

## “LOVE IS...”

### An Inaesthetic Inquiry on Love and Attention in Aureus Solito's *The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros*

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#### Abstract

Drawing from Alain Badiou's concept of inaesthetics, which proposes that art conditions philosophical thought, this essay offers an inaesthetic reading of *The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros* (2005) and suggests that it is a film that offers enabling possibilities in the thinking of love by providing the spectator with a different experience of cinematic attention in the visual field. The author suggests that the film raises the philosophical question "What is love?" and attempts to answer the very question it poses through punctual encounters, which are moments of cinematic interruption—described by Roland Barthes as "what I add . . . and what nonetheless is already there" (*A Lover's Discourse* 55)—that may offer opportunities for philosophical speculation. This essay further argues that those punctual moments initiate a new form of attention that is not sustained by "visual pleasure," as theorized by Laura Mulvey, but by the "movement of thought" (Badiou, *Cinema* 17). The film uses that mode of attention as a way to think about love while also suggesting that love itself is a form of attention.

#### Keywords

Alain Badiou, cinema, film-philosophy, *punctum*, Roland Barthes

#### About the Author

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The basic unit of investigation is not so much the film in its totality as some moments of film, moments within which an operation is legible.

Alain Badiou (*Infinite Thought* 114)

In his essay "Cinema as Philosophical Experimentation" Alain Badiou offers a reading of a scene taken from the film *The Crucified Lovers* (1954), directed by Kenji Mizoguchi. Predominantly focused on the film's final scene, Badiou extrapolates a grand philosophical claim from what appears to be a rather inconsequential detail in the scene, "the hint of a smile":

The two lovers are tied back-to-back on a mule. The shot frames this image of the two bound lovers going to their atrocious death; both seemed enraptured, but devoid of pathos: on their faces there is simply the hint of a smile, a kind of withdrawal into the smile. The word "smile" here is only an approximation. Their faces reveal that the man and the woman exist entirely in their love. But the film's thought . . . has nothing to do with the romantic idea of the fusion of love and death. These "crucified lovers" never desired to die. The shot says the very opposite: love is what resists death . . . No doubt this is what true love and the work of art have in common. (*Cinema* 204)

Badiou's reading may be regarded as a demonstration of what he suggests is the ideal relationship of (cinematic) art to (philosophical) thought; that is, inaesthetic.<sup>1</sup> Rather than critically engaging with a work of art by making aesthetic judgments, Badiou's inaesthetics reverses the relationship: not what philosophy could say about art, but how art can condition philosophical thinking. Badiou regards cinema as that which "transforms philosophy . . . transforms the very notion of idea" (*Cinema* 202). In this case, what is a small and arguably insignificant detail in the film that an inattentive viewer might miss becomes an occasion to make a novel philosophical claim about love and its relationship to the work of art. This claim is enabled by the cinematic construction that Badiou designates as a "philosophical situation." According to Badiou, the artistic impulse in cinema forges a confrontation between "terms that usually have no relationship with each other, [that are] foreign to each other" (*Cinema* 202).

Insofar as Badiou's philosophy elevates subtraction as the exemplary political operation,<sup>2</sup> it might be instructive to identify what his reading curiously excludes, if only to demonstrate what is at stake in such an approach to film. Badiou appears disinterested in situating cinematic texts in their historical and cultural context, favoring its generically universal, rather than culturally specific, address. He also seems to regard with equal disinterest the way film produces and sustains visual pleasure. The first exclusion is a crucial concern to historico-cultural and post-theory approaches to film, while the second is crucial to approaches aligned with

(Apparatus) Film Theory. Badiou strategically neglects those issues in favor of broader universal issues; that is, the exceptional within the particular.

