. The thieves are, thus, assured that petty criminality is exclusive to them. This further gives them unrestricted movement and details only known to them.

Stealing is generally done in a crowded spot where every body is indistinguishable. The crowd slows down the movement of a thief but it is also their cover-up, their entry into anonymity. Only the camera and the audience could make the distinction. The police are not given the same chance. Shots of thieves running very fast are always without the police or the victim chasing after them. This raises a fundamental question: why do thieves run at full speed ahead without any one chasing them? To answer this question entails specifying

the social body that lives in the body of the petty thief.

Symbolically speaking, the body of the thief on the run carries on his feet politics, economics, religion, and the law. The politician from whom he can get an additional amount of money, the police that can temporarily detain him, business establishments and small time victims of his stealing, and religion from which he asks for absolution. He also carries with him his family, kin, and friends to whom he feels responsible. All these institutional bodies are grafted into the *tirador's* body and emplaced their residential area.

The kinematic property of the thief's body is made feasible by the fact the different social bodies in his body do not overlap; they move in concert with his own biological body. One could say that religion is his head and eyes — the all-knowing, all-seeing god that does not require being shown because it is pure logos. His family and friends represent the arms to the extent they will provide assistance and protection.

To a certain extent, the politicians also perform the same function. But they operate more as entrepreneur because the *tiradors* sell their votes to them. They could also make money from the *tiradors*. When Elmo dies, the community leader gives a semblance of helping his son, of taking care of the business of the wake, funeral, and burial. His solicitous gesture is an act of solicitation, which is normally reserved for the kin of the dead to raise money for funeral expenses. Without further delay, he tells the son to call his mother who is presumed to be in a position to pay for all the cost. Otherwise, Elmo's dead body would not be moved to the burial ground.

In the meantime, Elmo's coffin is moved inside a tent. His house would not be able to accommodate members of the public who want to see him lying in state. No one discusses details of his death or anything about his past or future. In fact, no one seems to pay him attention. Nature decides to intervene.

The pouring rain immediately makes every body move inside the tent to take shelter. They stand still and wait for the rain to stop. Casey calls this movement as ‘moving within place.’ Here the dead and the living perform kinematics but remain in the place. In that place, Elmo’s dead body is finally paid with respect.

When the rain stops, the camera moves to another spot and shows a group of men playing cards. Caloy’s step-father joins them. Without cash, he proudly presents a stolen wristwatch as his wager. Needless to say, that watch is significant for it is a device for measuring the movement of time.

Indeed, the watch is a movement within a place — its own encasement and on the body that wears it. It would surely move from hand to hand, there at the table where hands are playing cards. More than this, it is the clock’s movement that sets the orientation and circulation of the movement in *Tirador* with the camera acting as the hand of time. The audience will not miss the spherical movement of the camera, which provides the film with a rotund landscape. This explains the seeming absence of boundaries between society, economics, religion, politics and the law in *Tirador*.

During the raid, the police barge into the house of a couple having sex. They put on their clothes and do not even attempt to beg for privacy. The camera lends a helping hand by exposing the woman’s pubis while putting on her underwear. Without malice and shame, the woman shouts at the police, “what zoning are talking you talking, can’t you see we are having intercourse?” The officer responds “can you at least wear your denture?” True to their right-side bodily orientation, the sense of shame is delegated to the police. In another scene, after catching a couple having sex standing up, an officer reproaches and tells them “are you not ashamed, why do bring your obscenity outside the house?”

As if testing the audience's sense of decency and as if obeying the officer's instruction to her, the woman with no upper denture is finally made to have enough money to pay for one. On the way home, she proudly shows off her mouth with the denture on. Before and after eating she cleans it again and again until it falls down into the piped sink and lands into the muddy, filthy ditch. She rushes downstairs to retrieve it. She digs into the filth but to no avail. Even a false teeth, and by implication pretences, has its own way of moving away into nowhere.

