

First ASEAN Symposium on Aesthetics, where Wong Hoy Cheong, then a young graduate who had returned from the United States, began to question earlier postcolonial artistic tendencies and preoccupation with mining the mythical past. Instead he advanced the critical inquiry of the present as a direction for contemporary art. I quote him here at length:

— we need to confront the fabric of everyday life and not be tangled in the cobwebs of the past. As it is, we have enough myths and legends, pucuk rebungs, dragons and phoenixes, batik motifs and *wayang kulit*. The anonymous singers in Karaoke lounges, the medicine men and prostitutes in the backlanes of Chowkit, Mat Rocks and heavy-metal music, the squatters of Sungei Way, the computer salesman, the bank auditor, the travel agent — they too make up our culture.¹⁸

— A detailed reading of this manifesto and how it sets the agenda for Malaysian art in the 1990s is beyond the scope of our inquiry here today. However, it sets up a contrast and allows us to consider the crystallization of a different commitment to cultural rebellion to the one that is primarily seen through the rubric of the nation. This is another story of another time.

Fig. 06
Zulkifli Dahlan, *Kedai-Kedai* (Shops),
1973, acrylic on canvas, 158 x 266 cm,
National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur



“Suddenly Turning Visible”: Art as Experiment and Pedagogy in the Philippines

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The “Great” Philippines:
Marcos and the Cultural Center of the
Philippines

“This nation can be great again.” This was how Ferdinand Marcos enchanted the electorate in 1965 when he won his first presidential election at a time when the Philippines “prided itself on being the most ‘advanced’ in the region.”¹⁴ In his inaugural speech, “Mandate to Greatness,” he speaks of a “national greatness” founded on the patriotism of forebears who had built the edifice of the “first modern republic in Asia and Africa.”¹⁵ This sense of “greatness” would feed into the global present in the global south as Marcos was seriously committed to the idea of a “Third World.” He hosted the ministerial meeting of the Group of 77 in 1976 in Manila, a coalition founded in 1964 within the United Nations for developing nation-states. In his remarks to the ministers, “Manila and the Global New Society,” Marcos invoked meetings and declarations such as the Bandung Conference (1955), the Algiers Charter (1967), and the Lima Declarations (1972 and 1975) as context and proposed the transformation of the Group of 77 into a Third World Economic system.¹⁶

This paper locates “cultural rebellion” against this complicated background that similarly lays claim to a certain kind of revolution and Third World globality. In order to do this, reflecting on the discourses of development, identity, and democracy may prove useful at the outset.

Development is broadly conceived, implicating the economic policy of the Marcos government in the 1960s and ‘70s and its immense outlays in infrastructure for culture as part of

social development and to “fulfill the potential of the human personality.”¹⁷ The First Lady, Imelda Marcos, would cast identity in terms of a crisis. Says Her Excellency: “through centuries the Filipino had been putting on a mask in order to confound his conquerors. When the time came for him to take off the mask because it was no longer needed—he found that it had become part of his face.”¹⁸ This identity is a critique of the colonial or the Western and this notion of the ethnic may in turn translate into the spectacle of diversity in exotic representations that convey what James Clifford calls “ethnographic surrealism.” The opening of the Folk Arts Theater in 1974 presented a two-and-a-half hour parade, depicting the entire range of Philippine history and social development, from the Stone Age to the New Society.¹⁹ In a book published in 1971, on the eve of Martial Law, Ferdinand Marcos stated that the Filipinos lived in a “revolutionary era,” one marked by “swift, violent, often disruptive change.”²⁰ For him, democracy was the revolution of the time, a negation of the oligarchy on the one hand, and of communism on the other. It also meant people coming together as a collective under his and his wife’s paternal patronage.

These discourses of development, identity, and democracy condense in the Cultural Center of the Philippines, the main edifice for culture in the Marcos government and Imelda’s brainchild.²¹ In the atmosphere conditioned by the said discourses, the artist-curator Raymundo Albano described a situation in art in which a world was “suddenly turning visible.”²² This art world was no different from the world being made at a hectic rhythm by the Marcos government.



Fig. 01
Inauguration of Folk Arts Theater with the parade *Kasaysayan ng Lahi* (History of the Race), telling the story of the Filipino people from Stone Age to New Society, 1974.



Fig. 02
Imelda Marcos inspecting the construction of the Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1969.

First, the government transformed a part of the Manila Bay, 77 hectares of foreshore land, into a cultural complex. This unprecedented achievement in public works and architecture was part of the form of internationalism and the process of modernization. In her speech to the delegates of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund meeting in 1976, Imelda was clear about her vision and gave full play to its montage: "you have come to our country at a most exciting time though at a somewhat awkward stage when we are negotiating the challenging transition from a traditional order to a progressive humanist society. This new complex of buildings erected on land reclaimed from the sea stands in dramatic contrast to the slum areas that blight our city. The contrast of shrine and shanty symbolizes the shining future against our impoverished past."⁰⁸ Moreover, the participation of the Philippines in expositions and biennales as well as the invitation of foreign artists and exhibitions to the Philippines was in cadence with the transitivity of this internationalism.