These lovers are universal because that synthesis, the synthesis between their status as exceptions and the ordinary law, exists. We understand that every exception, every event, is also a promise for everyone. And if it weren't a promise for everyone, that artistic effect of the exception wouldn't exist. (*Cinema* 206)

One commentator quite fairly points out that such a method is a "restricting approach" because it is "only interested in cinema *qua idea*, rather than *qua film*" (Zepke 335). The consequence of which is the subordination of "discussions of formal, material or historical aspects of cinema" to the "description of an idea" (Zepke 335). Be that as it may, Badiou's contribution to cinematic thought enables new directions of theoretical inquiry in a field that has for the most part been exclusively polarized between (Apparatus) Film Theory on the one hand and so-called Post-theory on the other. I would insist on the enabling possibilities of Badiou's approach and concur with the idea that it should be "situated within a larger philosophical event in film studies/theory" (Fleming 468). Badiou meaningfully extends the relatively new area in Film Studies called Film-Philosophy, an area that is related to but categorically different from Philosophy of Film. Whereas the latter emphasizes "more cognitivist and analytical approaches to film," the former examines film *as* philosophy, a way of doing philosophy (Martin-Jones 7). Film-Philosophy is a relatively new formation and even more so outside of Europe, but the recent English translation of Alain Badiou's *Cinema* (2013), which gathers Badiou's theoretical work on film over the past five decades, has substantially contributed to the expanding interest in the field outside its European provenance.<sup>3</sup>

But what does it mean for film to *do* philosophy? In "Film as Philosophy," Thomas Wartenberg offers two ways in which philosophy "can be screened." The first, and perhaps somewhat self-evident, way is when films show a "philosopher making a philosophical argument verbally." The second way is when films "raise philosophical issues" (550). Wartenberg's thoughts regarding the idea of film as philosophy appears to be particularly concerned about whether or not a film is a medium capable of transmitting philosophical ideas—that is, visually instead of textually—and he seems to suggest that in this case the medium is not the message (or at least, does not substantially distort the message). As I have begun to indicate above, Badiou's inaeesthetic approach elevates art as a condition of philosophy. For Badiou, legitimate philosophical thinking can only occur when philosophy is able to make legible genuinely new ideas and not merely reiterate stale ones cloaked in illusions of novelty through a multiplicity of language games. As much as art, perhaps more so poetry than any other art form, seems to offer itself as the emblematic affirmation of the polyvalence of meaning, worthy of banishment from

Plato's ideal republic, Badiou recognizes that art brings thought closer to truth rather than away from it.

The poem occurs in philosophy when the latter, in all its will to universal address, in its vocation to make the place that it erects inhabited by all, falls under the imperative of having to propose to sense and to interpretation the latent void that sutures all truth to the being of that of which it is truth. (*Infinite Thought* 79)

Because art often attempts to express the inexpressible, it thus contingently points to the void, for it "makes truth out of the multiple conceived as a presence that has come to the limits of language" (*Handbook of Inaesthetics* 22). This is art's tendency to move towards universality, which consequently also moves towards truth insofar as truth emerges from the void, the place of non-Being.<sup>4</sup> This is not to suggest that the void is a repository of pre-given transcendental truths. For Badiou, truth is not divine illumination, but a production, and one that is produced through the pure conviction of those called to be subjects to that truth and whose fidelity drives it toward acquiring universal validity. Art thus joins the other conditions of philosophy—namely, science, politics, and love—as a way to produce truth through an encounter with the situation's void, which is what Badiou designates as an event.<sup>5</sup> When it comes to cinema, Badiou asserts that the cinematic spectator does not encounter truth in the dialogue nor in the plot, but rather in the "very movement that transmits the film's thought" (*Cinema* 18).

