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Arianna Mercado
Varsha Nair
Marian Pastor Roces
Karla Sachse
Roy Voragen
Ruby Weatherall



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Front cover, photograph by MM Yu.

Back cover, installation view of
Moving House at Calle Wright.

Photograph by Wubin Zhuang.

Courtesy of the artists.

Contents

- 6 **Archive**
Marian Pastor Roces
- 11 **To De-file**
Patrick D. Flores
- 15 **Archiving Womanifesto, and much more....**
Varsha Nair
- 21 **Delving into Philippine artists' moving image:
The extraordinary moment is no longer and not yet...**
Clarissa Chikiamco
- 26 **From L to E: Working with Archival Contingencies**
Lizza May David and Eva Bentcheva in conversation
- 36 **Subtitles or a love poem in plain language**
Lesley-Anne Cao
- 38 **Boxes and Spaces**
Karla Sachse
- 47 **Contemporary Ink Art as Archive**
Ruby Weatherall
- 50 **Prestige Machines and Performance Anxieties
in the Age of the Economy of Recognition**
Lyra Garcellano
- 57 **City of Bawal, part I**
Roy Voragen
- 60 **A Case Study in Making a Magazine Public**
Gillian Brown
- 64 **What's missing?**
Joni Low
- 68 **labor pains**
Arianna Mercado
- 71 **Calle Wright Housewarming Prayer, Moving House**
Judy Freya Sibayan



Detail of *Moving House, Unpacking a Life of Critical Art Making: An Autobiographical Installation Art Performance*, 2018 at Calle Wright, Manila. Courtesy of the Judy Freya Sibayan Archive

Thirteen years ago, *Ctrl+P Journal of Contemporary Art* was conceived as a response to a challenge I brought to a class of graduate students in art history, theory and criticism supervised by Flaudette May Datuin. Editor of the first issue, she cited my challenge: Sibayan pointing to the dearth of critical discourse production in the Philippines urged “us to write on contemporary art, and that, if we *do* write, we need not do so within traditional discursive frames, publication circuits and technological channels. As we saw in her art projects...and the exhibitions which she curated largely through the internet, we realized that yes, there *are* indeed other ways and spaces for ‘doing’ art and writing and disseminating responsible art criticism.”¹ The students’ response was to publish the first issue of Ctrl+P originally circulated as a PDF via email. After six years of hiatus, Ctrl+P is being revived with this special Calle Wright issue.

Last year for three months, I produced *Moving House, Unpacking a Life of Critical Art Making: An Autobiographical Installation Art Performance* at Calle Wright, a non-white cube art space located 1.3 kilometers from my home. Here I installed and performed my archive of 45 years. Beyond the literal sense of unpacking my self-archive was the more important task of unpacking *Moving House* as a work of institutional critique. To describe this self-instituting work, I take liberty in using the words of scholar Beatrice von Bismarck on self-archiving and what is critical about this practice—“a self-reflexive archival praxis that takes the record-making and generative aspects of archiving as its subject.”² And “By

usurping their archiving activities, artists challenge the ascendancy of institutions and those who work in them. Self-archiving thus appears to be primarily a political strategy; it represents a counter-model to the institution and its consecrating function...not only exercises its own power, but illustrates and makes visible its conditions.”³

In response to Calle Wright’s requirement for artists to produce a publication, I offered to reactivate Ctrl+P an online journal established as performative of the critique of the institution of discursive production. Writing for Ctrl+P Issue 11, sociologist Saskia Sassen, noted for her analyses of globalization and international human migration, cited projects that construct possible “forms of globality that are neither part of global corporate media or consumer firms, nor part of elite universalisms or ‘high culture.’ It is the possibility of giving presence to multiple local actor/projects/ imaginaries in ways that can constitute counter-globalities.”⁴ Independent publications such as Ctrl+P, basically a zero-funded journal thus allow for the not-so-powerful, not-so-dominant and not-so-well endowed agencies and individuals to take part in the critical project of production and circulation of ideas and meanings in this era of globalization.

Inviting contributors to focus on art archives and critical art production, the “stuff” of *Moving House*, in this issue, I take up again as co-founding editor and publisher (see “How we have Represented Ourselves thus Far,” Issue No. 13) the autobiographical aspect of birthing Ctrl+P, an aspect that has now become key to the production of the journal. I publish around my own art projects, inviting contributors who I meet or work with in the process. Eight of the contributors visited me at Calle Wright or have done work in this art space. The rest are friends who have previously contributed to Ctrl+P or who have collaborated with me in the past. I consider Ctrl+P a new type of local initiative defined by Sassen as “cross-border work, one centered in multiple localities yet intensely connected digitally.”⁵

The art archive, power and the construction of history

In “Asia as Method, Archive as Method” Claire Hsu, co-founder and executive director of Asia Art Archive wrote, “While we often casually speak of this all-encompassing Asia, we are also aware that the construct of Asia is one that is fraught for multiple reasons. At the same time, we are cognizant of the implications of our well-intentioned meanings recreating the very power structures that we are looking to break down...”⁶ She asks, “What are the goals of an archive based in a region where the local art scene is still finding its place in the world map of contemporary art? How to approach contemporary art in the region if no linear social, political, and art history can be told?”⁷ Power and history, two things our first group of contributors focus on in relation to the art archive. In these urgent times of decolonizing praxes and projects (of spaces, places, institutions and geographies), critic, writer and curator Marian Pastor Roces takes on the case of Asia Art Archive’s “will to be *the*” Asia art archive, as “a canny detection of an ‘Asia’ as a productive geographic category of art, and an uncanny move to claim the space” which she observes as “the will to power” where “oblivion is all.” This is made evident by the expedient yielding of some archives such as those of Green Papaya Art Projects and Womanifesto to their conversion to digital data bases by AAA, a giving in to processes of the “meta-archive that produces modern power” which Roces concludes, is a yielding to the reproduction of “the patron-client relations of a strangely neocolonial cast in a postcolonial moment.”

The compost, the laboratory and the rhizome are some of the tropes cited by scholars in considering the archive’s ramifying and generative aspects with the obsessive activities of accretion and connection, of the will to connect to make meanings, of the bearer or researcher feverishly embracing the inter-textual condition of the archive are perhaps, according to critic Hal Foster, “the paranoid dimension of archival art [and] is the other

side of its utopian ambition—its desire to turn belatedness into becomingness...to turn ‘excavation sites’ into ‘construction sites.’”⁸ An exemplar is the construction of history made possible by the archive’s capacity to “describe potential history.”⁹ To von Bismarck this is the dimension

of the “future perfect,” of “it must have been so,” which Derrida describes in his explanation of “archival fever.” For him, the archive is synonymous with an “irreducible experience of the future,” it suggests not so much as what is as what will have been and ought to or should be in the future. The glimpse into the future serves to select information that could be decisive in the reappraisal of what will have then become the past.¹⁰

Historian, critic and curator Patrick Flores researching on an exhibition of Southeast Asian curators for the 2008 Gwangju Biennale found the artist-curator embodied in the work of four curators. One of them was the late Raymundo Albano whose archive, in particular his writing, offered Flores “instructive entry points into a wider discussion of Philippine art history.” The excavation of Albano’s archive deepened his inquiry, generating key publications and projects, which brought Flores ten years later, to develop the 2019 Singapore Biennale inspired by Albano’s ideas on the roots, basics and beginnings of Philippine contemporary art. All these were performative of the activation, or as Flores puts it—the “de-filing” of the archive.

The history of Womanifesto, an international art exchange founded in 1995 in Thailand has been fully documented by its archive recently exhibited at The Cross Art Projects, in Sydney. Co-organizer of the exchange, Varsha Nair, regularly made aware of the condition of women artists’ near absence in art history, undertook very early on the all-important project of, in her words “marking our presence firmly in the context of feminist art history...as an attempt to make visible what we were doing and thus connect it with the wider discourse going on out there.”

Beatrice Colomina in “Archive” the first chapter of her book *Privacy and Publicity, Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, swiftly narrates the actions of her subjects—Adolf Loos and Le Corbusier, in relation to their archives. Loos in 1922, “orders all the documents in his office to be destroyed.”¹¹ Le Corbusier “very early on...saves everything.”¹² Colomina locates the space where research is done on Loos: “If the research into Loos is organized by the gaps in the archive, the research into Le Corbusier is organized by archival excesses... To think about Loos one has to occupy a public space, the space of publications, his own and others’, but also the space of word of mouth, hearsay, gossip, tips; the enigmatic space of circumstantial evidence.”¹³

It is also in the public space where Clarissa Chikiamco engages in her research on moving image in the Philippines. She points out that in the “absence of a dedicated archive and institution,” it is the “intrinsic quality of the moving image...time-based...therefore transitory and fleeting, a moment present then passed...perpetually slipping away, leaving behind memories and impressions, traces of its existence” that is the real challenge of her study. However, challenges brought about by absent archives or absences in the archive presuppose potentialities. In the case of Loos, the near absence of an archive spurred researchers and scholars to flesh him out out of the destruction. For Lizza May David, one particular information not found in the inventory of the art collection of the Cultural Center Philippines became critical to her own production of a work exhibited in CCP in 2014. A work which helped generate another work performed at the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin four years later. David in conversation with scholar Eva Bentcheva, discusses how gaps and absences in the archive offer opportunities for archival contingencies.