The nowhere is the implied destination of the moving hands of the clock. The *tiradors* share the same destination in the sense that nowhere they could be found after a quick steal. The anonymity of the crowd conceals them but it is only a matter of time before they are found out as what happens to Leo. That is why they run because eventually they know that they would be caught. Running, however, provides something more. Since there is an economy of stealing, the thieves' running is their own labour force. The greasy and sweaty shirt of the *tiradors* attests to the fact that they are really working men. They are assured of that sort of work every day.

Spectatorial Body and Locality

The use of digital camera lends *Tirador* a touch of realism--of being a documentary or an amateur home movie. Like the thief on the run, the (unseen) camera is also on the run in order to supply the audience with the logistics of perception. The feet are a further localisation of the body, place, and motion. The film's architectural orientation is one of de-privileging wall, column, and roof, which makes the entire place porous. One could get in or out the church, in and out of prison, the shack's roof also an escape route, sex

inside the house is also done outside, the politician speaking the word of god, and so on.

The camera moves around the precinct where the arrested *tiradors* the night before are released, meet by family members, and the campaigning politician who reminds them to vote for him. Then it shifts to a group of young boys pulling coins from a video gaming machine with a wire. A few steps away, another group of young boys are prancing while holding coconut leaves that symbolise palm Sunday. The scene finally ends inside the church where shots of the coconut leaves are repeated. It is, indeed, palm Sunday. One congested spot of the area, one place — able to hold several motions and events simultaneously.

Casey reiterates that knowledge about locality requires distinction between body, position, place or region and knowing as a “matter of intimate acquaintance with places by means of our knowing bodies.” To make that acquaintance intimate, *Tirador* makes a map useless. In fact, the film seems to have deliberately removed any mapping scheme that could be undertaken by making the viewers become intimate — to the point of claustrophobia—with the place. The camera is made to perform a variety of extreme long shots (that barely show human figure), extreme close-up shots (that only show a portion of one’s face), medium close ups (that only show half of the body) and conventional close-ups (that make visible human and non-human figure).

The film actually begins from a top down position. Shots taken from above make the audience feel as if they are in a steep subterranean position. This is the scene where the community leader, holding a flashlight, is making the rounds to inform the people about the coming police raid. He flashes the light up and down the houses that form an enclosure in between passageways. It conveys the sensation of something vast, deep, and bottomless. Only the next

morning one would know that the cavernous feel is caused by the vertically formed houses whose long shot is taken from the creek up the roof. Here, one is liable to pay attention to the upward portion of the scene.

The long shot is meant to confirm that in *Tirador*, the point of orientation is the ground. Elmo dies beneath the feet of the processional crowd. To know one's place is to know one's social position. That social position stands upon one's feet as is clearly shown by the thieves on the run. Caloy frantically points this out when he shouts at this step-father rushing down the stairs "hey, my slippers!" during the raid.

If one pays enough attention to the intimate details provided by the film's close-up shots, one could even quantify the worth of a *tirador*. It is Caloy's face that holds the figure. In the scene where boys are stealing coins from the video gaming machine, the camera makes the coin more prominent, which puts the bodies of the boys outside the screen. It then moves to the next scene where a street vendor is selling fish balls. The camera puts right across the screen the pan frying the fish balls and a hand picking out the cooked ones with a stick. It is the hand of Caloy. With a mouth full, he chats unintelligibly with the vendor. This scene ends with a sideways extreme close-up shot of Caloy's face. The coins, almost the size of a fish ball, and Caloy's profile are all suggestive of the same profile of the face of Jose Rizal, the country's national hero, on a one-peso coin. Petty cash is the worth of a petty thief. Apparently, it is enough to make Caloy's mouth-full.