This essay, being unapologetically Badiouian, humbly attempts to facilitate that cinematic encounter with truth, and will proceed with the conviction that film is "a proposition in thought, a movement of thought, a thought connected . . . to its artistic disposition" (*Cinema* 17). In the pages that follow, I will offer an inaesthetic reading of one of my most beloved films, *Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros* (2005). I suggest that *Maximo Oliveros* is a film that attempts to render legible through cinematic experience what it is unable to directly articulate visually and verbally, following Badiou who argues that film "operates through what it withdraws from the visible" (*Handbook of Inaesthetics* 78). Consequently, it involves the attentive spectator in the procedure of thinking, a procedure initiated by cinematic punctual moments. I further suggest that those encounters with the *punctum* in the visual field demand a particular form of attention that revises attention sustained by visual pleasure. My proposition: *The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros* is a film that offers enabling possibilities in the thinking of love by providing the spectator with a different experience of cinematic attention through punctual encounters. Towards that goal, I conscript Roland Barthes's concept of the *punctum*, which was originally conceived as an attribute of photographic images and that I now appropriate for the analysis of a cinematic text. Barthes's concept of the *punctum* is strikingly compatible with Badiou's thought. Badiou speaks of truth events as a

"hole without borders" in the textual, and presumably the visual, edifice of a work of art (*Infinite Thought* 79). It is a concept that has an uncanny homology with Barthes's *punctum*, which is a "sting, speck, cut, little hole" (*Camera Lucida* 27).

## PUNCTURING ATTENTION

One of the more perplexing moments in Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*—a *punctum*, if you will—occurs when he writes:

Ultimately—or at the limit—in order to see a photograph well, it is best to look away or close your eyes . . . I may know better a photograph I remember than a photograph I am looking at, as if direct vision oriented its language wrongly, engaging it in an effort of description which will always miss the point of the effect, the *punctum*. (52-3)

What does it mean and what does it entail to see something without looking at it? Surely Barthes is not suggesting that the ability to faithfully capture the external image as a duplicate mental picture is a sign that one knows it better. Barthes speaks of how the *punctum* emerges in the field of perception. In the visual field that is framed by the empire of signs, the *punctum* exists as a "subtraction," to use Badiou's term. The *punctum* is not immediately discernible; however, it is able to set off a series of metonymic connections that leave an affective mark in the consciousness. It is "as if the image launched desire beyond what it permits us to see" (*Camera Lucida* 59). As a failed product of the process of what Badiou calls law of count, the *punctum* cannot be coded and cannot be neatly classified within existing categories of knowledge. We thus wait attentively for the *punctum* to surface in the visual field, for since it serves no purpose in the manifest narrative of the image, what Barthes refers to as the *studium*, there is no way to predict its arrival.<sup>6</sup> It requires a form of waiting without expecting, an intransitive waiting, which is a condition of openness to the extra-narrative elements that are present (as subtraction) but not represented in the image. The *punctum* thus disrupts cinematic attention predicated on visual pleasure and consequently opens up opportunities for new modes of attention.

Theories of spectatorship suggest that cinematic attention signifies the efficiency of ideological manipulation. The cinematic apparatus offers illusions of plentitude and also negates through suture psychic antagonisms rooted in sexual difference that is often dramatized in film. Visual pleasure suggests the erasure of "lack," whether it is achieved through identification with the all-seeing Gaze of the apparatus (Metz 782) or through the identification with the active, controlling male Gaze (Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure" 30). To enjoy the image on screen is the surest sign that the subject

has become a spectator and thus has aligned his gaze with that of the cinematic apparatus. It is no surprise that oppositional theories of spectatorship have tended to accept that the tradeoff for a concretely defined feminine spectatorship is the abdication of pleasure (Doane; Pollock; Friedlander). Historically inflected approaches to cinema have also explored how the logic of capital structures spectatorship and consequently cinematic attention. In his important work, *The Cinematic Mode of Production*, Beller argues that the emergence of the spectator follows the historical trajectory of capital both contribute to the formation of what he calls an "attention economy," where the consumption of the object gazed at is really a form of labor. He sees the evolution of commodity as moving towards "dematerialization," and the theater is a "deterritorialized factory" that creates a new social logic. Beller writes:

[Cinema] arises out of a need for the intensification of the extraction of value from human bodies beyond normal physical and special limits. And beyond normal working hours. (13)

Beller's work provides an explanatory logic to visual pleasure: it lubricates, as it were, the act of attention, which, Beller argues, is a form of labor and indeed consumption in our period of advanced capitalism.