From archival absences to abundance, artist Lesley-Anne Cao working amidst two decades of archival materials—that of the artist-run initiative Green Papaya Art Projects and specifically materials for the digitizing efforts of Asia Art Archive brought her to trace back the beginnings of her art practice and return to where she left off. *Subtitles or a love poem in plain language*, a moving image by Cao is a return to what she calls her “proto-practices” the creative acts in youth. Karla Sachse too looks back at her art practice in terms of five decades of archival materials with the first two decades necessarily hidden away from the authorities. Former resident of the communist East Berlin and actively working then with political dissidents, she recently produced an archive of oral history uploaded online to commemorate 30 years of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The archive and critical art production

A writing that transitions this editorial from the archive to critical art production is Ruby Weatherall’s “Contemporary Ink Art as Archive.” Conflating both archive and art into one, she reads and situates the work of woman artist Tao Aimin within a recently expanded definition of the archive that “has served a progressively relativist and inter-subjective agenda, focused on unearthing previously marginalised historical narratives and ideas;” befitting Tao’s complex body of work that “critiques the elitism of scholar-class culture and its institutionalised approaches to archiving and linguistic preservation, as sites for the construction of male-authored historical narratives.”

Critical art production as expanding the field

Lyra Garcellano whose art practice and research focus on prevailing economic models and their impact on artistic praxes, maps out the particularities of art production in Manila—a production largely in the service of the maintenance of the status quo (of the dominant culture); a monolith like all city-centered art worlds, its rules of engagement are, to say the least—exacting. But it is in the “critical knowing” of these same rules of engagement that makes possible the expansion of the field (by problematizing the very workings, norms and values of this world with the goal to work within one’s own terms). Roy Voragen’s terms are to walk and write the city to let loose himself into the everyday and do a slow reading of the “minutiae of the mundane” as performative of re-politicizing everyday life. A practice now fully theorized as revolutionary, here the artist is agentive of addressing daily life (now overtaken by power structures barely grasped) at the level of perceptual experience. If there is the performance of a slow reading, there is also “the attempt to force deep reading” in performing *fine print*, an online art magazine co-founded by Gillian Brown. She qualifies the magazine’s decision to publish one issue live as a way of testing “how publishing might sit within the notion” of the “revolutionary” by “shifting its ‘empirical’ public to a new public...”

On the production of new publics in art, the ideas of curator and writer Simon Sheikh are instructive: “all exhibition making is the making of a public, the imagination of a world...it is the mode of address that produces the public, and if one tries to imagine different publics, different notions of stranger relationality, one must also re(consider) the mode of address, or if you will, the formats of exhibition making.”¹⁴ These were the same problematics addressed by *Flotilla*, the first transnational gathering focusing on and re-imagining nomadic and temporary elements of contemporary artist-run culture in Atlantic Canada. According to Joni Low, curator of one of the exhibitions, the four-day event sought “to create...spaces for in-person relational discussions and transmissions.” In “What’s Missing?” Low poses critical questions: “how much real change can spark from a short-term utopia? How do we create and hold space for art within a loose network—what are our safety nets, and what is required to sustain it? How do the conditions need to change, to allow for a greater diversity of voices in the arts?”

I end with a meditation and a prayer. In “labor pains,” Arianna Mercado takes stock of her work as Calle Wright’s first project manager and curator as she embarks on the next phase of her journey to earn a masteral degree in curating under the mentorship of Simon Sheikh at Goldsmiths, University of London. I first introduced Arianna to Sheikh’s writing while we were working on my archive in Calle Wright. She was quick to learn the nature of critical art production and the necessity for critical curation. She first read Sheikh’s “Constitutive Effects: The Techniques of the Curator” from which I quote extensively in formulating *A Prayer Piece for the Proliferation, Health and Survival of Places and Spaces of Critical Art Making such as Calle Wright in the Face of Most Art Being Made Instrumental in the Maintenance of the Dominant Culture*. It was the prayer for the house warming of Calle Wright, my opening ritual for *Moving House, Unpacking a Life of Critical Art Making: An Autobiographical Installation Art Performance*.

¹ Flaudette May Datuin, Editorial, *Ctrl+P Journal of Contemporary Art* 1 (April 2006): 2.

² Beatrice von Bismarck, “Artistic self-archiving: Processes and spaces,” in Beatrice von Bismarck et al (eds), *Interarchive: Archival Practices and Sites in the Contemporary Art Field*, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne, 2002, p. 459.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 457.

⁴ Saskia Sassen, “Narrating Unsettlement,” *Ctrl+P Journal of Contemporary Art* 11 (March 2008): 11.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Claire Hsu, (2014, March 13). “Asia as Method, Archive as Method.” Retrieved 20 November 2019, from the Post, Modern & Contemporary Art Around the Globe: https://post.at.moma.org/content_items/412-asia-as-method-archive-as-method. Hsu (and not Asia Art Archive, the institution) has had a steady presence and rise in Art Review’s Power 100 ranked 98th when she was first listed in 2009. Retrieved 14 November, 2019, from Art Review Asia: https://artreview.com/power_100/2009/ She “raised 1million to set up the Asia Art Art (with Johnson Chang) in 2000.” Retrieved 16 November, 2019, from: <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/claire-hsu/>

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Hal Foster. “An Archival Impulse,” *October* 110 (Fall 2004): 5.

⁹ von Bismarck, *ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity, Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, MIT Press, Massachusetts, Cambridge, 1996, pp. 1-2.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp.3-4.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁴ Simon Sheikh, “Constitutive Effects: The Techniques of the Curator” in Paul O’Neill, (ed), *Curating Subjects*. DeAppel, Amsterdam, 2007, p. 182.

Archive

Marian Pastor Roces

1

The sign *archive* magnetizes desire, memory, splinters of self, grief, energy—fugitively, like iron filings. Its poetics, mobilized in art, facilitates *jouissance*.¹ Its technologies of construction, toughened by change, produces the solidities we may choose to call identity; produces, in art, a politics of assemblage or pastiche or mosaic, depending on the period of making. *Archive* conjures the chimerical possibility of reconstitution. It also seduces with the possibility of reinvention.

It is also a timeworn bent in art, as the critic Hal Foster thought to make a point of in 2004.² Remarking the turn to the idea of archive at the time of his writing, Foster also offers a long view: “This general impulse is hardly new: it was variously active in the prewar period when the repertoire of sources was extended both politically and technologically.” At present, a decade-some since his *October* essay, it should be time to look through the haze of preciousness enshrouding the archive idea, to see what should be obvious: that the archive is very much the library, the unglamorous and necessary institution. It is also very much the collection of art or artifacts or incunabula, the quite glamorous and sometimes frivolous pursuit. The archive is very much a quotidian matter. The effusiveness around it is a notch extravagant.

A contrast may be drawn. Libraries and other kinds of collections did not mutate to acquire the shape-shifting qualities of archives. On the other hand, archive status can be and is often retroactively assigned, without much comment, to collections that were not *a priori* pursued and gathered to fill an imagined system. The archive idea is allowed to embrace the whole zoo of collection types (or no types at all). Most curious are the idiosyncratically organized clutches of stuff—at best, of Borgesian order, and at worst, garbage—much of the collecting or organizing-in-retrospect driven by raw yearnings for self-definition. It is this conceptual malleability that allows for the awesomeness assigned to the utterance: archive. Fascination is produced by the disjuncts between the opacity of any presumably orderly collecting system and the luminosity of unsystematic gathering. Multiple empty spaces bubble up at the interstices. Rhyme and reason can be supplied, to occupy these voids, at a future time.

Archives titillate out of sheer plenitude of hope secreted in their folds.

Stands to reason, therefore: artists’ enthrallment with the archive as somehow containing a living force. The vogue of self-conscious referencing of the archive idea—or of a particular archive—has become a predictable conceit. Artists’ archive fever exceeds now the surrender to collections that has been the rarefied pleasure of curators, academics, scientists, and collectors. In this field of dreams and odd ecstasies, it appears very much the case that nostalgia and self-absorbed reverie are accepted proclivities for contemporary art; and indeed accepted and folded into the universal will to historicize everything that walks, so to speak.

Then again, the seduction of the archive in art is also the undertow of power.

¹ The Lacanian mobilization of the term *jouissance* strikes the perfect political register along which consider experiences that are at once pleasurable and more than slightly transgressive—because of excess of pleasure.

² Hal Foster, “An Archival Impulse,” *OCTOBER* 110, Fall 2004, pp. 3–22.