This morphing is best imagined by the heady atmosphere at the Cultural Center itself, which was simultaneously ethnic and cosmopolitan. Such a sensibility may be gleaned in the project titled *Ugnayan* (Connection) in which the ethnic is renewed through a kind of musicology that inscribed the local in the language

of the avant-garde. Jose Maceda, a pianist trained in Paris, composed *Ugnayan*. Its sources were "musique concrète (atmosphere, waves, clouds, electronic technology) and shared labor and cooperation of large numbers of people as a form of technology."⁰⁹ It aimed for the synthesis of "ethnomusicology and composition as well as temporalities (that is, the past and the present)." According to Ramon Santos: "the construction of *Ugnayan* consists of twenty 51-minute layers of recorded sounds (mostly from ethnic instruments), each layer to be broadcast by one of the 37 radio stations authorized to operate in Metro-Manila. All stations were to be synchronized to start the broadcast exactly from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. on New Year's Day of 1974, during which no other sound would be heard on Philippine airwaves." ^{fig. 03}

Ugnayan, according to Santos, was significant in Philippine contemporary music as it presented a synthesis of two separate disciplines: ethnomusicology and production. On one hand, the recorded sounds in *Ugnayan* were sourced from traditional musical instruments and vocal sounds identified with prehistoric, indigenous, and ethnic traditions in Asia and the Philippines. On the other, it involved the collective effort of a large community of people, which simultaneously assumed the roles of spectator-listener and the producer of sound through the transistor radios that they

- 01
Patricio Abinales and Donna Amoroso, *State and Society in the Philippines* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005), p. 193.
- 02
Ferdinand Marcos' inauguration speech "Mandate for Greatness" in Ileana Maramag, ed., *The Second Marcos Inaugural* (Tokyo: Toppan Print, 1970), p. 140.
- 03
Ferdinand Marcos, *Manila and the Global New Society* (Manila: Government Printing Office, 1977).
- 04
Bureau of National and Foreign Information, *The Philippine Economy in the Mid-Seventies: Development for the New Society* (Manila: The Philippines Bureau of National and Foreign Information, 1974), p. 136.
- 05
Imelda Romualdez Marcos, "A Monument to the Filipino Spirit," *The Ideas of Imelda Romualdez Marcos*, Vol. 1, Ileana Maramag, ed. (Manila: National Media Production Center, 1978), p. 113.
- 06
Ferdinand Marcos, *Today's Revolution: Democracy* (Publisher unknown, 1971), p. 1.
- 07
Raymundo Albano, "Developmental Art of the Philippines," *Philippine Art Supplement*, Vol. 2 No. 4 (Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1981), p. 16.
- 08
Imelda Romualdez Marcos, "Between Two Worlds," *The Ideas of Imelda Romualdez Marcos*, Vol. 2, Ileana Maramag, ed. (Manila: National Media Production Center, 1978), p. 58.
- 09
Ramon Santos, "Society and Power as Music Composition," unpublished essay.

fig. 03
A crowd gathers around transistors in a town plaza in the first *Ugnayan* assemblage, 1974.



fig. 114
Raymundo Albano, *Step on the Sand and Make Footprints*, 1975

11
Albano, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

12
Raymundo Albano, "Installations: A Case for Hangings," *Philippine Art Supplement*, Vol. 2 No. 1 (Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1981), p. 3.

13
Albano, "Developmental Art of the Philippines," *op. cit.*, p. 16.

14
Ibid.

15
Alice Guillermo, *Protest/Revolutionary Art in the Philippines 1970–1990* (Manila: University of the Philippines, 2001), p. 244.

brought along with them.

The gathering of different art forms at the Cultural Center was part of Imelda's agenda of the "seven arts." This interdisciplinary inclination found expression in experiments that sought to convene a wide range of materials for art, a mixing that was in many ways a translation of foreign forms. Two instances may be foregrounded in this respect: the curatorship of modern and contemporary visual art and the translation and staging of the "classics."

The experimental art found hospitable ground at the Cultural Center through the curatorial and artistic practices of artist-curators Roberto Chabet and Raymundo Albano. Albano explains that "there was a need... to opt for a learning-center type of a Museum, but which would not in any way paralyze contemporary artistic concerns especially those of the young artists. Thus started what we call, 'developmental art.'" By "developmental" he meant "fast-action" just like how the government of the day carried out the "building of roads, population control, or the establishment of security units." He elaborates that the

museum's curatorial policy was that of "stimulating public minds and at the same time allowing the artists to question and investigate with their work."¹⁵ fig. 114

The key person here was Albano who worked as director from around 1972 to 1985 at the Cultural Center, replacing Chabet who continued to organize exhibitions outside the Cultural Center, like in Shop 6 (1976), and later taught at the University of the Philippines where he became very influential among a particular set of students. He also instituted the Thirteen Artists Awards that recognized artists whose practice demonstrated what he characterized as a "recentness." At the heart of Albano's approach to art and curation was a certain authenticity of local expression mediated by a postcolonial perspective, though filtered through a curiously nationalist rhetoric. This approach kept in step with the effort of the Marcos government to sort out a Filipino identity located somewhere between a cultivated native civilization and an international vocabulary of modern art. These rough edges are finessed in "installation." According

to Albano: "if one were to consider a medium's intimacy to folk patterns, installations are natural-born as against the alien intrusion of a two-dimensional Western object like painting."¹³ But then again, "installation" is also not exclusively Filipino. Albano proposed that it is "continental, but the disguise is thin as one realizes the works have charming shortcomings, such as reduced scale, over or under control, humor, et cetera."¹⁴ In his history of installations, he points to "hangings" as an extension of sculpture done in 1968; he makes mention of Danilo Dalena's piece titled *Levitation of Lazarus* hung from the ceiling and his own work called *Alice*, which he describes as consisting of "painted metal hangings, some spread on the floor with three painted turtles moving about the room."¹⁵ In 1980, the project *Art in the Regions: Baguio/Los Baños* was launched, presenting the projects of Junyee and Santiago Bose. Junyee made his first installation using indigenous materials in 1970 through *Balag* (Trellis); and the practices of three female artists were particularly instructive: Genara Banzon, Judy Freya Sibayan, and Lani Maestro. And finally in 1989, Roberto Feleo's presence at the Third Havana Biennale rearticulated the Third World as a discourse of "tradition and contemporaneity."

Alongside this conversation with the local and the global was the translation of modern dramatic texts as a testament to the translatability of the foreign as well as the competence of the vernacular to offer equivalent meanings. In the hands of Rolando Tinio, the director of the resident theater company of the Cultural Center, modernist texts like Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and August Strindberg's *Miss Julie* and the operas *La Bohème* and *La Traviata* were translated and staged.