The need to secure the spectator's attention suggests that attention occurs outside the normal condition of consciousness. Of course, this normal condition from which we distinguish the exemplary moment of attention is a historically determined mode of behavior. Indeed, Jonathan Crary's genealogical study suggests that the "problem of attention" was "elaborated within an emergent economic system that demanded attentiveness of a subject in a wide range of new productive and spectacular tasks" (*Suspensions of Perception* 29). Crary seems to suggest that the demand for attentiveness on modern subjects is another way for the current regime of power to discipline, in the Foucauldian sense of the term. It is a way to make subjects efficient and productive in an age where the logic of capital "demands that [they] accept as *natural* switching attention rapidly from one thing to another" (*Suspensions of Perception* 29). Crary concludes that what we identify as distractions to attentive behavior is an "*effect*, and in many cases a constituent element, of many attempts to produce attentiveness in human subjects" (*Suspensions of Perception* 49). Distractions are produced by the discursive regime to precisely constitute a particular understanding of attention that is compatible with systems of power in place. Incorporating the insights of Beller and Crary, one could say that in the cinematic experience attention becomes linked to consumption, and visual pleasure is the primary means by which attention is secured. Consumption, as used here, relates both to the image as commodity and the woman as object of male desire. Cultural theorist Rey Chow extends the concept of cinematic attention

to talk about how another culture (particularly China) could be made into an object of visual pleasure by the feminization of the camera. I want to briefly engage with Chow's "Seeing Modern China," one of her most anthologized essays.

Chow, analyzing Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor*, argues that attention in the film becomes "indistinguishable from the experience of being watched and followed everywhere" (*The Rey Chow Reader* 100). The attention given to the main character Pu Yi (initially as an exotic symbol—what Chow calls "museum aesthetics"—then as a "castrated" ordinary citizen) demonstrates, for Chow, what Kaja Silverman designates as "erotic overinvestment" (qtd. in *The Rey Chow Reader* 101). Interestingly enough, Pu Yi "commands" that he be given attention: he desires to be "watched and followed everywhere" (*The Rey Chow Reader* 100). Chow never fails to link the notion of attention to erotic desire. She insists that her move to extend the scope of image-as-woman to image-as-feminized space retains the "politics of to-be-looked-at-ness" (*The Rey Chow Reader* 108), and only in retaining the erotic relation between spectator and image can her argument sustain such a politics. Her analysis enables her to argue that not only women but in fact an entire culture (China) could be fetishized by the cinematic apparatus.



Fig 1. Pu Yi commanding attention (Universal Studios, author's screen capture)

Chow's rather faithful refunctioning of Mulvey's framework into the domain of the cinematic representation of Asian culture is, on the whole, convincing, but what interests me most about the essay is its consistent use of amorous metaphors to describe the camera's attitude toward Pu Yi. Chow speaks of the camera's "amorous attitude," of its "caressing strokes" (*The Rey Chow Reader* 101, 102). Indeed, she speaks of the camera as "courting [Pu Yi]" (*The Rey Chow Reader* 101). The camera's attention to Pu Yi is motivated, Chow seems to be suggesting, by love as well as desire. For me this tension between love and desire—and for Chow erotic desire wins out in the end—reveals the conflicting impulses within Bertolucci himself, who, as Chow herself points out in the beginning of her essay, openly expresses a deep admiration for China but had to construct the film in such a way that would appeal to a mainstream audience. Thus, despite the intention to present China through loving eyes, larger structures of mainstream modes of cinematic representation end up fetishizing the object (of the gaze). It is the ethnic spectator whose reaction is both "fascination as well as painful historical awareness" and who thus caught "in a cross-cultural context, between the gaze that represents her and the image that is supposed to be her, who could thus provide a new way to approach a way of knowing the Asian other without being "caught in the opposition between modernity and tradition" (*The Rey Chow Reader* 122).