2

When the Asia Art Archive (AAA) was established in Hongkong in 2000,³ it was by and large welcomed by artists and curators, especially in the Southeast Asia neighborhood of artists. Its advent as a local institutional player with global ambition and reach transpired when this neighborhood was well on its way to becoming a constituency of artists who, collectively, have particular aesthetic appetites responding to a particular geopolitical context. Particular enough to be clearly different from other regionally construed communities. The initiative to construct an archive—in truth the will to be *the* archive—should be read as a canny detection of an “Asia” as a productive geographic category of art, and an uncanny move to claim the space. An Area Studies frame locked into place for contemporary art, looking to quarry a place called, with little (or with popularly assumed) definition, “the region.”⁴

Put another way: the arrival of AAA astride this region as the early 21st century proceeded, staked out a piece of turf with vague boundaries, but with a clear picture of the global size of the future⁵ of the assumed or anticipated whole. The ownership and management of archival records is resource consolidation *plus* flair and gumption; and it is certainly a matter of flair and gumption for something as gargantuan as Asia, or Asian contemporary art, to be reproduced, contained, and owned in an archive. In the end, however, all that matters is the capacity to make good on such exercises of pluck—as, in the case of AAA, the imperative to archive has been backed by financial wherewithal of an atypically appropriate scale.

AAA succeeded in building the singular contemporary art archive that encompasses all arguably fecund art-producing locations in Asia. This archival body parallels the Singapore Art Museum’s project to own a definitive chunk of what it reckons to be the distinctive outcomes of Southeast Asia’s contemporary art production. But AAA gathered the details of the big concept Asia—everything Asia potentially means as a term useful to art—as limned in the personal documents of artists to whom this term Asia had meant something; or who can one way or another be categorized as somehow Asian.

The material consolidated by AAA are both straightforward documents and tracteries of art careers through the second half of the 20th century until the present. The collected mass represents the premier scientifically constructed data base that is now the *sine qua non* of all present and future projects in criticism, curation, and narrativization for art making in Southeast, South, the Middle East, and East Asia. All of it is now gathered in Hongkong. It bears observing that it was just three years after the handover of the city to the People’s Republic of China, when AAA bid elegantly for heightened attention to the city itself as a still viable center for a vast geography of nervy art making. It was preceded and succeeded

³ The independent, non-profit Asia Art Archive was established by Claire Hsu and Johnson Chang in Hongkong in 2000.

⁴ The AAA’s official website says that its establishment was “in response to the urgent need to document and make accessible the multiple recent histories of art in the region.” Please see: <https://aaa.org.hk/about/about-asia-art-archive>.

⁵ That future of art “in the region” can, by now, can be given dimension by just the public record of the present AAA Library alone, research and community efforts across the region, now comprising “over 50,000 records, including exhibition catalogues, monographs, audiovisual material, rare periodicals, individual archives, and more,” according to the site: <https://aaa.org.hk/en/collection>, as of the date of this writing. This much volume of material collected over less than two decades is indication enough of the global significance of collecting through the geography marked out.

by significant institution-building projects⁶ that have given the city to take its place in the world as a cutting edge cultural capital; emphasis—needless to say—on capital.

As for actual capital—that is to say, risk capital—the financial and logistical stores parlayed to archive the turf in question were bet on exciting prospects. Something that can be called Asian Contemporary Art, or Contemporary Art from Asia (the latter inflected to suggest consolidation-in-progress, while the former is a *de facto* if fluid brand) promised considerable return on investment. As things transpired, the prospects quickly became bullish. The ROI for the AAA is not profit in trading, of course, but cultural capital as it is accumulated in all centralized data facilities and vested in the sheer coolness of being absolutely indispensable. By extension, Hongkong has become indispensable.

It is neither necessary nor possible to dismiss the importance of archives anywhere, to observe and remark the will to power. In this case, considerable power over art's processes of validation and indeed canonization within its ambit. It is neither necessary nor possible to scorn the power dynamics—the preservation of a hard core driving the gently sympathetic philanthropic ways of archiving—to recognize and acknowledge the operations of the insuperable fact of data ownership. Ultimately, the power of the proprietor, whether it is of a bank, gene bank, library, museum, or digital data base, is the privilege of determining what can be absent. And absent a person, community, school of thought, or memory encysted one way or another in an archive, oblivion is all.

3

Oblivion seems to have been stayed at the 28 year old Viva Excon art festival⁷ held recently, in mid November 2018, in the rural, seaside province of Capiz of the central Visayan islands of the Philippines. Some 250 mostly young artists and self-described “cultural workers”⁸ were collectively stirred by outpourings of recollection of nearly three decades of art making and cross-national community building. Papers presented during the conference, describing enthusiastic archiving projects focused on the festival itself, further elevated its buoyant spirit. The organizers' personal accounts added to the archiving mood. AAA gave documentation support. Individuals resolved to disinter personal *materia artistica*. Sub-groups whetted appetites for all manner of retrospective research, including exhumation of the dead.

A happy, sentimental time was had by all. Heightened ardency for art appeared to have sprung from a shared sense, not only that Viva Excon has secured a good chunk of future; but also that this festival secured that future by securing its past. Reinvigorated by a shared joy in that the bits and pieces of that past was can be re-gathered and celebrated, the

⁶ The signal event of the present decade is easily the establishment of M+, self-described as “the new museum for visual culture in Hong Kong, as part of West Kowloon Cultural District, focusing on 20th and 21st century art, design and architecture and moving image.” The present decade has also seen the full emergence into international significance of Para Site, Hongkong's first artists' run space, established in 1996, preceding by four years the establishment of the much more corporate-fashioned AAA. These and related developments conveyed Hongkong to the top tier of players in the competition between and among cities for cultural hothouse status.

⁷ Viva Excon was first staged in 1990. The relevant data, online, reads: VIVA EXCON is a Visayas-wide biennale which was started by the art group Black Artist in Asia in 1990 in Bacolod City and whose hosting has since then toured the Visayan Islands every two years.” See: <http://www.biennialfoundation.org/biennials/viva-excon-philippines/>

⁸ The term “cultural worker” existed prior to 1986 among non-artists who were active in mostly grassroots-based cultural activities in the Philippines. The term became wholly ascendant after the Marcos dictatorship was collapsed, and has since been the preferred term for all participants of all manner of cultural activities.



Top left to right:
Norberto Roldan and Lesley-Anne Cao organising Green Papaya Art Projects' archive. Yuji de Torres and Merv Espina setting up at the archives' current location in Kamuning, Quezon City. Courtesy of Green Papaya Art Projects, the implementing agency of Visayan Islands Visual Arts Exhibition and Conference (VIVA ExCon 2018)

Artist Rock Drilon and Norberto Roldan, Executive Director of Green Papaya Art Projects at "The Future of VIVA ExCon" plenary



participants and organizers communed in an outpouring of autobiographical narratives. In bucolic Capiz, Viva Excon participants were free to indulge reverie; wear longing and aspiration on their sleeves; relax into romantic notions of art making as shamanic gestures flying against perceived hegemony (and also connecting with invisibly-operating hegemonies); enjoy having kept oblivion at bay.

Discussions about power were—and had to be, because of the viscerally-sensed zones of impact in the general vicinity—addressed to very current violences internal to the Philippines. And even this political discussion was enveloped in the shroud of hindsight. The red-baiting character of kills that recently occurred in Negros, the island immediately adjacent to the conference site, could only have resurrected the lethal discourse of Left versus Right during the prolonged Martial Law period that took a particularly harsh toll on the very Visayan islands that Viva Excon has marked out for its geography of art making. Black Artists of Asia⁹, the founding group of Viva Excon, began their individual and collective work as artists in the 1970's, in deliberately contrapuntal relation to the tyrannical Right of the Marcos regime; and they would as a matter of course offer comparative views across the decades that they understand well.

Meanwhile, the global operations of art hovered above all this zeal. Having taken some interest, the surveying entity soaked in the grain of the local; absorbed this grainy local into

⁹ The artists who started calling themselves Black Artists in Asia in the 1980s were: Norberto Roldan, Nunelucio Alvarado, Charlie Co, Boysie Imperial, Dennis Ascalon and Jojo Regollo. All were born in the Visayas Islands, and worked during formative years of BAA in Bacolod City, Negros Occidental.



Left to right:

Top row

Speakers at the VIVA ExCon plenaries: Maria Katrina de la Cruz,
and Melanio Olano Jr., Patrick Flores and Martin Genodepa
Edgar Talusan Fernandez

Bottom Row

Speakers at the VIVA ExCon plenaries: Manny Montelibano,
Yvette Malahay-Kim, and Raymund Fernandez

the smoothly textured archive-of-archives. The smoothening transpires soundlessly amidst the energetic, earnest sounds of “archives” that are, in this case, largely constructed orally. And while transnational data-gathering need not necessarily be perceived as nefarious, there is something to be keenly observed of the acquisitive techniques operating amidst the naked intensities of the local. Once in a while, it is to be hoped, the alert will recall that all meta-archives move quietly and with the god-like qualities of benevolence, omnipresence, and omniscience.

