FILM REVIEWS

Peasants in the Philippines have worked this land for generations, but developers want to turn this seaside community into a four-course golf and tourist resort. Image source: http://www.golfwar.org/press.htm

The Golf War
A Story of Land, Golf and Revolution

Produced and directed by Jen Schradie and Matt DeVries

Durham, North Carolina: Anthill Productions, L.L.C., 1999

VHS (color). 39 minutes. ISBN: 1-56029-878-2
In English and Filipino subtitled in English, and Spanish edition available.

Distributed by Bullfrog Films
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The genteel game of golf kills Filipinos! To oppose powerful developers intent on converting farmland and fishing areas in the Philippines into golf-course-enhanced tourist attractions is to risk life and limb. Politicized violence from the government and private armies ("guns, goons and gold") are all too familiar in the Philippines and other late-industrializing countries. In this well-framed case study, carefully documented corrupt land deals stretch from local government in Hacienda Looc, Batangas Province, up to administrators appointed by President Fidel Ramos (1992–1998) in Malacañang Palace.

Despite decades of criticism, "modernization" and "development" models of social change persist. Intent on hastening their demise, Jen Schradie and Matt DeVries' documentary video *The Golf War* exposes the technocratic face of capitalist "development" to uncover the human suffering generated in its pathway. It places a human face on political corruption and paragovernmental terrorism (intimidation and killing of political activists) used to suppress opposition to the "modernization" juggernaut in the Philippines. Using ironic sound-bites from champion golfer Tiger Woods and his father as naive but instructive foils golfing in Batangas Province, the video artfully foregrounds the plight of rural Filipino agricultural laborers. Futurists and other social scientists in university classrooms, government social service departments, corporate boardrooms, and nongovernmental organizations can all learn from *The Golf War*.

It presents three alternative futures with unequal clarity. Two are directly counterposed to one another. Corrupt "development" from above drives golf course construction with inept and narrowly conceived "land reform," theft of ancestral lands from farmers, threats, physical attacks, and political murders. Humble but determined farmers and fisherfolk bravely resist, desiring a future much like that of their ancestors who worked the same fields and fished the same coastal seas for five generations or more. Poignant as their struggle may be, their dream may yet have to be revised, even if corrupt political opponents are briefly checked by heroic collective resistance. Romantic futures that nostalgically project the past into the years ahead are increasingly unlikely to be realized. In light of ongoing national and global changes, farmers of Hacienda Looc might do better designing their own future rather than finding one imposed on them from above.

Interviews, voice-overs, and graphics in *The Golf War* fail to identify the political pedigree of the New Peoples Army (NPA) as the military arm of the Communist Party of the Philippines, which has been under the umbrella of the Communist-Party-dominated National Democratic Front since 1969. The omission of this third political actor, with its unclearly-defined future, does not serve foreign viewers well. Of course, societies like the Philippines need radical social transformation. An organization least likely to lead it to a successful conclusion, in this reviewer's understanding, is the Communist Party of the Philippines. As portrayed in the video, the NPA appears like Robin Hood's merry band, providing virtuous muscle to support the farmers' just demands for land to till and for continued fishing rights. Ironically, the NPA and its umbrella organization have not been shy about stating their political views. However, it is hampered by a state-capitalist vision of its preferred future. Despite earlier campaigns against dictator President Ferdinand Marcos, who declared martial law to stay in power for two decades (1965–1986), the Communist Party and NPA abstained from protest actions that brought the dictatorship to a sudden-death finish in 1986 because the Party did not trust the masses; and it would have had to share leadership of that massive four-day protest action.

Unlike Canadian Nettie Wild's video *A Rustling of Leaves: Inside the Philippine Revolution* (Santa Monica: Empowerment Project, 1988), *The Golf War* resists probing below the surface of the New People's Army's defense of farmers' rights. And it evinces unwillingness to criticize self-sacrificing revolutionaries in other countries. Perhaps this accounts for the unstinting praise the video receives in a "Message of Solidarity" from Jose Maria Sison, self-exiled chairman of the Communist Party of the Philippines, on the Web page of the Revolutionary Anti-Imperialist League (http://www.etext.org/Politics/MIM/cal/jms_gw.htm, accessed March 7, 2003).