In *Tirador*, the mouth is a worthless organ of communication. It is no longer the organ from which one gains access to one's thoughts. It becomes, however, a neutralising force that shuts up certainty words might convey. This is enacted by Leo who is reduced to an infantile position and wails like a baby while being tortured to confession and Elmo's son who maintains a calm silence

upon learning of his father's death.

By making the mouth a neutralising organ, the film enhances itself as a logistic of perception and the entire film — the locality — as the field of perception with body becoming spectatorial. The spectatorial body, however, needs to have a sense of site — not sight. Bruno (1997) introduces the concept of 'site-seeing' and defines it as the "act of inhabiting and traversing space that could not be explained within the framework of theories of the eye". In sightseeing, the spectator is a voyeur unable to move with the film's "spatiocorporeal kinetics" because it is absorbed within its own gaze. In site-seeing, the spectator is a voyager who uses the cartographic and architectural lay-out of the film.³⁴⁾

Sight-seeing is a term relevant to a locality studies inclined to examine variables external to the locality itself. Site-seeing involves grasping vision instead of words, percept instead of precept, event instead of outcome, walking instead of talking, wandering yet also wondering. Certainly, the spectatorial body implies non-movement and an outsider to a particular locality. By virtue of being absorbed by the film's visual landscape and following its events, bodies and movements is the spectator's own movement. Casey calls this 'passive movement.' The film is the "path", which brings the spectator to "unexpected geographic explorations."³⁵⁾

Film and place have one thing in common: they simply present themselves to those who like to see or visit them. Both are a locality imbued with locality — the reason why one chooses to inhabit a given place and endowing it with lived experiences. The movie house is the film's geographical location, its locality. It houses dreams, anxiety or aspirations, which are constitutive of

34) Bruno, "Site-seeing," p. 10.

35) Ibid.

locality. Film and place also share a habitual bond — inclining spectators to imagine from a particular moving visual point of view.

Locality can provide a partial understanding of a given place. In bodily terms, it is only the surface or the outer covering of one's lived experience. If knowledge is the goal, then it necessarily entails grasping that is which underneath that covering. Locality's connatural term is localogy, which requires a site-seeing vision that can very well maximise the body's asymmetrical orientation. Instead of a multiple perspective, localogy's position is dividual--separate yet a shared experience and consciousness. A dividual locality is where the lived and unlived knowing bodies share the same habitation.

Tirador is found in such a dividual locality, which is depicted in the twilight that begins and ends the film. The twilight simultaneously obscures and illuminates the world of the tiradors. A flash light guides the advancing police on the way to the raid at the beginning of the film and a candle light held up to the sky by Rex after pick pocketing someone's wallet at the religious-election campaign rally at the film's actual ending. Just as the flash light reveals to the spectators the decrepit housing condition of the residents, Rex elects to turn-away from the speaking politicians because he knows that their lives would remain obscure and uncertain. This is also the fate of a politician seeking election.

Rex directs our attention — in that twilight world, where song of praise for the Lord is also the song of the politician is also the song of the petty criminal. Indeed, a twilight world is suitable for merry making and criminal activities. Some would leave emptied, some would leave filled from the same place. The money Rex stole, and for that matter all the stolen items in *Tirador*; would go back to an exchange system circulated by money. The man would simply buy a new wallet while Rex perhaps would buy milk for his son.

There is no reason to leave such decriminalising locality. The thieves are the reason for the abiding presence of religion, law, and the state from which they could extract living and livelihood. To imagine this locality without a criminal is to imagine the end of it all. In the same fashion, it would be unimaginable for a criminal to live in a world without religion, law and the state. With no one to confer him that status, he is destined to obscurity with neither body nor geography.

Under a religion, which prejudices all as offender regardless, the petty thief's entry to pardon is that very offence. Without that prior judgment, he will not be able to secure his innocence. Under the legal precept that presumes all as innocent until proven otherwise, the petty thief is above suspicion. Thus, he does not mind going in and out of prison--it is the only available means by which he can prove his innocence. Needless to say, his declaration of innocence requires a prior act — that of committing an offence. To commit a crime and to be absolved is the localogicality of a decriminalising locality.