The local archive that induces reverie is absorbed easily in the meta-archive that reproduces modern power. The meta-archive will sustain the corpus representing the idea of power in accumulation, as AAA writes in its website: “Art is knowledge. Asia Art Archive is a catalyst for new ideas that enrich our understanding of the world through the collection, creation, and sharing of knowledge around recent art in Asia.” What is unsaid is that the gathered knowledge has a keeper, recognized by artists on the ground who are happy enough to yield to meta-archiving operations. Unable to maintain even personal archives well, they have little choice. The best that can be said at the moment is that the archive as sign occasions strenuous critical regard. Nevertheless, it is already self-evident that nostalgic recuperation of memory will yield the power over the production of knowledge to the unsentimental meta-archiving procedures at work everywhere; and reproduce patron-client relations of a strangely neocolonial cast in a postcolonial moment.

To De-file

Patrick D. Flores

My first research encounter with Raymundo Albano was around ten years ago when I was preparing my proposal for the 2008 Gwangju Biennale. The Artistic Director, Okwui Enwezor, asked me, alongside three others, to curate a section within the Annual Report program of the Biennale. It was to be called “Position Papers,” which encouraged four curators to organize any kind of exhibition of not more than four artists. The turnaround of the proposal was tight. To start from a blank slate was logistically impossible. So I thought of my research on the curatorial history in Southeast Asia as the trajectory for this unexpected curatorial effort.

In the said study on curators in the region (Redza Piyadasa of Malaysia, Jim Supangkat of Indonesia, Raymundo Albano of the Philippines, Apinan Poshyananda of Thailand), the role of the artist-curator stood out. I realized that the contemporary turn in Southeast Asian art was in part conditioned by a curatorial turn; and that the turn was informed both by artistic and curatorial interests. The artist-curator, by necessity or inclination or by both, embodied the turn; and in fact was a kind of turning in itself, thus the title *Turns in Tropics: Artist-Curator*. I regarded the artist-curator as a tropic moment that was the basis of certain shifts in the environment of art in Southeast Asia, a category that was not spared in the interrogation.

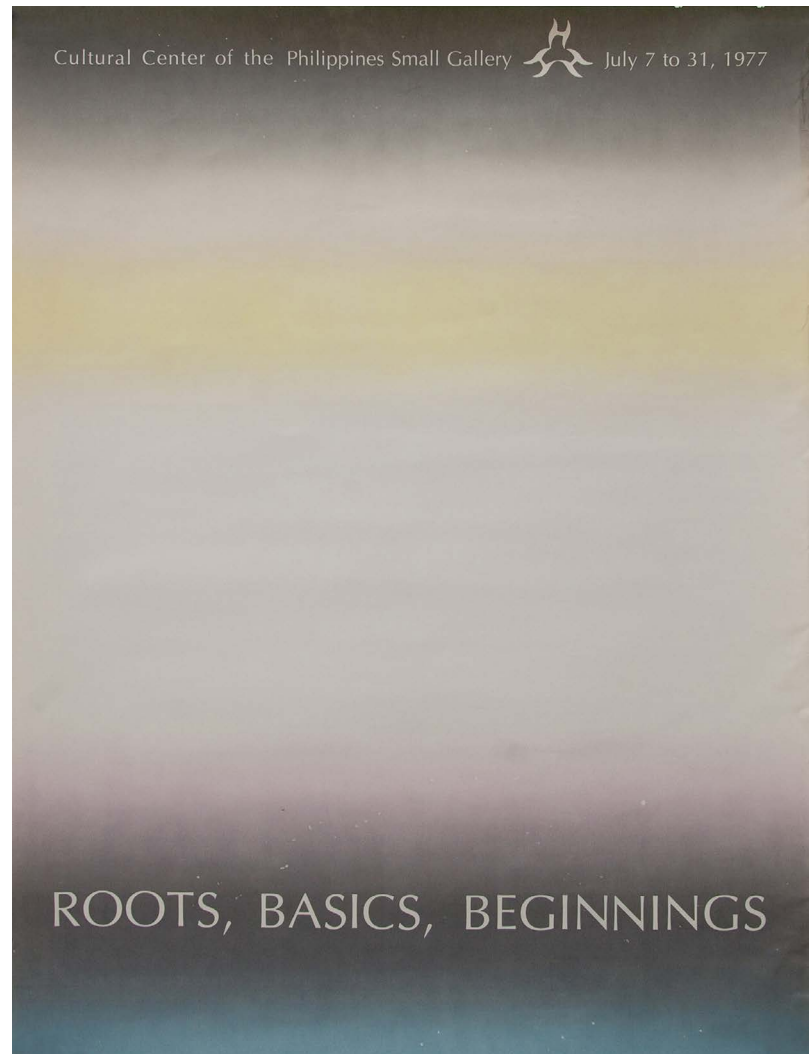
This was how I was led to facet an angle of the practice of Raymundo Albano. I knew Albano as an artist and a curator of the Cultural Center of the Philippines. The archives of the exhibitions and other initiations at the Center, however, opened up a larger context of his work as well of the history of the modern and the contemporary through the Center and Albano. This was the incipient phase of my engagement with Albano.

In looking into the archives of Albano, I came across the texts he had written that offered instructive entry points into a wider discussion of Philippine art history. The pieces on installation and developmental art further expanded the constellation of forces and gave me the opportunity to create coordinates and tangents of Albano in the endeavors of the likes of David Medalla and Jose Maceda. The impulse of Medalla and Maceda to create conditions of participation and to broaden the milieu of artistic experience through a range of actions from kinetic sculpture to musique concrète layered Albano’s own contemplation of a world “suddenly turning visible.”

It was this relay of Albano, Medalla, and Maceda that gave me the intellectual space to sharpen my reflections on two critical terms in modernity and contemporaneity and the possibility of a Philippine method: the “installative” and the “alternating.” I was asked by the *Afterall* publication to contribute an essay on a survey of the early installative instinct in Southeast Asia for a volume on the Chiang Mai Social Installation and participated in the Glossary of Common Knowledge project run by the Moderna Galerija in Ljubljana, Slovenia with the term “alternating.” With regard to the installative, Albano’s essay “Installation: A Case for Hangings” was indispensable. In the case of “alternating,” his notion of the “developmental” and Maceda’s fifth interval were extremely illuminating. In a related endeavor, I linked up the notion of the developmental with the democratic and the avant-garde for an essay of the inaugural issue of *Southeast of Now*.

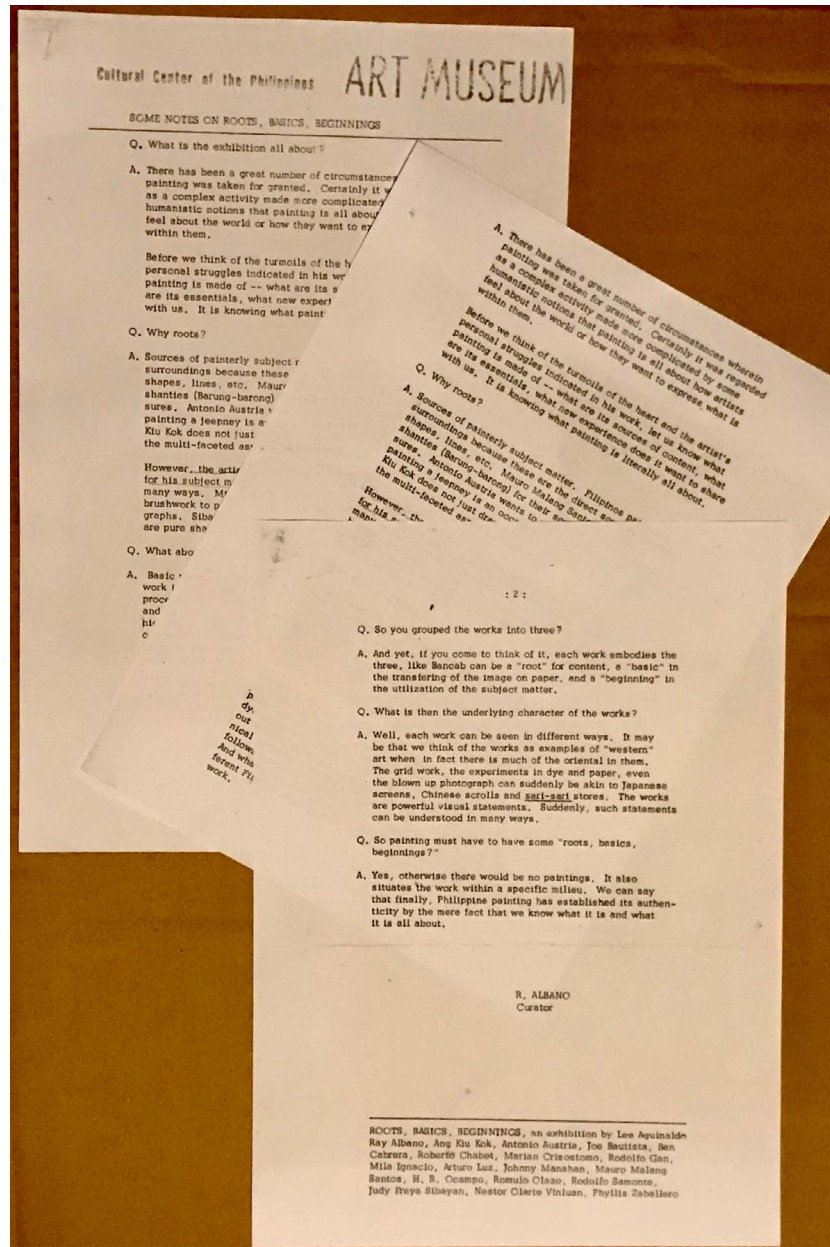
The Albano archive then would widen even further when I began to direct the Philippine Contemporary Art Network (PCAN) with the “Place of Region in the Contemporary” as its first problematic. One section of the network is tasked with Knowledge Production and Circulation. For the initial foray, it took on the challenge of bringing together four