And finally, the third plane of the rebellion implicated in the life of the Cultural Center was the resistance itself to the institution. This came by way of the performance of David Cortez Medalla at the opening of the Cultural Center in 1969.^{fig. 05} Medalla, who later moved to England and became well-known for his kinetic sculptures and took part in Harald Szeemann's "When Attitudes Become Form" exhibition in 1969, unfurled banners in the foyer of the building and staged an impromptu performance as he had previously done elsewhere in the country. The early performance projects of Jun Terra, Virgil Calaguian, Alan Rivera, Raymundo Albano, and Jose Tence Ruiz merit keener investigation.

This polemical and performative pause recalls antecedent textual production of the

same persuasion. We take note of the 1976 *Kaisahan Manifesto*, presumably written by the core of what will later be known as social realist movement and the critic Alice Guillermo. This crucial text includes the line: "we shall therefore develop an art that not only depicts the life of the Filipino people but also seeks to uplift their condition. We shall develop an art that enables them to see the essence, the patterns behind the scattered phenomena and experience of our times. We shall develop an art that shows the unity of their interests and thus leads them to unite."¹⁶ The *Kaisahan* was preceded by the initiative *Nagkakaisang Artista at Arkitekto* (United Artists and Architects) that began in 1969 and organized events in 1971 and '72. Underlying

fig. 05

David Medalla protesting at the opening of the Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1969.

fig. 06

Antipas Delotavo, *Itak Sa Puso Ni Mang Juan* (Dagger in Juan's Heart), watercolor, 1978



the ideology of social realism was socialism, informed by Mao Zedong's Yan'an Forum lectures and the armed revolution waged across the country. A stain of social realism would be pursued by younger artists in the 1980s through, for instance, Salingpusa (1985) that helped form the mural group Sanggawa in the 1990s. [fig.06](#)

Pedagogy and Experiment Elsewhere

While the Cultural Center of the Philippines was the monolith that centralized the official cultural program of the country, there were parallel forces that sought to build up their own agenda largely in the context of pedagogy and experiment. Pedagogy and experiment may have been the logic of practice animating these efforts: to democratize access to the skills of art and the resources of innovation beyond the conventions of the academy, the state, and institutions. Exemplary in this regard was the Philippine Educational Theater Organization or the PETA founded in 1967 with the vision of a "people's theater." Central in the advocacy of PETA was training, which was mainly undertaken through the Central Institute of Theater Arts in the Philippines or CITAP that later became the Central Institute of Theater Arts in Southeast Asia or CITASA. The PETA staged its first production amid the ruins of Intramuros, the Spanish enclave of colonial Manila, in a theater combining the proscenium, the Japanese *hanamichi*, and the arena style. A watershed event in the history

of PETA was the First Third World Theater Festival and International Conference held in Manila in 1971 with the theme "Developing Theater in Developing Countries." Of the various foreign colleagues who came to Manila, Yoo Dukhyung from South Korea and Fritz Bennewitz of the German Democratic Republic left lasting imprints. Yoo directed PETA's ensemble in the play *Alamang* (Small Shrimp), a translation of a Korean folktale that was interpreted through a mixture of Chinese movement, Philippine music, shadow play, and improvised sound patterns of different intonations and pitches. [fig.07](#) Bennewitz of the Weimar National Theater, for his part, introduced Bertolt Brecht and the Brechtian approach to the historicization of the dramatic text and its theatrical articulation. For instance, the Philippine translation of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is set in 1840 in Mindanao when the Spanish forces attacked the islands of Sulu and Basilan. He then directed Brecht's *Galileo Galilei* in 1980 and *Macbeth* in 1984. As part of the wider program of PETA for the pedagogy of people's theater, it formulated the Integrated Arts Workshop in 1973 which was later known as the Basic Integrated Theater Arts Workshop in 1978. [13](#) [fig.08](#)

Related to the movement in theater was the "emergence of a new cinema" by way of the short film. The filmmaker and historian Nick Deocampo begins his story of this emergence with the Oberhausen Manifesto of 1962 which declares: "the old cinema is dead, we believe in the new." He then narrates important events in the history from the First National Festival of Short Films in 1964.

Crucial in this narration was the founding of the Movie Workers Welfare Foundation or Mowelfund in 1974 and the University of the Film Center in 1976 both of which conducted workshops. Their efforts centered on training and harnessing the short film to sustain an independent cinema distinct from the film

[fig.07](#)
Yoo Dukhyung, *Alamang* (Small Shrimp), for the Philippine Educational Theater Association, 1971.

[fig.08](#)
PETA Theater Workshop Manual Series 1: BITAW (Basic Integrated Theater Arts Workshop), Quezon City: Philippine Educational Theater Association, 1989.

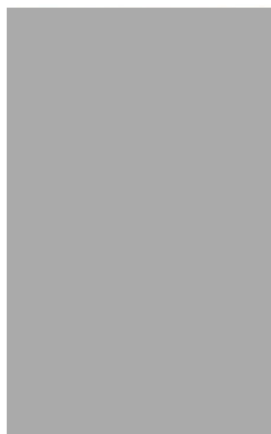
[fig.09](#)
Nick Deocampo, *Oliver*, 1983

industry. The 1983 films of Deocampo and Raymond Red, *Oliver* and *Magpakailanman* (Forevermore) respectively, dwell on social inequality and historical memory; they represent the impulses of this movement. ¹⁶ [Fig. 10](#)

An important precursor, of course, would be Kidlat Tahimik's paradigmatic Third World film *Perfumed Nightmare*, screened in 1977 in Berlin and then distributed by Francis Ford Coppola. ¹⁷ [Fig. 11](#) From this community came Tad Ermitaño, a pioneer video artist in Southeast Asia who attended a workshop at Mowelfund; he made the animation *Panaginip ng Pera* (Dream of Money) in 1989. Ermitaño represents a type of crossover artist, along with Lirio Salvador and Diokno Pasilan, who honed the practice of intermedia art through the punk and rock music scene in the 1980s.