Indeed, the petty thieves are “privileged residents.” When the community leader — on the night of the police raid — instructs the residents, “go home, there police are coming,” he is not stating something so obvious, he is merely reiterating it. For the outside is the extension of the residents' home. When the officer instructs his subordinates, “gentlemen, search every thing, do not destroy any property; move, move!” they did and found nothing. They are not capable of searching everything. The police may know the locality but not its localogicality.

It does not even occur to the police officer who looks at the collection of Elmo's photograph that he is already in front of a body of evidence. Elmo might have thrown away the wallet and the money from which the photographs originate but he will not throw away the underlying reason why his forte is

picking wallet, which is to put a face to his absent wife. Here, we have a site-seeing event in which the image appears to have counter-acted the possibility of a forensic analysis. Hence, Elmo does not attempt to explain to the police officer who in turn does not bother to ask anymore. The photographs he keeps are his way of re-living the existential absence of his wife. The photographs of his victims become the ‘privileged’ occupants of Elmo’s home.

In *Tirador*, the interior of the homes is cluttered with objects. It would be difficult to distinguish which of these objects are stolen or legitimately owned. The clutter conveys an intense and intimate domesticity. The fact that shots of domestic scenes are taken from the upper part of the house is spatially significant. Up there, the intense and intimate domestic clutter co-exists with the wind, air, sky, rain, sun. These cosmic elements are present outside the screen. We don’t usually see the immense mess they create in the atmosphere but the cluttered homes of the residents provide the clue. Up there, it is really impossible to institute order and tidiness. Inside the house, there is the cosmos; quite simply, the home localises the cosmos, which diminishes the chaos and intensity of the outside world. And here one can conduct a topoanalysis in order to reveal how immense, intense, and intimate the site of localogy is. For the house that is also the cosmos is in possession of the physico-moral energy of matters that are human, material and cosmological.

As a film, *Tirador* tells a ‘tale of inhabitation,³⁶⁾ which is basically about the lived experience of the petty thieves. That lived experience is the source of local knowledge about them. That local knowledge is geographically and bodily emplaced. The emplacement is not externally imposed; rather it is originated by the space below and above whose emptiness is a virtual invitation to be occupied thus becoming a place. In becoming a place, *Tirador* becomes a

36) Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” pp. 18-19.

localising cultural apparatus, which provides the viewer a pair of site-seeing eye able to follow movements between the lawless and the lawful and a body that will not choose one over the other because it will compromise the organic unity of the body itself.

That the film does not partition that body is its own statement about what makes it different from other such films. *Tirador's* apparent idiolocality is also emplaced, which is a demand by urban space itself. This is duly noted by Simmel (2002) who describes the city as occupied by the seeming comforts afforded by buildings and institutions, which are actually “space-conquering techniques.” Their “cultural accomplishments” can be observed in a highly “de-personalized social life,” which is ruled by the precision of time or the computation of money earned.

Before these space-conquering techniques, the ‘persons can scarcely maintain itself.’ Hence, there is much striving for the “most individual forms of existence” in the city without regard to its ‘correctness or success.’ That striving for what is unique — the idiolocal — is an endeavour against insignificance in a space so designed to make the unique or the individual a ‘negligible quantity’.³⁷⁾ Hence, it becomes understandable why the *tiradors* have chosen a life of thievery and why agents of social and political institutions are drawn to them. The lawless and the lawful have formed a bond because their personhood, their very life, which is premised on its uniqueness, is at stake.

As part of the institutions of the economy and art, *Tirador* is also compelled to be unique. It can only be described as a certain type of film, acted upon by a certain type of people who inhabit a certain type of place — the originators of locality, which is premised upon a place (the city) that compels one to be *idlo*, which in turn is its own localogy.

37) Ibid.

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