Poster of *Roots, Basic, Beginnings* (1977)
Small Gallery, Cultural Center of the
Philippines. Designed by Ray Albano



artists who harnessed artistic practice outside of Manila: Jess Ayco in Bacolod, Santiago Bose in Baguio, Junyee in Los Baños, and Abdulmari Imao in Sulu. Albano would figure in this matrix as someone who organized a program at the Center called Art for the Regions. It was through PCAN that I collected the essays of Albano in an anthology that framed his thoughts within four rubrics: the cultural, the curatorial, the critical, and the creative. He reflected on the context that is oftentimes unproblematically considered “cultural.” He annotated art through criticism and elaborated on exhibitions through curatorial discourse. And he wrote poetry and performance texts. This collection rounds out the mindscape of Albano and references the ways by which he had grappled with the contentious issues surrounding the local, the contemporary, the international, the western, the traditional, among others. The book begins with Albano responding to questions posed by the critic-painter Cid Reyes and closes with Albano interviewing the artist-connoisseur-collector Fernando Zóbel.

The work on the Albano archive took on density exceptionally, with new sources presenting themselves alongside those from the Center, which consisted mostly of photographs, notes, art works, floorplans, and other exhibition ephemera. It seems that Albano was a diligent steward of files and meticulously kept track of documents. Judy Freya Sibayan’s archive contained numerous materials related to Albano’s curatorial and artistic practice, including rare performance texts and exquisite posters. Patricia Sanders from Portland, Oregon wrote me to fondly refer to a work of Ray that is in her possession, a 13-page parable titled “The Grid Escape” written in long-hand on gridded tracing paper. Finally, at the National



Notes on the exhibition *Roots, Basic, Beginnings* (1977) by Ray Albano. Cultural Center of the Philippines Art Museum.

Gallery Singapore archive is the manuscript of what may well be a text of explications called *Things Change*, said to be co-written with Johnny Manahan. All this testifies to the robust discursive climate in which Albano moved and in fact incited. And in the end helps foil the enterprise of some quarters in the art world to ensconce, partly through the archive apparatus, a singular interlocutor of a much-inflated and perhaps poorly theorized conceptualism in the Philippines that has been made attractive, even peddled, to a global curatorium and archive leviathans.

My relationship with the Albano archive, therefore, is part of a larger sequence of experiments in art history and curatorial practice. I speak to the archive but I do not fetishize it. I observe that archives have assumed currency in contemporary art and that gestures towards their valence tend to instrumentalize them as objects or ends in themselves, severed from appropriations and political effects. They become media of exchange or channels of recognition in a highly competitive art ecology in which authenticity, difference, and desire for criticality gain premium status. The said virtues are sought in the archive, which is imagined to yield both local knowledge and the native

informant in a scene that thrives on fraught translations. It seems that the documentation of these translations has become some kind of form in the contemporary; and that the archive lends to the quickening of this desire, and in many ways financializes the object of the archive and the admission into the scene of its keepers.

I am suspicious of this strategy of the archive. I think it fails to complexify the material that the archive implicates and isolates the material as if it were an ethnographic evidence of salvage anthropology. Without the intelligence and the theory to mediate its potential significations, the archive tends to distort the social world from which the archive comes and confers privilege on the discovered and the discoverer. It makes of the archive a bureaucratic procedure of amassing and consolidating and never really generatively releasing, sharing, reciprocating. And of the discoverer a hoarder who profits on the range of capital accruing to the repository. In other words, the archive must refuse to become merely a vacuum or vortex of data. It should be a discursive field of ideas and speculation; a node in the network, or a knot in the meshwork of other archives; and a laboratory of thinking through and acting on the files of documentation.

For the Singapore Biennale 2019, I again relooked into the Albano archive for reference and inspiration. Because I am wary of thematizing the material of the Biennale, I instead searched for a method to understand the condition of the work that is the condition of the world. I found it in an exhibition of Albano in 1977 titled *Roots, Basics, Beginnings*. I was drawn to how he tried to explain as an artist-curator the modes by which Filipino artists incarnated their vast imaginations with the particularities of social forces. Roots is ecology; basics is technology; beginnings is risk. In this circuit, Albano intuits the contemporary in the archive of its restless conduct, not in the registry of its mastery. Finally, the archive must be activated. In the Derridean sense of the lack of knowledge or information, it must find its supplement in the actions of the artist, the curator, the public to perform the operations of de-filing.

Archiving Womanifesto, and much more....

Varsha Nair

In 1995, when Womanifesto was conceived, I had just moved from India and started to live in Bangkok. Not knowing anyone and wanting to connect with artists and find a studio space to work in, I made my way to the print-making department of Chulalongkorn University's faculty of fine arts and was accepted as a visiting artist, where I continued exploring working with etching, lithography and other forms of print-making. I was soon told about a women's art project that was being planned and introduced by a common friend to Nitaya Ueareeworakul, who invited me to participate in the exhibition. In one of our early discussions about the project, Nitaya pointed out that she was the sole remaining organiser and I instantly offered to join forces to help bring the exhibition together. Thus began our friendship and my long engagement with Womanifesto, an engagement that in many ways became meaningful in defining my own journey—settling down to live in Thailand and coming into my own as an artist, potentially one who could also conceptualise projects to bring people and things together.

Womanifesto Opened up Various Possibilities.

First of all Womanifesto offered a rare platform, going on to become the first feminist collective of its kind emerging in Southeast Asia, where women artists could gather and connect with artists coming from near and distant shores. Womanifesto became an exciting playground in which we could take the initiative as women and as artists, rather than being just passive players, to set up projects and make diverse creative processes and thinking visible. It was a kind of laboratory, one that was based on hospitality, enabling participants to produce, show works and generate fresh ideas. We started to don the role of planners to initiate and promote the staging of group events, from fundraising and documenting, to exhibiting and conversing about our individual realities and art practices.

As artist-organisers our thinking behind Womanifesto was also to remain independent, without intervention in our planned projects from the funding organisations that supported us. Fed purely by our joint creative energy and excitement of working together we attempted to find the most direct ways to realise projects even with the most minimum financial support. Thus, biannually, starting with the first exhibition in 1997, different projects were realised until 2008, when the last project, a residency programme was set up at Boon Bandarn Farm in northeast Thailand.

A year ago some of the members of the collective and I started to work on organising the archive. We were invited by the Power Institute (University of Sydney) to exhibit it in relation to the symposium, *Gender in Southeast Asian Art Histories II: Art, Digitality and Canon-making?*¹ The exhibition was subsequently installed at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok (April 2019), and recently at The Cross Art Projects in Sydney.²

Unpacking the boxes and going through the stored documents/material and preparing to exhibit the Womanifesto archive we found ourselves going down memory lane, somewhat overwhelmed with the diversity of projects, artistic expressions and how much was made possible purely due to the creative energy and determination that went into organizing

¹ Gender in Southeast Asian Art Histories II: Art, Digitality and Canon-making? <http://www.powerpublications.com.au/art-digitality-and-canon-making/>

² Archiving Womanifesto. Exhibition at The Cross Art Projects, Sydney <https://www.crossart.com.au/current-show>



Fig. 1 Womanifesto archive at Varsha Nair's studio in Bangkok. Aug. 23, 2018. Courtesy of Womanifesto Archive

the various projects. The documents, photographs/slides/negatives, letters, drawings that passed between our hands became living, breathing things—palpable memories which we were now reconnecting with, and thus reliving. We were simultaneously sorting the material as the archive was to be donated to Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong, who are currently digitizing it to include in their Research Collection.

Having the material digitized, all of Womanifesto projects as digital data, will have its advantages in terms of recording and storing for the long term, also for sharing the information more easily and widely. In many ways, digitization of the archive is to lend added focus and increase connectivity further fostering our work. I am aware, however, that maintaining our analog connections is very important and with this in mind as we worked through the archive we started to plan establishing a center for Womanifesto on my co-organizer Nitaya Ueareworakul's land outside Udon Thani, Thailand. This would be a physical space where the original archive materials will be exhibited, and a connected studio space which will host artists as residents. It is an exciting development, this room of ones own, which we aim to settle down in starting in March 2020.