Part of the decentralization of the Cultural Center would be the vital signs of cultural life outside Manila. Worth noting were the founding of the Black Artists in Asia in 1986 in Bacolod in the Visayas, the group of islands in central Philippines, that ultimately led to the organization of the Visayas Islands Visual Arts Exhibition and Conference in 1990. In 1988, the Baguio Arts Guild was set up in Baguio, a city in Northern Philippines, an artist initiative that conceived the Baguio Arts Festival in 1989. ¹⁸ [Fig. 11](#) The women as well organized themselves in 1987 through the *Kababaihan sa Sining at Bagong Sibol na Kamalayan* (KASIBULAN; Women in Art and Emerging Consciousness) which might have been one of the first organizations of contemporary female artists in Southeast Asia. This history of artist initiatives should be seen in relation to a history of the building of modern institutions beginning in 1960.

This paper is an attempt to constellate in Philippine art history what has been framed as "rebellion" by this seminar. It is clear that the situation in the Philippines was exceedingly complex and that its trajectories of articulation were multiple. It is, therefore, unproductive, if not totally distorted, to invest too much in conceptualism or conceptual art as the overdetermination of this robust ecology of efforts. There can be no political future if we fail to broaden the sympathies of modernity and its afterlives in Southeast Asia.



¹⁵
 Laura Samson et al., *A Continuing Narrative on Philippine Theater: The Story of PETA (Philippine Educational Theater Association)* (Manila: Philippine Educational Theater Association, 2008).

¹⁶
 Nick Deocampo, *Short Film: Emergence of a New Philippine Cinema* (Manila: Communication Foundation for Asia, 1985).

¹⁷ [Fig. 10](#)
 Kidlat Tahimik, *Perfumed Nightmare*, 1977

¹⁸ [Fig. 11](#)
 Santiago Bose, Baguio Arts Festival



Re-Reading History through Recycling Old Films

Nguyen Trinh Thi

Video Artist

Of relevance to the forum's topics, I'll talk about two main areas of my work:

1

Nhan Van – Giai Pham

Since 2007, I've been researching and documenting the surviving poets of *Nhan Van-Giai Pham* (Humanism – Works of Beauty), a literary movement in the late 1950s that was soon suppressed by the Communist Party, and its legacy of dissent in Vietnamese art over the past five decades. While some of the founders spent years in jail, others lost their right to publish for three to four decades; a generation of avant-garde artists who promised to revolutionize Vietnamese poetry and the arts was lost.

This intellectual dissident movement, starting even before the Chinese Hundred Flowers Campaign, can be considered the first of its kind in Southeast Asia, and thus far the only instance of widespread intellectual dissidence ever to occur in North Vietnam.

Despite suppression in the following decades (in the 1960s through the '80s), a number of the forbidden artists continued to work in the dark including Tran Dan, Le Dat, Dang Dinh Hung, and Bui Xuan Phai, whose remarkable modern innovations have only been discovered by the public in recent years.

Background

The year 1956 was one upheaval for the nascent socialist state in North Vietnam. Not only was the countryside in disarray, but no sooner had land reform ended than the campaign to reeducate the capitalists plunged the cities into fear. The whole country was

in turmoil, and the atmosphere was stoked by a series of developments that comprised the only instance of widespread intellectual dissent ever to occur in North Vietnam. Commonly referred to as the Nhan Van-Giai Pham period, the interlude received its name from two short-lived periodicals in which poets and intellectuals voiced their concerns and criticisms of the Party and the government.

Among artists and intellectuals that joined the periodicals were poets Tran Dan, Hoang Cam, [fig.01](#) Le Dat, Nguyen Huu Dang, Phung Quan, composer Van Cao (author of the national anthem), musician Tu Phac, painter Bui Xuan Phai, lawyer Nguyen Manh Tuong, Dr. Dang Van Ngu, and philosopher Tran Duc Thao. The first edition of *Giai Pham* was published in March, 1956. By December 1956, they had published two issues (Fall and Spring) of *Giai Pham* and five issues of *Nhan Van*. However, this brief period of openness (with some similarities to the Chinese Hundred Flowers Campaign), in which the intellectuals called for freedom of expression and debated government policies, ended two years later as the Communist Party, under the influence of China, suppressed dissent. In 1958, the Party launched a campaign against "saboteurs on the ideological and cultural front," with a re-education course organized for nearly 500 writers and artists in Hanoi.

As the Vietnam War was escalating in the mid-1960s, the communist regime in Hanoi was striving to make sure that artists and writers concentrated on the fight against American imperialism and the construction of socialism in the North. A political surge against the so-called Anti-Party Revisionists between 1963 and 1967 only intensified the general

nervousness in North Vietnamese society.

Government suppression led to decades of professional and economic deprivation for the participants of Nhan Van-Giai Pham, including long jail terms for a few who were considered to be the key leaders.

Between 1975, when the Vietnam War ended, and 1986, when economic reforms known as Doi Moi began in the country, Vietnam was virtually isolated from the rest of the world, and, for 30 years before that, had been engaged in various versions of civil war. In effect, “much of the Vietnamese artistic sensibility had been ‘frozen’ in time with the European post-impressionist style firmly established along with small traces of modernism.”¹⁰¹

In the pre-Doi Moi period, until the late 1980s, artists were expected to follow guidelines set by the Ministry of Culture for the creation and exhibition of nationalist socialist art. Abstraction and nudity were forbidden until 1991, and artists were closely watched for anti-patriotic sentiments. The artists who studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts d’Indochine, founded in 1925, came to the attention of international art observers after the onset of the Doi Moi period. According to the Asia Art Archive, the first international exhibition of Vietnamese contemporary art outside Vietnam, since the end of the war, took place in 1991 at Plum

Blossoms Gallery in Hong Kong, when Bui Xuan Phai (1922–88) and Nguyen Tu Nghiem (1922–) — members of the Nhan Van-Giai Pham movement — were the two representatives from the colonial period. Having defied authorities in refusing to comply with regulations on art, they are remembered as the fathers of modern painting.