Both the notions of the female spectator and the ethnic spectator have been offered by film theorists as an antidote to the grip of cinematic attention. Whether through "masquerade" (Doane), "distanciation" (Pollock), or "lived experience as the ethnic Other" (*The Rey Chow Reader* 2010) these strategies of viewing disrupt attention primarily through the repudiation of visual pleasure. What I want to do, however, is to recuperate the notion of cinematic attention. It is my contention that love is one of the domains of experience that transcends epistemic dualisms, to rethink visibility as a form of looking that is not predicated on a fundamental antagonism between subject and object, looker and looked-at, gaze and object-of-the-gaze, viewer and image, and such bifurcated modes of analysis that are dominant in the analysis of visual texts.

I argue that attention is only a sign of the efficiency of ideology if it is an effect of visual pleasure, a product of the Gaze; however, attention may also be a form of intransitive waiting-for-an-Event, a kind of attention that is born out of an encounter with *punctual* moments in the film, moments in the film that due to singular metonymic connections elicit a peculiar affective response from the spectator. The *punctum*, as developed by Barthes, disrupts attention but only because it demands a new form of attention. Like the amorous encounter, the *punctum* is an accident; it occurs by chance. And, following Badiou, fidelity to the *punctual* moment is necessary, if the film were to have potentially transformative effects on the subject.

## THE BLOSSOMING OF MAXIMO OLIVEROS AS PHILOSOPHICAL SITUATION

*The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros*, directed by Aureus Solito, is a film that centers on Maxi, an effeminate boy whose love for his family of petty criminals conflicts with his love for Victor, a handsome police officer who Maxi first encounters when Victor defends him from the assault of two neighborhood toughs one evening. The film was awarded *Pinakamahusay na Pelikula* (Best Picture) in the *Gawad Urian Awards* in 2006 and its warm local reception was matched by international recognition, including Best Picture in the Montreal World Film Festival (2005) and in the ImagiNative Film Festival, Toronto (2005), Best Film in the Asian Festival of Films, Singapore (2005), and Best Feature Film in the Berlin International Film Festival (2006). It is tempting to attribute the international success of the film to what Graham Huggan calls the "postcolonial exotic" (2001). The "love story" of an effeminate 12-year-old set in the backdrop of the slums in Manila provides the film with a spectacular combination of exotic and ethnographic appeal. One American commentator writes:

[*The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros*] is a fascinating slice of third-world life ... Amazingly enough [Maximo's] grotty neighborhood where mountains of garbage soak in stagnant ponds is a paragon of tolerance. (Willmott, "Maximo Oliveros")

The comment, aside from revealing the author's rather strange assumptions about tolerance, reveals that part of the film's global (read: Western) appeal is due to its ability to show the extent to which the ethic of tolerance can emerge in even the most unlikely regions of the developing world—that is, the surprise that emerges from the gap between expectation and presentation is what gives the film, in the eyes of some of its Western viewers, a distinct appeal and charm. Such attempts to turn the film into a mouthpiece for the current dominant ethics, which Badiou calls "ethics of difference" (*Ethics* 15) is thankfully balanced by more nuanced critical readings. Local critic J. Neil Garcia offers a convincing reading of the film as a "national allegory" that strategically uses a young homosexual as a "vehicle for [the film's] metaphorical project." Indeed, for Garcia, Maxi comes to symbolize the paradoxical "duplicity" of the Filipino postcolonial subject, for he "lives in the liminal space between maleness and femaleness, childhood and adolescence, and between the "goodness" of filial and romantic loves." Maxi, for Garcia, is symbolic of the nation: young, confused, poor, but always full of grace and hope. My own inaeesthetic approach restrains from giving a totalizing reading on the film, opting instead to locate scenes that offer punctual moments that may open up "philosophical situations" (Badiou, *Cinema* 202).