Working with the archive has reaffirmed our labour, our labour of love. It needs to be said that Womanifesto is rarely acknowledged for what has been achieved. We, as women artists are regularly made aware of our position or lack of it by being left out of the discourse taking place in the art centers specifically in the region. Thus we are made invisible, and in many ways our achievements erased from becoming points of reference to the present and future generation.



Fig. 2 Installation of the Womanifesto archive at CommDe Gallery, Chulalongkorn University Bangkok. Courtesy of Womanifesto Archive

Recognising from early on the significance of marking our presence firmly in the context of feminist art history, and starting to pen a chapter for it from/of our part of the world, way back in 1999 I made my first foray into writing and published a text on Womanifesto II in *n paradoxa*, a feminist art journal from the UK. Prior to the internet entering our lives this was an attempt to make visible what we were doing and thus connect it with the wider discourse going on out there.

This, accounting for ourselves/by ourselves started by writing, also presenting talks, giving workshops, basically talking about it at any given chance, such as recently at my alma mater, Faculty of Fine Arts in Baroda, India. To quote Terry Berkowitz, a New York-based artist who participated in Womanifesto, “if we don’t keep screaming backsliding happens even where progress had been made. And this is very painful and tragic”.

Bridging the digital and the analog: planning for an artist run archive

As far as archiving and conducting future projects/activities for Womanifesto, along with the physical space digital technology, the ether, certainly will act as a “gathering” point. With this in mind, I started a conversation recently with Durbahn, one of the members of a collective called Bildwechsel³ an international umbrella organisation and archive for women/art/media based in Hamburg, Germany. This valuable archive highlights how artists run an archive, in this case both digital and analog. Bildwechsel has different nodes in Hamburg, Basel, and Glasgow, mostly connecting feminist groups and each one operating with their own aims. But all follow the same ethos and idea behind Bildwechsel, which is that they are not part of the art market but rather a support structure for artists who want to make art. So, every part of Bildwechsel is there for and by the artist and as Durbahn puts it, “What is important is that it is an analog experience. Just digital is not good enough!”

In addition Bildwechsel set up events to bring together artists, groups and ideas via arranging project, talks and film/video screenings. And much like Womanifesto, they also came together via a friend introducing a friend introducing a friend, and so on, with wanting to build a network of women and their work, and doing so with conviviality at its core. Catriona Moore at the recent closing event of the exhibition *Archiving Womanifesto*

³ Bildwechsel <https://www.bildwechsel.org/info/en/index.html>



Fig. 3 The Womanifesto archive all packed up at Nair's studio. Courtesy of Womanifesto Archive

at the Cross Art Project in Sydney, framed our archiving work thus, “The work of local, regional and transnational artist collectives and curatorial actions feed growing archives, of which the Womanifesto project is an important example. Collectives produce archives, and in turn, archives might produce collectives, or models for future collectivity. Archiving is an active verb, and feminist archives are not inert collections but may also propel future-oriented feminist models.”⁴

When Nitaya, Preenun Nana and I opened up and delved into boxes of the stored away Womanifesto material, the overall feeling was how completely a different experience it is to handle analog material such as photos, slides, actual documents etc., Somehow we connect more directly than looking at things on a screen. There was a reluctance to trawl through files of jpegs and our devices somewhat took a back seat.

⁴ Catriona Moore further writes, “As Womanifesto begins a new chapter, its rich archives are being digitalised by the Asia Art Archive. This brings to mind other feminist collectives that emerged in the pre-digital era; their archival material unfortunately still scattered and endangered—locally, the archives of the pioneering NSW Women’s Art Movement (1975-mid 1980s) and NSW Artworkers Union (1979-mid 1980s) languish in individual members’ wardrobes, cupboards and filing cabinets. Fragmented histories of art practice and politics are always vulnerable to art historical disappearance, and many look to the AGNSW artist archives as an important repository for a wealth of pre-digital material. Australian artists and scholars can learn from Southeast Asian archival models, and vice versa. SE Asian collectives like The Artists Village, Ruangrupa and Chang Mai Social Installation, who have been well archived and documented, now enjoy quasi-canonical status as alternatives to institutional histories established since the 1990s. Yet do these masculine and male-dominated examples constitute an alternative historiography or do they simply update an older (modern) refrain? Do more marginalised contemporary feminist collectives and archives that are currently emerging in the region address this status quo with more imaginative and reflexive thinking? We note here the feminist approaches possibly guiding the development of the Indonesia Visual Art Archive, National Gallery of Singapore archives and Malaysia Design Archive, and smaller archival holdings surfacing through feminist curatorial practice, such as Judy Freya Sibayan’s archive, exhibited in artwork form, the Kasibulan archives, as well as the Fifth Passage archive currently being digitised by Chu Chu Yuan for the Singapore Art Museum, amongst other ventures. There is much to share about past, present and future feminist art collectives in the region. The Womanifesto archives help us rethink nation-centric (and region-centric) narratives, by bringing to the fore the material memories of participating women artists from around the world, including Australia. What of the future of the Womanifesto archives and related SE Asian ventures, of feminist-driven archival projects in Australia (the ‘Women’s Art Register’, ‘future feminist archive’ and ‘trempang trade route’ projects, among others)? How can we enable conversations between these collective histories in a period of increasing national and regional gatekeeping? These practical considerations form the preconditions for global feminist art and art history. (<https://www.crossart.com.au/current-show>)

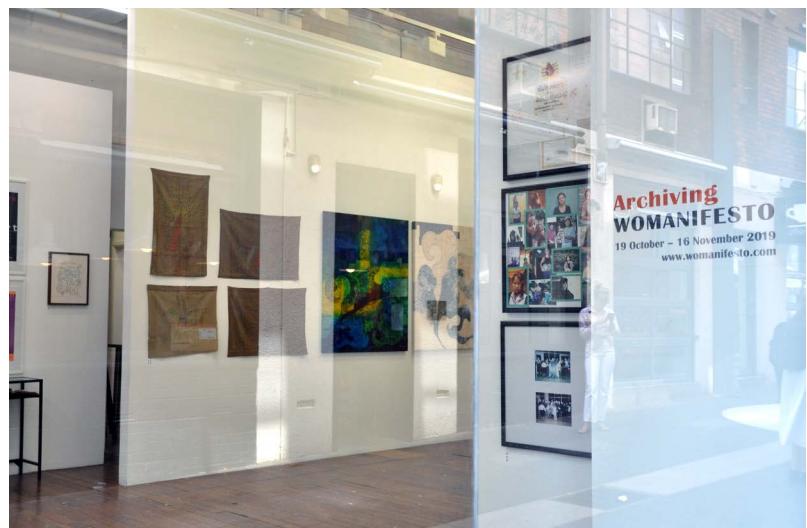


Fig. 4-5 Exhibition of Womanifesto archive at The Cross Road Art Projects.
Courtesy of Womanifesto Archive

How can one compartmentalise the many memories and experiences, and so much else—the invisible labour—that has gone into making what Womanifesto is today? Looking through the digitised archive and/or the actual material offers only part of the picture. Working with and finding ways to present her own archive, Judy Freya Sibayan offers this for consideration—“The archive as laboratory; exploring and testing ways on how best to perform it.” Finding ways to “perform” the archive, to tell the behind-the-scenes stories and highlight significant personalised moments does open up various possibilities for many to encounter in a more direct way, making for a potentially tangible experience.

After living in Bangkok for 23 years, early this year I uprooted and relocated— myself and my studio, my many boxes that had remained unopened for years to which were added many more new ones. Now in my studio in Baroda, still in the process of finally opening, unfolding and sorting ones “life’s work,” sorting, filing and archiving, is to re-live things as I engage and get engrossed in an unfolding daily performance.

Fig. 6 Archiving Womanifesto roundtable at The Cross Art Projects. Courtesy of Womanifesto Archive



Fig. 7 Preparing the Womanifesto archive for exhibition at CommDe Gallery, Chulalongkorn University Bangkok. Courtesy of Womanifesto Archive



Baroda, November 2019

For further reading on Womanifesto, download related texts:

- Womanifesto: A Biennial Art Exchange in Thailand, by Varsha Nair
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/721050>
- Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia. Gender in Southeast Asian Art Histories
<https://nuspress.nus.edu.sg/products/southeast-of-now-vol-3-no-1>
- Womanifesto website: www.womanifesto.com
- Womanifesto Archive, exhibition and symposium at CommDe, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok
<https://cms.commde.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Gender-in-Southeast-Asian-Art-Histories-and-Visual-Cultures-Report-2.pdf>

Chronology of Womanifesto projects:

- 2019 Archiving Womanifesto, exhibition at The Cross Art Projects, with symposium 'Art, Digitality and Canon-making?' at The University of Sydney
- 2019 Womanifesto Archives, exhibition at COMMDE Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, with symposium 'Gender in Southeast Asian Art Histories and Visual Cultures, Art Design and Cannon making?'
- 2008 Womanifesto Residency Program – Boon Bandarn Farm, Si Saket, Thailand
- 2005/06 No Man's Land – A web project
- 2003 Procreation/Postcreation - A publication project
- 2001 Womanifesto Workshop 2001, Boon Bandarn Farm, Si Saket, Thailand
- 1999 Womanifesto II, Saranrom Park, Bangkok, Thailand
- 1997 Womanifesto, Group exhibition at Baan Chao Phraya Gallery and Concrete House, Bangkok, Thailand

Delving into Philippine artists' moving image: The extraordinary moment is no longer and not yet...