Although the Vietnam War has generated a great deal of interest among historians and political scientists, the war-generation artists has not received as much attention from international museums and galleries as the younger artists who came of age after Doi Moi, with only a few exhibitions having taken place outside of Vietnam. These artists also include those born in the 1940s who did not participate in the war or were active in the national art exhibitions such as Nguyen Trung (1940–) and Vu Dan Tan (1946–2009). ¹⁰² Both artists can be considered outsiders to the establishment but both have been active as artists.



¹⁰¹ Tran Thi Huynh Nga, “Contemporary Vietnamese art during Doi Moi,” *VietnamArtBooks*, November 19 (2002).
 ▶ <http://www.vietnamartbook.com/article/article.html?id=232>
 (Accessed January, 2015)

¹⁰² Nguyen Trinh Thi (left), Hoang Cam (right), 2008.
 © Jamie Maxtone-Graham

¹⁰³ Bui Xuan Phai (left), Vu Dan Tan (right), Courtesy of Asia Art Archive (AAA)



03

The Vietnam Film Studio later split into the Feature Film Studio, the Documentary and Science Film Studio, and the Animation Studio.

Indeed, 1986 can be considered a pivotal moment for the Vietnamese arts, and the very beginning of Vietnamese contemporary art. Today, in the midst of rapid economic and social changes brought on since 1986, when the Vietnamese Communist Party adopted a market-oriented development strategy and set out to integrate Vietnam into regional and international networks, issues about culture, tradition, modernity, intellectual freedom, and national identity—once dominating the intellectual discourse of the 1950s—have returned to the public arena to be discussed and debated with passion.

2

Found Footage

In terms of Vietnamese cinema, the late 1950s also laid the ground for the national institutional structure for managing national movie activities in Vietnam, which has remained largely unchanged over the next half-century. Between 1956 and 1959, state-owned cinema institutions were established in Hanoi—the Vietnam Film Studio,⁰³ the Movie Distribution Company, the Cinema Department, the Cinema Newspaper, and the Hanoi Cinema College.

With the end of the First Indochina War and the creation of North and South Vietnam, there were two Vietnamese film industries, with the Hanoi industry focusing on propaganda films documenting the Vietnam War, and Saigon producing mostly war-themed or comedy films. After the fall of Saigon in 1975, studios in the former South Vietnam also

turned to making Social Realism films, focusing on heroic efforts in the revolution, human suffering created by the war, and social problems of post-war reconstruction.

Now a Vietnamese documentary classic, Tran Van Thuy's 1987 film *Story of Kindness* (or *How to Behave*)⁰³ symbolically marked the end of the post-war subsidy-period cinema and the beginning of the contemporary period. Tran, as all other filmmakers of that time, was working within the state-controlled film system, yet he was brave to the extent of risking his own security to make a film that forcefully pursued the truth. Originally banned in Vietnam, *Story of Kindness*—which explores the realities behind the nationalistic slogans to reveal troubling scenes of Vietnamese life—was released only after the intervention of Communist Party leader Nguyen Van Linh.

I've been collecting and re-working found footages including classical films, of which I'll show a couple of examples.

Song to the Front (2011)⁰⁴ is the first from my intended *Vietnamese Classics Re-Cut Series*. The original film was produced in 1973 by the Vietnam Feature Film Studio, a propaganda film aimed at drumming up patriotism.

*Vietnam the Movie*⁰⁵ is a survey of how the word "Vietnam" appeared internationally (usually as a war, a symbol, an ideology, a concept), particularly in the context of the Vietnam War and also legacy of the Indochina War. It looks into the ways popular media form our collective imaginations, memories, and understandings of a war, a country, a nation.

My motivations in recycling found footages—also including corporate video materials, contemporary press photos, and home movies—is to preserve, deconstruct, and subvert different kinds of aesthetics and languages in film and media; to re-tell, re-think, re-read, and re-engage with history.

fig. 03

Tran Van Thuy, *Story of Kindness* (film still), 1987, color film, 43'

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fig. 04

Nguyen Trinh Thi, *Song to the Front* (film still), 2011, single-channel video, 5'14", black-and-white, sound (based on the film *Song to the Front* directed by Tran Duc in 1973)

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fig. 05

Nguyen Trinh Thi, *Vietnam the Movie* (film still), work-in-progress, expected completion: 2015, approx. 60'





Discussion on Sessions I and II

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Moderator
Hayashi Michio

Critical Possibilities:

The “Third World” Ideology and “Asia as Method”

Hayashi Michio

We have this discussion time until 6:30p.m., and I am hoping that we could first have an internal discussion among ourselves for maybe 20 minutes, and then open the entire discussion to the floor. So observers, you also have plenty of chances to ask questions later.

Where to begin? We had many different types of presentations, but I want to start with a very basic theoretical question. Suzuki-san brought up the notion of the “Third World” as a critical possibility in his keynote speech last night. “What kind of Third World theory can we re-imagine at this point of history?” is something that Suzuki-san proposed as a theme to think about. Patrick, you also mentioned the Third World in your presentation a couple of times, while on the other hand, Yu Jin, you introduced Chen Kuan-hsing’s concept of “Asia as Method.”

So broadly speaking, “how could these two positions, these theoretical frames interact or have a relationship with each other?” That is something that I would like to start the discussion with. Maybe, starting with Yu Jin? Do you see the Third World as a kind of viable theoretical option in light of “Asia as Method”?