The opening scene of *The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros* immediately presents a challenge to attention. The camera begins by (re-)presenting the slums of

Manila, showing a sequence of random images of poverty and destitution. The camera seems especially interested in the inordinate amount of garbage that has been amassed in the streets and the sewers of Kalye Guipit, a dingy street that some people have to unfortunately call home. Ironically, the opening score that accompanies those destitute sights and sounds of Kalye Guipit is Yoyoy Villame's "This is my country, my Philippines," an upbeat nationalistic song that catalogues the Philippines's beautiful mountains, valleys, rivers, beaches, sunrises and sunsets; that is, a tropical paradise that could not be farther away from the images that the camera strings together. All of a sudden, we see a dainty hand fish out a stray flower from the garbage-infested street, and the next time we see that flower it is tucked behind the ear of a beautiful, effeminate boy, Maxi. Like the flower that he picks up, Maxi stands out as a misplaced figure of beauty whose grace and poise is in stark contrast to the backdrop that is his troubled neighborhood. The camera, after panning across different areas of Kalye Guipit, momentarily rests its gaze on Maxi, and presents a medium close up shot of our protagonist. Maxi offers a photo-worthy smile, seemingly happy about the few privileged seconds of attention he gets from the camera. The spectatorial discomfort produced by the images of destitution and poverty and by the tension between the image of the Philippines shown by the camera and the one spoken of in Villame's song is put to rest by Maxi's calming appearance. It is a scene that reenacts Lacan's thesis on the formation of the ego, the mirror-stage: from the jarring fragmentation of the Real to the comforting unity of the Imaginary in one swift and spontaneous moment accomplished through the recognition of the other. Maxi thus becomes the immediate sole object of cinematic attention, and from hereon, the camera will follow Maxi as he gracefully waltzes through the teeming alleys of Kalye Guipit.

The shots of Maxi in this opening scene never appear to be neutral. It is not an indifferent eye that looks at Maxi, but a gaze that has a particular agenda. The camera dwells on Maxi's effeminacy, capturing all his "swishy" mannerisms and movements. Thus, he cannot be a threat to the narcissistic ego that identifies with the active male gaze of the apparatus, which defines the spectatorial position. Yet, the apparatus also captures Maxi looking back at the gaze, a look that resists integration into the dominant narrative. It is presented as it *is*: as a look that returns the gaze. But rather than disrupting the look and triggering the shame that accompanies failed voyeurisms, Maxi smiles at the camera, putting into question the antagonism that exists between bearer of the gaze and object of the gaze. Maxi's smile also requests our attention, but it is not coerced. It is not like the attention that Chow says Pu Yi "commands" (*The Rey Chow Reader* 100). Maxi's smile is the *punctum* of that scene, an incalculable emergence. It is not part of the situation of the scene. It appears that the viewer is the reason for Maxi's smile, for the smile appears immediately following his look into the camera. I suggest that Maxi's smile creates a situation for thought because the viewer has to consider how to respond



Fig 2. A smile that requests attention (TLA Releasing, author's screen capture)

to his smile. One could, of course, forget about it, with the justification that it is meaningless because it has no relevance to the narrative. But one could also wait; keep it in one's consciousness, sustain one's attention to it, and let its memory intrude in other scenes.