Clarissa Chikiamco

1

Cinema is the art of the future, claimed filmmaker and poet Virginia Moreno. A few years ago, through a blur of text and images from the Purita Kalaw Ledesma archives, this essay by Moreno caught my eye. In her treatise written in 1969, she expressed belief in cinema as the best art form to grasp the spirit of the modern. The spirit of the modern, she asserted, was the “momentary,” the now, the passing. From the fractured geometries of Cubist painting in the early 20th century that tried to arrest this, the modern would now flourish in the moving image. She excitedly professed:

The cinema, in containing all the arts and giving breath and life to them, is therefore the art of the future. Into it, the painter will come with his brush with his moving forms, ever more, the architect as the designer not alone of houses, towns, or cities but the megalopolis of the imagination....And the new griffin—the cinema—by its movement and creators, will portray the modern spirit that has for motto: the extraordinary moment is no longer and not yet...¹

It is this idea of the “moment” that I would like to reflect upon in connection with my own research and curatorial practice on artists' moving image in the Philippines. In particular, I would like to expand on first, the moving image as an art of the present and future moment, and secondly, the moving image as an art of the past.

2

The moving image has been a source of utopic declarations. It is viewed as a medium of the moment, a medium emblematic of the present, a medium of contemporary times. The excitement that the moving image stimulates is strongly related to technology, the machinery “of the moment” which can offer *new* and *current* possibilities. The formats can vary and shift as the technology is upgraded over time. The designate “moving image” is perhaps the best catch-all for different terms encountered in artists' engagement with moving image media, such as video art, short film, experimental film, alternative film and underground movies.

The engagement with the moving image is not simply about choice but also about access. Artists need access to moving image technology to enact its possibilities. While film had already been introduced in the Philippines during the Spanish colonial period, it was only in the later half of the 20th century after independence that film became more readily available for non-commercial purposes.² For some artists, film was what was obtainable. For others, it was video.

¹ Virginia R. Moreno, “The Coming Shape of the Arts,” *The Manila Chronicle*, 21 April 1969, 24-A. Purita Kalaw Ledesma (PKL) Archives ART XXIII, 10. With thanks to the Kalaw-Ledesma Foundation for the use of the archives. Moreno would go on to be the first director of the University of the Philippines Film Center. She herself made short films and was part of collaborative film groups, such as Observation Platform and Salaguinto Film Society. Mauro Gia. Samonte, “Underground movies,” *Movement Magazine*, 1(4), 1986, 21. With thanks to Bernadette Patino and Merv Espina.

² Nick Deocampo, *Short Film: Emergence of a New Philippine Cinema* (Manila: Communication Foundation for Asia, 1985), 3.



Johnny Manahan, *Choose*, 1982, U-matic video transferred to digital video, ed. 1 of 6, 46 min 39 sec, Gift of the Manahan family, Collection of National Gallery Singapore. *Choose* was shown at the exhibition *A Fact Has No Appearance: Art Beyond the Object* at National Gallery Singapore in 2016. The author, who was one of the curators of the exhibition, chose to include a second monitor as Manahan originally intended for showing this work in the 1982 Paris biennale. Only one video has been found so it is unknown what the second monitor might have played. Image by Joseph Nair, courtesy of National Gallery Singapore.

While Nam June Paik is perhaps the most well-known artist internationally as an advocate of the video medium, the Philippine art scene was not immune to a bit of prophesying. There is the statement for video art in a Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) press release written in 1977. It was likely written by artist Ray Albano, the main impresario behind CCP's visual art exhibitions and programs, and announced the showing of a "video as art" program courtesy of the U.S.-backed Thomas Jefferson Cultural Center. The press release declared, "Video art is a new medium, 'the most exciting medium' and Friday afternoon's program will feature works displaying different art uses of the video machine."³

By then, the art possibilities of the video machine had already sparked interest. Johnny Manahan—artist, television director and Albano's frequent collaborator—was the first Philippine artist to use video as artwork in 1972. In 1974, he wrote about artists investigating the information systems which "capture, document and codify reality" and which people have become increasingly reliant on in the technological age.⁴ Video, film and photography were some of these systems that artists were testing the limits of as they expanded beyond painting and sculpture. In 1982, Manahan expressed scepticism on declarations and manifestoes on video, deeming that the work should speak for itself.⁵ His video work from the same year, *Choose*, did speak, notably with a voiceover declaring that television—like roaches—would inherit the earth. In an interview many years later, he mused, "And then, in the end, wasn't I right, it was like cockroaches, TVs everywhere."⁶

³ "Visual art show at CCP today," *Business Day*, 25 February 1977, 18. PKL Archives Box #6 ART XXXVI, 409. According to Judy Freya Sibayan, to her memory, the video as art program at CCP did not happen. Judy Freya Sibayan, personal interview, 11 June 2015. I delivered a paper in Areté at Ateneo de Manila University last 12 September 2018 which mentioned this. During the Q&A session, film archivist Teddy Co mentioned that the program was available at the Thomas Jefferson Cultural Center.

⁴ Johnny Manahan, "Otherwise Photography," *Marks*, Vol. 1, No. 2-4, May to October 1974, n.p.

⁵ Johnny Manahan, "commentaire," *XII^e biennale de Paris* ([Paris]: [s.n.], 1982), 306. With thanks to Phoebe Scott, my colleague at National Gallery Singapore, for assisting with the translation.

⁶ Johnny Manahan, personal interview, 20 January 2016.

Film, particularly film short in duration, was also thriving at the time. Nick Deocampo, in his 1985 book *Short Film: Emergence of a New Philippine Cinema*, espoused short film as conducive to experimentation through being independent from commercial constraints and the narrativity of full-length films.⁷ He contended that short film is the “true cinema” and, invigorated by a new generation of filmmakers, could be considered the “new cinema” as well.⁸ While only a subset of these filmmakers was also practicing visual artists (Pandy Aviado being a notable example), this overlap then merits including this genre, at least partially, in the study of artists' moving image, which has not yet really been analysed collectively and historically. Suffice it to say this is still an argument in the making which deserves more thought and longer explication elsewhere. For now, we will settle for the point that artists' engagement with film should not be excluded from study of their practice as artists simply because these were not exhibited as artworks per se or viewed in traditional visual arts venues. Film intersected with their pursuits and, when filmmakers like Moreno and Deocampo declare the promise of film and cinema, the films by artists were also part of, not apart from, these pronouncements.

The technology of the moving image is one which constantly evolves and finds new relevance, finding new generations to believe in its potential. Festivals for video and short film were—and are—constantly being initiated over the years. In 2006, naively then without much knowledge of earlier artistic engagements with the moving image, I myself had also professed similar beliefs in the potential of video when I cofounded a now extinct video art festival.⁹ I had reverence for video as the medium of the moment and also saw it as the art of the future, thinking that it was the medium most people would be able to relate to, given the increasing exposure to moving images in daily life and the increasing ease by which people (and artists) could shoot and edit video.¹⁰

I now realise that, while such beliefs are not new, the belief in the moving image is consistently renewed over time. Though or much rather *because* the format or technology may differ and be constantly changing, the moving image is persistently deemed an art of the new—pregnant with promise, an art of the present and even future moment.

3

The intrinsic quality of the moving image is that it is time-based. It is therefore transitory and fleeting, a moment present then passed. This is a challenge of its study. It is perpetually slipping away, leaving behind memories and impressions, traces of its existence.

That is—if it is even fortunate enough that the work still exists. Some works are missing, are no longer extant, or could not—or were not—meant to be captured. Manahan's 1972 video work *I Will Breathe* is known through photos of his photos of the now-lost video. Ray Albano, Hugué Bartolome and Judy Freya Sibayan's 1977 performance with video, *Three Pieces*, had no video recording, using live feed. It exists through Sibayan's written descriptions of it and a contact print she has of the performance. Photographs, written descriptions and interviews (if possible) are the recourses to “access” a work as much as possible. A degree of conjecture to stitch these things together has proven necessary. It is perhaps not unlike what the Japanese experimental film and video pioneer

⁷ Deocampo, op. cit., 2-3.

⁸ Deocampo, op. cit., 2, 98.

⁹ The video festival, called End Frame Video Art Project, ran for three editions in 2006, 2007 and 2011-2013. The festival's other cofounders are Rica Estrada and Marinella Mina.

¹⁰ “An online conversation between Fatima Lasay and Clarissa Chikiamco,” unpublished, 2006, n.p.; Clarissa Chikiamco, “For Philippine Video Art? More Things to Come” in *End Frame Video Art Project*, exh. cat. (Manila: Visual Pond, 2006), n.p.; *End Frame Video Art Project video documentation* (Manila: Visual Pond, 2006).