Yu Jin Seng

Actually, yes, because Chen Kuan-hsing is also engaged with the concept of the Third World. I think that this idea, this concept is really important to him. In relation to our discussions today about “Asia as Method,” something that came to my mind again and again, as I listened, was about the multiple frames of references that are really central to Chen Kuan-hsing’s concept of “Asia as Method.” And we talked about it in our own many different ways.

For example, if you look at certain strategies adopted by artists, earlier there was the idea about Complex art by Prof. Lai, but I think there was in some sense a desire for creative freedom. So trying to be free from all kinds of imposed categories, especially from the West or Euro-American categories; artists could use any materials, any ideas, and any concepts. So that is really in line with the idea of multiple frames of references whereby an artist need not necessarily just draw from one but from different references and sources. That’s one example.

There were also others like the artistic shift to the public, community-based engagement. So, again, that is a shifting, a drawing from a completely different frame of reference as well. I think that is something we can think about in terms of artistic strategies of resistance, as acts of rebellion. Because when we have acts of rebellion, we must be able to articulate it, articulate that resistance or that rebellion as well.

This is where I think Chen Kuan-hsing’s method is quite useful because he looks at interdiscursivity; he looks at discursive formation across different disciplines, be it literature, theater, artistic practices and so on. So if we could find some common or shared articulations of resistance across disciplines, it could be a way in which we could develop an idea of how cultural rebellion actually emerged in Asia; shared metaphors, concepts, issues that artists engaged with, for example. So that could be one of the ways in which we could deal with this idea of cultural rebellion.

Hayashi Michio

So the Third World in that sense is not really an imagination of a unitary subject. It is actually a kind of, say, attitudinal or behavioral kind of philosophy.

Yu Jin Seng

Yes, very much so.

Hayashi Michio

So multiplicity can be found in different localities. In relation to that, then, I think what really struck me in your presentation, Simon, is that you talked about “nation” as a kind of agent of cultural rebellion. And later in your presentation, you said there’s a strategy of exclusion from the nations that brought about some problems.

So, when we talk about resistance or rebellion (in the Third World way), we have to think about rebellion against “what.” In that sense, what you are arguing is that the object of rebellion, is historically determined and it shifts with time.



fig. 01
Wu Biduan and Jin Shangyi,
*Chairman Mao with the People of
Asia, Africa and Latin America*,
1961

Simon Soon

I was perhaps also thinking more about the dialectic of how this idea of Third Worldism came about. Therefore, I think it's really interesting that Yu Jin actually brought up "Asia as Method" because I think Chen wasn't only talking about this; he had registered this idea on three different levels, three different processes: the first, deimperialization, the second is decolonialization and the third, he very clumsily calls it, "de-Cold War." Perhaps I think that is quite a useful term for us to think through: that perhaps the Cold War binary is something that artists, adopting this attitude of Third Worldism, was trying to transcend.

Pi Li

Just to give some background because I'm a little bit confused. When we're talking about the Third World theories, on which level are we talking about? Because actually, there were two levels, two kinds of Third World theories. One of them is before 1974 where the main characteristic is that it is based on Cold War politics: on the one side there was America and Britain as the first world, and on the other, Russia and East Europe as the second world. The independent part, the middle part is the third world.

But in 1974 when Mao Zedong met with the President of Zambia, he totally revised the Third World theory. He revised it as America and Russia, the two imperialist nations, as the first world, and the countries that follow them as second world. And we, like the nations you showed in your painting, are the third world.

That is another background about the Third World divisions that also reflects the turning point since China tried to escape from this kind of Cold War structure in 1974. It's a very Chinese version of the Third World.

Hayashi Michio

In relation to that, I have a question for Suzuki-san. You showed a very interesting painting: Mao Zedong shaking hands with other people from African and Asian nations where there is also Japan as a woman in the middle. [fig. 01](#) These representatives included in the painting are not only representatives of socialist countries. They also include, possibly, the liberal camp also?

Pi Li

This includes Africa, Asian countries, and also Latin America. So that's our standard description of the Third World.

Hayashi Michio

So this is not a Cold War division. This represents a geographical extension of the Chinese version of the Third World?

Pi Li

Yes, because if it were based on the Cold War, the Japanese woman should be on the other side.

Hayashi Michio

Right. Suzuki-san, do you have any comments about the Third World issue?

Suzuki Katsuo

In my presentation yesterday, in fact, I specifically referred to Chen Kuan-hsing's *Asia as Method*, and when thinking about the overall framework of this exhibition, I think having multiple reference points, or pluralizing our reference points, could be one of the goals we set for ourselves. In order to do this, we could set reference points that are cross-genre so that we not only have a spatial, synchronic width, but also historical and diachronic constellations. That is how I very vaguely imagined the framework of this exhibition to be. Yu Jin, I think, articulated that very clearly with exhibitions in mind which has been extremely helpful for me, so I am very grateful for that.

The Cold War, or rather with 1970 as the turning point, as I pointed out, there was a major transformation in perception. My hypothesis is that from these various changes in global geopolitics, we can, in fact, see the processes in which artists began to achieve a sense of criticality in their artistic practices, and also the sense of unity, or united-ness, and of aiming for the same goal.

Referring to Yu Jin's presentation again, he explained that around 1970 was also the time when new movements, to borrow his term "critical exhibitions," emerged in various parts of Asia. And in

these “critical exhibitions,” I think some of the key terms that appeared in the latter presentations such as “pedagogy” are also included.

I brought this book with me today as an example, *The Playful Revolution: Theater and Liberation in Asia* written by Eugène van Erven. In this book, case studies of PETA (Philippine Educational Theater Association) from the Philippines and the theatrical movements, or “theaters for revolution,” from Thailand, Indonesia, Japan, and Korea are included; precisely the topics that we have been discussing today.