Student viewers will readily agree with an older Filipina's comment that future employment for women as prostitutes serving resort

clientele does not represent progress. Otherwise, however, the issue of the effects of top-down "development" on women remains underdeveloped in this video. Also, at several points, translations from Filipino might have been rendered more completely and with less bowdlerizing.

I have viewed *The Golf War* three times, including once with students at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. Despite shortcomings, *The Golf War* succeeds as a political satire of "development"-driven tourist attractions by presenting the tragically high human cost of such projects. Aside from the video's research value, it may be viewed and discussed in a fifty-minute class period. Asian studies teachers, futurists, planning and tourism specialists, and other social scientists can use *The Golf War* in undergraduate and graduate courses and community discussion groups. ■

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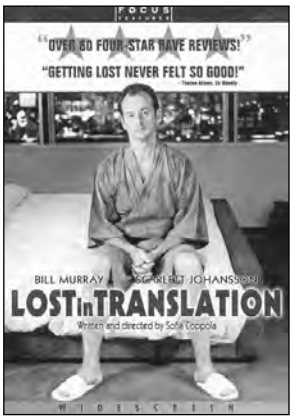
Lost in Translation

Written and directed
by Sofia Coppola

Universal Studios, 2003

DVD and VHS (color)
1 hour, 42 minutes



Lost in Translation is Sofia Coppola's most ambitious film to date. It depicts the interaction of two Americans, both fish out of water in a hotel in Tokyo. Bob Harris (Bill Murray) is an over-the-hill American actor in Tokyo to film whiskey ads; "Charlotte" is a recent college graduate who has accompanied her photographer-husband to Tokyo and been left to amuse herself. Bob and Charlotte (Scarlett Johansson) spend time together, develop an affection for each other, and part. In one scene they share a bed, but they never make love. Slight gestures—his hand reaching out tentatively to grasp her ankle, her turning away into an elevator—are supercharged. The film garnered four Oscar nominations—best film, best actor, best director, and writing (original screenplay)—and won for writing. Now in her early thirties, Coppola is the first American woman nominated for an Oscar for directing (she was also producer and screenwriter).

With a few exceptions, those under the age of twenty probably won't choose to see *Lost in Translation*—there's little action, sex, or profanity. I didn't notice specific segments, short or long, that would lend themselves to classroom use. *Kill-Bill* and *The Last Samurai* will affect our students, but *Lost in Translation* will be significant for its impact not on our students but on us. Here are one viewer's thoughts after two viewings a month apart.

The glittering neon of downtown Tokyo, the sumptuous appointments of a five-star Tokyo hotel, the bullet train, imbecilic TV shows: is this Japan? Yes, of course. No, of course not. It *is* Japan, one of a thousand Japans; it *isn't* the Japan anyone should mistake for *the* Japan, if such a thing exists. It *is* Japan only for those foreign visitors utterly insulated, determined *not* to make human contact. Charlotte makes forays into other Japans. She goes to a Buddhist temple (but complains afterward, in a teary phone call to a friend back home, that she felt nothing), to an *ikebana* lesson (in the hotel, no less), to Kyoto (the Heian Shrine); she has, she says, Japanese friends, but the only evidence is a bar scene and a *karaoke* party, with little human contact at either. Yes, she is more open to Japan (and to life) than Bob Harris, but the final image of her, blonde hair on the Tokyo street, wrapped in warm thoughts about the encounter with Bob, is of her isolation from her Japanese surroundings. The gorgeous vistas of Tokyo from her hotel room underline the fact that she's on one side of the glass, Japan—life—on the other.

The setting is Japan and Tokyo, but it might be any empire of signs in other than Latin letters: Moscow? Athens? Istanbul? Shanghai? It is an essentialized Other, there not for its own sake but to highlight the humanity of Bob and Charlotte. Together, they are the Tom Cruise of *The Last Samurai*, the Kevin Costner of *Dances with Wolves*, the Richard Chamberlain of *Shogun*.[1] The audience focuses on them. It is meant to focus on them.

But what if—for a moment or two—we were to focus on the Japanese characters? The manic PR types, the karaoke partygoers,