The philosophical question that *The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros* raises is announced in the film's most playfully parodic scene. In this scene, Maxi and a few of his "sissy" friends stage a parody of the Ms. Universe beauty pageant, and they mimic all the various components of the pageant apart from the swimsuit competition. The scene is three and a half minutes worth of drag and mimicry, and is enough to make any crude Butler-ian and Bhabha-ian declare it as the film's most subversive moment. To read the scene as enacting "troubling drag" or "menacing mimicry" or as a manifestation of a particular aspect of Philippine gay culture might be the obvious recourse, but doing so risks missing the enabling moment of the *punctum*. For me, the punctual moment of the scene occurs during the Q&A segment of their pageant. The boy playing the host asks Maxi a predictable pageant question: "Ms. Philippines, what is love?" In a tone that resonates confidence, Maxi replies, "Love is . . . [pauses]." His clipped sentence is followed by an uncomfortable pause. One would expect that like the contestants in the pageants they mimic, Maxi would be offering a prepared response, simply playing along. Instead, he pauses and offers only silence and a perplexed look. Maxi takes the question out of the frame



Fig 3. Eye contact (TLA Releasing, author's screen capture)

of their game. His silence makes the question resonate thick and full. His reply starts off strong, as if prepared to provide a rehearsed response that is common to such beauty pageants (i.e. "Love is a many splendored thing. I wish for world peace. *Mabuhay!*"). "Love is . . ." Maxi says confidently, looking directly at the camera. His confident tone is interrupted by a hesitant pause, an uncomfortable silence. He then suddenly breaks out of character. He no longer wants to participate in their game. Their game has turned too serious. "I have to go home," Maxi says to his friends as he dashes out the door, "My father must be looking for me."

It may seem that Maxi evades the question; however, he perhaps unknowingly provides an unconventional response. To the question "What is love?" Maxi's answer is silence itself. Maxi could have very well given us some prepared answer, and thus the question "What is love?" would not have resonated so thick and full. Instead, by giving us his lack in the form of silence we as spectators are invited to share Maxi's burden in thinking about the question within the parameters of this particular cinematic situation. We are requested to patiently wait for the answer. It is of secondary importance if Maxi is eventually able to formally articulate a response, for like Maxi we wait for love itself, and we wait with Maxi. "It is," to repeat one of my best loved lines by the philosopher Simone Weil, "only watching, waiting, attention" (58).



Fig 4. "Love is..." (TLA Releasing, author's screen capture)

The theme of silence is picked up in the final scene of the movie. It runs for a little over two minutes, and not a word is uttered. Maxi and Victor had a falling out. Maxi's father was killed by Victor's commanding officer, and we assume that Maxi holds Victor partially responsible. This scene appears to be intentionally crafted to stand in stark contrast to the opening scene. If the opening scene featured the raucous sights and sounds of Manila, this one shows a different, more tranquil side of the city. In the early morning quiet, Maxi gracefully (and "swishily") walks to school. Victor then appears in the scene driving a jeep. He follows Maxi. The camera then focuses on Victor (in uniform) looking at Maxi. Victor's vehicle overtakes Maxi, and stops several meters ahead of the direction Maxi is walking toward. Victor steps out, leans on his jeep, and waits for Maxi. Now, all is set for the encounter: Victor waits at the end of the street and gazes at Maxi. But Maxi does not acknowledge Victor and walks past him. Victor's gaze follows Maxi as he calmly walks away and disappears from the frame. We then see Victor waiting at the same spot as the scene fades out.



Fig 5. Maxi and Victor's love story ends in waiting (TLA Releasing, author's screen capture)

We wait for a signifier on which we might anchor our interpretation of the current state of Maxi and Victor's relationship—perhaps a look, a smile, anything that would reveal that Maxi acknowledges Victor's desire for a connection. What the scene provides, however, is a *punctum*. What I consider to be the scene's *punctum* occurs just before Maxi disappears from the frame. Maxi's metronomic pace is disturbed by a slight pause; he hesitates for a fraction of a second before completely stepping outside the cinematic frame. Maxi's pause recalls his earlier pause that was his response to the question "What is love?" And what this *punctum* does is to initiate a conversation between the two scenes. This final scene then could be read as a visual response to the question "What is love?" And Maxi's answer: still silence and waiting. From the Q&A scene that occurs early in the film to this final scene, we waited for/with Maxi. We want to know how he understands love and how his experiences shaped his own understanding. Yet, he seems to have the same response to the question "What is love?" Silence and waiting. Maxi shows us that love need not reside only in amorous declarations and consummations. He invites us to see love in those very moments of its supposed absence, which is a challenge to both our attention and understanding.