To elaborate a little on why I initially imagined this exhibition to be cross-genred; Hayashi-san mentioned in his presentation that the Cold War structure began to be less visible after 1970, but when we think about the conception of “Asia” in Japan, rather it was *after* 1970 that the momentum of creating cultural networks with other Asian countries really flourished. For example, the Japanese underground theater group, *Kuro Tendo* (Black Tent), established workshops with PETA, and there were also cases where Thai theater groups were invited to Japan. These all happened during the 1970s through the ‘80s. So when I was imagining the word “solidarity,” I was actually thinking of that period, a little before or after 1970 through to the ‘80s, where minorities were actively creating these movements, joining hands to create a public space that transcended national borders. These included the use of theaters, small media, and other printed media; various media were utilized and strategies were adopted to generate alternative spaces. The reason why I imagined a cross-genre approach was because I could visualize those movements.

So, I think one of our goals is to precisely recontextualize this into the visual arts and create these multiple frames of references through this project. Just to clarify, though, this is not to create a Third World in a so-called geographical sense. I mean it more in the sense of connecting the various people and groups who want to make changes and create movements from around the world; these people and movements that, in a larger context, can be considered movements that generate a rewriting of the existing world map. That is how I understand Third Worldism to be.

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Hayashi Michio

In other words, the Third World doesn’t exist in any map; it is a kind of virtual space where people can have meaningful interactions. I think it is very important that you pointed out this gaining of criticality in the 1970s in various different locations where artists actually gained the space of freedom from the authoritarian power in which peer-to-peer connections became possible. So we can imagine these alternative spaces as a space of the Third World.

—
Geographical versus
Ideological “Asia”

—
Patrick Flores

I think the Third World as a term is productive on certain different levels. But I’m just wondering how this project will see the Third World in relation to the idea of region, which is Asia. Because we’re gathering examples of practices from a particular region: Asia. So in a way it is already geographically demarcated. So how do we mediate the geography with another imagination of solidarity or a gathering, which is the Third World?

So when you mentioned, Michio, about the relationship between “Asia as Method” and the Third World, I thought it’s an interesting juxtaposition between the two phrases. If we are to productively appropriate the discourse of the Third World, how do we situate that in relation to the idea of Asia as a geographical imagination?

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Hayashi Michio

In other words, Patrick’s question can be rephrased as, “the Third World can exist anywhere, between the West and Asia, or West and Japan or Africa or wherever. If it’s a virtual space, why is there a need to pin it down onto a geographical map?”

But historically speaking, I think what Suzuki-san has in mind—and this is my interpretation of what he told me the other day—is that maybe through the 1960s, ‘70s and ‘80s there actually already were movements in Japan which sought connections with other Asian countries. There were actual practices that supported the idea of the Third World imagination in the Japanese context. But that connection or possibility has quite systematically been suppressed until, I would even say, now.

Now we have so many Asian art exhibitions that basically started in the 1980s, not to mention the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum. So there is that tradition and awareness from the 1980s. However, for the 1960s and '70s, we haven't really looked back on these interconnections between Japanese and other Asian countries' practices because it has been overshadowed due to our preoccupation in the relationship between Japan and the West.

So I think one of the motivations for you, Suzuki-san, is to rediscover these lost connections of the 1960s and '70s. In that sense, I think it's not only a theoretical framework, it is also based on historical occurrences.

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Patrick Flores

But my only fear is that the Third World presupposes a more inclusive, a more expansive context.

—
Hayashi Michio

Exactly. But I think that is good, no?

—
Patrick Flores

Yes. But the region of Asia significantly limits it, that's what I fear. So we might be, in a way, diminishing the energy of the Third World by situating it within a geographical area.

—
Hayashi Michio

There is that danger, yes. So, in that sense, I think Suzuki-san or this exhibition project has to be very careful about how to present this case as an exhibition: whether we should present it as an exemplary case of Third World possibilities that could occur anywhere in the world, or we present it as *the* Third World. I think it is the former: we treat Asian cases as an exemplary case of many other possibilities.

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Suzuki Katsuo

If I may, one key issue that can connect the two ideas, "Third World" theory and "Asia as Method," is the Cold War structure which was unique to Asia. This structure did not exist anywhere else, it was very unique to Asia. While it is true that there is a geographical limitation, I believe it was a hugely significant determining factor for various cultural activities within Asia in general. So how we understand and consider this particular Cold War situation in Asia will, I think, allow us to seek ways in which we can think about the postcolonial conditions in Asia. This, I believe will, in the long run, elucidate the meaningfulness in the limitation of Third Worldism and of Asia.

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Universalist versus
Local Discourse of Modernism

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Hayashi Michio

Following up on that Third World issue, what I sensed or saw recurrently in some of the presentations today is that these local practices may have in fact been a reaction against the universalist discourse of modernism. But in other presentations, for example in Ms. Park and Pi Li's presentations, this universalist discourse, notion of humanism, or the metaphysical could function as a medium for these rebellious practices. Conversely, in other contexts such as in Indonesia or Malaysia, I think this universalist discourse of modernism is somewhat seen as Western-centric to a degree. Therefore, how do we reconcile these two different strategies of rebellions? I think that is something which came to me as a very difficult question. Ms. Park or Pi Li, do you have any thoughts on this? I mean, maybe it is contextual; this universalist discourse could function as a very effective tool in certain political contexts. In any case, the impressions I got from your presentations are very different in terms of the use of that concept of universal humanism.

Ms. Park, in your case, if I may add, you talked about these very interesting artists and the monochrome painters of the 1960s and '70s, but didn't go into the Minjung art movement of the 1980s. My understanding of the Minjung art movement is that it really emphasized the local, indigenous elements as opposed to the avant-garde practices you presented today of the 1960s and '70s, which, if I understood it correctly, are much more closer to the universalist notion.

So what is the relationship between the two kinds of rebellions, if you can call them that?

[Park Hyesung](#)

Actually, they are the same: what the authorized artist system did to the unauthorized or the third unfocused art are similar. The Minjung artists did the same thing as other artists, I think. So I agree with your question: how should we show or present these kinds of works, the rebellious works in an exhibition, precisely because the museum is the antithesis of their reactions. So while I don't want to say we should "embrace" their activist reactions, my question is "how can we determine, say, or use a word that expresses our action or our attitude toward them?" The starting point is the same. So there is a double burden: how to show "Asia as Method," and how to show these forms of rebellion that are invisible to the public. That is a question I would like to pose.

[Hayashi Michio](#)

Thank you. I don't know if this dualism of the universalist versus local discourse can actually be a productive one, but I am nevertheless interested in the notion of translatability that, Patrick, you brought up in your presentation. Because if the notion of solidarity is very important, as Suzuki-san says, I think we have to focus on the possible ways of presenting local rebellious practices to audiences of other cultures. So whether these rebellious practices are truly or completely determined by contextual frames, or do they produce something that can be translated into other possibilities in other contexts?

[Patrick Flores](#)

In some cases that duality doesn't hold. For instance, a Malaysian artist like Syed Ahmad Jamal would credit, in fact, Abstract Expressionism as giving him the fundamental condition to be free. I think he is quoted as saying that it was modernist form that gave him the freedom to express himself.

Another exemplary case would be Raymundo Albano's essay on installation in which he argues that installation is also a local form because it's instinctive. At the same time, he is not saying that installation is purely Filipino, because it's part of an internationalist vocabulary of art. So I think there are cases that demonstrate this duality of the local and Western doesn't really hold.

[Hayashi Michio](#)

In relation to that, Yu Jin, I think your posing of these multiple references is a very important theoretical notion for this Third World subject. In this discussion, what really amazes me is that we are all discussing this in English, we all got degrees studying in universities, we all use the same referential points—postcolonial theory such as Homi Bhabha's etc.—, and we are literally sharing these reference points. I don't think we can ignore this reality: we're sharing the same set of concepts and theoretical prepositions. That's not the only determining element, of course, but isn't it something that ensures the translatability to a certain degree (like the installation as an international vocabulary)? It could function in a very oppressive way, but at the same time, we actually share the history of modernism with different timeframes etc. Modernism is still something that we all, more or less, have a common understanding of, and that is what allows this discussion to take place. So, modernism, after all, could be seen as a basis for this translatability of rebellion. Yu Jin, do you have any thoughts?

[Yu Jin Seng](#)

I have one thought in mind, which is from the phrase "aesthetics of rebellion" in Suzuki-san's diagram. Although it's in terms of practices, style and so on, here, I'm thinking maybe one productive way to rethink this might be to think of it in terms of artistic strategies, rather than specific styles or medium and so on. I think that would perhaps allow us to find a more common ground; to look at strategies of resistance or rebellion by artists. Whether or not they adopt strategies in terms of the universalist or the local modes, for me, they share a common desire for a decolonization or deimperialization of the universal or the local.

So it is still the same, just that the strategy they use is different of which there are so many and each of us have talked about them in our own way. For example, Pi Li talked about the Stars Group (星星画会) and the No Name Group (无名画会) as having no unitary style. That itself is a strategy of resistance that talks about multiple frames of references by refusing to be locked into one style, so there is no one unitary style to frame them into one. I think that's one way we can try to unravel this.

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 Rebellion:
 Inside and Outside Institutions

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 Choi Eunju

If I may add. I was involved in the “Cubism in Asia” exhibition in 2005, and at that time we were confronted with the similar questions: what is the common ground, the differentiation among Asian countries, and among Asian modernism and experimental arts? At the time it was very difficult to juxtapose the concepts with each country’s situation. So if we take that into account, I think we might as well raise the basic questions for the seminar and exhibition itself. We’ve been discussing the regional differentiation in Asian countries and also thinking of the periodical differences.

So I think that what we need to figure out is the artist’s ultimate purpose of taking up the concept of rebellion in each country and in each period, and why they wanted to break through all kinds of obstacles in their society and period. We can then further discuss the concept and make things productive in finding the answer to the questions raised here.

—
 Park Hyesung

My first question was similar. How can we include and show “rebellion” in the museum? The main theme of my paper is precisely that. The movements I discussed show not only the aesthetic but also political or socio-political rebellion against society. It is difficult to distinguish the boundary between aesthetics and reality. But we have to find this gap or the niche between them.

So I express this kind of duality as a rupture on every level. I want to see their works not only as the rebellion against Formalism. So we may need to find a new word for it.

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 Hayashi Michio

I think, really, Suzuki-san, in the process of shaping the concept for this exhibition, one of the key issues is whether or not we include those rebellious practices within the art historical context as cultural rebellion, especially in relation to the more public, socially engaged art practices outside the museum. So how much are we going to stretch the concept of “rebellion,” I think, is a very important issue to think about.

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 Patrick Flores

Michio, isn’t it also the issue of the historical avant-garde? That it’s the same, do you think? That it is analogous?

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 Hayashi Michio

I think it is very similar. Clement Greenberg and Peter Bürger’s use and notions of the avant-garde were completely different. So the same thing can be said about rebellion: is it a rebellion *within* the art context or rebellion *outside* the museum and directly engaging in the social practices. That’s something that we need to sort out.

Maybe it’s time to open up the discussion to the floor. But still, everybody can participate.

So now I would like to open the discussion to the entire room. If there’s anybody who wants to raise questions or respond to some of the questions which have been discussed, then please raise your hand.

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 To the Floor:
 A Re-reading of the “Third World” Theory

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 Kataoka Mami

I have a question for Ushiroshōji-san (Ushiroshōji Masahiro). I would like to hear your thoughts, Ushiroshōji-san, on these discussions so far because some of these younger panelists have been studying these historical facts as a history, but you have actually experienced these times, at least the 1980s. So having seen the progress of these discussions, I was just wondering how you would comment on these discussions by younger generations.