## A MOVEMENT TOWARDS CLOSURE

For Barthes, the lover, pressed by a will-to-knowledge, exclaims in frustration, "I want to understand!" However, the lover will eventually have to learn to come to accept that he "cannot hope to seize the concept of [love] except by the tail," for it is through "flashes, formulas, surprises of expression . . ." (*A Lover's Discourse* 59) that love makes itself available to thought because the "figures [of love] . . . are non-syntagmatic, non-narrative" (*A Lover's Discourse* 7). Whereas narrative could only present love in its embalmed form, it is the *punctum*, an "immanent break . . . [an] eventual supplement" (Badiou, *Ethics* 51) that is able to represent in the visual field love's transformative vitality. This essay, primarily informed by Badiou's concept of inaeffectives, suggests that *The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros* asks the philosophical question: What is love? It further suggests that the film attempts to respond to the very question it raises through punctual encounters in the visual field that render love accessible to thought. The film thus creates what Badiou designates as a "philosophical situation" (*Philosophy in the Present* 11). If "visual pleasure," as Mulvey posits, is responsible for sustaining attention in "narrative cinema," then punctual encounters generate opportunities to engage in a form of loving attention that initiates enduring philosophical speculation.

## Notes

1. See Alain Badiou. *Handbook of Inaesthetics*. Trans. Alberto Toscano. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2005. Print.
2. See Alain Badiou. "On Subtraction" in *Theoretical Writings*. Trans. Ray Brassier and Alberto Toscano. London: Continuum, 2005. Print.
3. Film-Philosophy made its first appearance at an international conference in 2008 and since then a Film-Philosophy conference has been held annually in various European (primarily UK) universities. The first film-philosophy conference outside of Europe was recently held in North America at York University, Toronto, Canada in May 2016.
4. According to Badiou, for something *to be* it has to be counted as part of what he calls a "situation," for "all presentation is under the law of the count" (*Being* 52). Being emerges when pure multiplicity has undergone the operation of the "count-as-one" and is thus made accessible to knowledge via categorization/ grouping based on its properties, characteristics, and so on. Only elements of the situation are accessible to knowledge because for Badiou "all thought supposes a situation of the thinkable . . . a structure, a counting for one, whereby the presented multiple is consistent, numerable" (*Being* 34). Although the void belongs to the situation it is not presented as one of its elements; it is present but not presented and consequently not represented. The void is the negative identity of the situation, and "every situation is founded on the void"; it is "what is not there, but what is necessary for anything to be there" (Feltham and Clemens, *Infinite* 16).
5. An event is "that-which-is-not-being"; it is an encounter with "the void of the situation . . . [and] has absolutely no interest in preserving the status quo as such" (Hallward 114). Since the Event occurs beyond the domain of established knowledge, there is no way to predict where and when an Event will take place; it is an "emergence of the New which cannot be reduced to its causes and conditions" (386). Since the Event has not been subjected to any "Law of Count" it is, by definition, multiple, but a multiplicity that counts as nothing within its Situation. "[I]t is not, as such, presented, nor is it presentable. It is—not being—supernumerary" (*Being* 178). That is, it belongs to "that-which-is-not-being-qua-being" (189). Because it is not discernable in the Situation, the existence of an Event cannot be proven but can only be asserted by a witness, a Subject, who by the very act of fidelity to an Event becomes subjectivized by it.
6. For Barthes, the *studium* is "the given cultural meaning that we understand at once" and is "ultimately always coded" (51). The *punctum* is "a tiny shock . . . at once brief and active" (49). It occurs by chance, by accident: The *punctum* "pricks" for "if they do not, it is doubtless that the photographer put them there intentionally" (*Camera Lucida* 47).

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