Contact print documentation of Judy Freya Sibayan, Hugué Bartolomé and Ray Albano's second version of *Three Pieces*, performed at the Thomas Jefferson Cultural Center in 1977.
Courtesy of Judy Freya Sibayan Archive



Takahiko Iimura described in trying to learn of avant-garde cinema during the 1960s: “I, however, living in the ‘far east,’ isolated, remote from those experiments of previous and contemporary generations, I could only read about them in foreign books and magazines, *I had no access to the actual films, could only imagine them.*”¹¹ Perhaps for certain works lost to us, the quote might be adapted to: “I, however, living in the present, remote from those moving image works of previous generations, I could only read about them, *I had no access to the actual works, could only imagine them.*”

With formats and equipment perpetually changing, preserving a work in its original form or upgrading it to the latest format so that it can continue to be accessed will be arduous. There is no singular archive or institution in the Philippines which is focused on artists' moving image works.¹² The state of film archiving has been written about elsewhere but artists' moving image works have additional complexities.¹³ They can be of multiple channels, be a part of installations, be site-specific and even involve live performance. For many works, I have only known them through its parts, such as the video component, documentation photographs and descriptions by artists, rather than experiencing the works in whole for myself. In one instance, I learned of Jean Marie Syjuco's *See Me, See You* work from 1986 through seeing a part of this video installation at her home and her explaining the work to me in person. Even for works made recently in the 2000s, the circumstances of knowing these works are similar, due to limited resources and frankly, the absence of time-space travel.

With the lack of a dedicated archive or institution, those who lean towards copyleft may argue for the free replication and circulation of the moving image parts of these works. It

¹¹ Takahiko Iimura, “Golden age of avant-garde [sic] cinema: 1960s” (Paris, April 1999) in *Takahiko Iimura: 60s Experiments* [DVD catalogue] (Tokyo: Takahiko Iimura Media Art Institute, 2004), n.p. Emphasis my own.

¹² While the Ateneo Art Gallery began a collection of artists' moving image works in 2012 (of which I was its acquisition curator), there is still no institution in the Philippines which has this as its primary focus.

¹³ On film archiving, see for example Bliss Cua Lim, “A Brief History of Archival Advocacy for Philippine Cinema,” in *2013 Philippine Cinema Heritage Summit: A Report*, UC Irvine, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2gx6w8ff> (accessed on 5 March 2019).

Installation shot of Poklong Anading's
Between Intersections, a 4-channel video
installation at Ateneo Art Gallery, 2007.
Courtesy of the author



is through replication, conversion and storage in multiple sites that the chances of a work's survival increases. Yet, in recent years, there has also been a concerted effort to recognise the value of these moving image works by artists through its sales in limited editions, similar to prints and sculptures. Galleries like 1335Mabini and Silverlens represent a number of these artists who frequently work with moving images. There also seems to be, at least from anecdotal knowledge, an increase in interest by private collectors in acquiring such works. Institutions abroad are also gaining interest as they also diversify the portfolio of their collections in medium and nationality. The agreements in the sales of artists' moving image works, and their seeming exclusivity, could be in direct conflict with their otherwise replication and circulation, with or without the artists' sanction. This is not only in the Philippines but certainly, a situation which is being faced by artists from all over who work with moving images. Scholar and critic Erika Balsom remarked on this tension in her book *After Uniqueness: A History of Film and Video Art in Circulation*: "New forms of reproducibility inspire new forms of control, which in turn ignite the desire for the utopia of reproduction and prompt a search for practices of copying that will escape regulation."¹⁴ In this century, these opposing inclinations will be compelling to observe as we reckon how future generations might be able to access, experience and learn of these moving image works—moments that are a part of a particular present, moments that were once deemed new.

4

In 2007, the artist Poklong Anading created a 4-channel video installation involving different projections on four walls in the Ateneo Art Gallery. Called *Between Intersections*, the installation was deliberately conceived so that visitors would not be able to view all moving images at once, being forced to miss out on the video projection they had their backs to. He called it producing an "anxiety of loss"—an unease at having missed something, the unattainability of seeing everything.¹⁵

This is also, I believe, the nature of doing research on artists' moving image—being between a past ever elusive and a future of anticipation. It is always, as Moreno intimated, a condition elapsed yet in a state of becoming. Seemingly forever out of grasp, the extraordinary moment is no longer and not yet...

¹⁴ Erika Balsom, *After Uniqueness: A History of Film and Video Art in Circulation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 53.

¹⁵ Clarissa Chikiamco, *Between Intersections* (Quezon City: Ateneo Art Gallery, 2007), n.p.

From L to E: Working with Archival Contingencies

Lizza May David and Eva Bentcheva in conversation

Since 2013, Berlin-based artist Lizza May David has developed works which explore the histories and potentialities of archival gaps. While working with the art collection of the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) in 2014, David chanced upon a series of grey L-shaped paintings unidentified as to their author and thus were listed in the inventory under “Artist Unknown” which she took up as the subject of several exhibitions and performances in Manila and Berlin. In conversation with art historian Eva Bentcheva, the artist discusses her interest in archival gaps in her work in the Philippines and Germany, and details how their collaboration unearthed the author of the “unknown” works from the CCP collection.

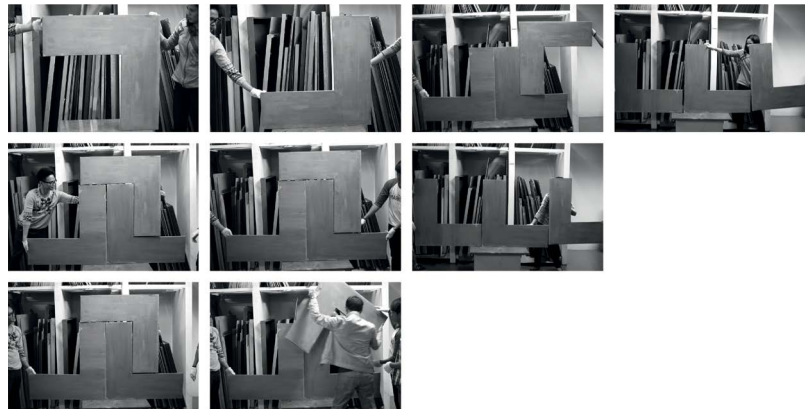


Fig. 1 Documentation of the Cultural Center of the Philippines Art Collection, 2014. Photographs by Lizza May David

Eva Bentcheva (EB): I recently had the pleasure to work with you on developing a workshop on Philippine conceptual art which accompanied your live performance, *L-Stellen*, at the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin on the 29th July 2018. Interestingly, this project has its roots in a series of grey L-shaped paintings by an unknown artist which you encountered in the collection of one of Manila’s most influential art institution, the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) in 2014. As it turned out, the story behind these paintings is connected in a fascinating way to Philippine art history—and its omissions—as well as your own practice. For me, your project speaks to certain debates around the current state of modern art institutional archives and collections and how they operate in the Philippines and Germany. To understand all this, perhaps we can start with your earlier projects. Can you tell me how the concept for this recent performance evolved?

Lizza May David (LMD): In 2014, I was part of the CCP’s annual Venue Grant Program. This gave me the opportunity to create new work and present it in an exhibition at the CCP exhibition spaces under the directorship of Ma. Victoria T. Herrera. In preparing for this work, I took the CCP’s art collection as my starting point to delve deeper into Philippine modernism. This project was, in fact, inspired by an even earlier work which I did with the Ateneo Art Gallery Collection in Manila in 2013, for which I found the method of “painterly appropriation” to be best suited to the concepts I was engaging. The work was called *The Incomplete Project*, and was displayed as part of the group exhibition, *You Have Every Right* curated by Lian Ladia. On that occasion, I referred to works from the Ateneo Art Gallery’s collection which were being exhibited in parallel. Inspired by Jürgen Habermas’s text, *Modernity: An Unfinished Project* (1980), I worked with processes of appropriation, archival research, observation, memory and the translation of painterly forms and gestures. Further study of the works I selected from the CCP art collection brought me to search for transnational resonances by comparing them to my

own artistic training and production in Germany and use this knowledge very consciously as material to work with critically.

EB: When you mention “transnational resonances,” it is of course impossible not to think about the history of the CCP which has held a very influential position in Philippine art. Established in 1966 upon the initiative of then president Ferdinand Marcos, with Imelda Marcos as its Chair, the CCP was closely tied up to the cultural politics of the dictatorial Marcos regime whose national drives towards spectacle, “greatness” and “progressiveness” became imbricated with notions of the “avant-garde” practices in the Philippines.¹ In the first two decades of its existence, under the directorship first of Roberto Chabet, followed by Raymundo Albano, the CCP Art Museum particularly supported artists who worked with minimalist, abstract and conceptually-leaning practices which did not espouse explicit political messages and resonated instead with international movements. In this respect, both the CCP’s archive of documentation, publications and publicity materials, as well as its collection of artworks, are closely bound up with its own curatorial programme and political history. How did you go about carrying out your artistic and archival research?

LMD: Upon my initial inspection of the inventory list of the CCP’s collection, I was struck by the fact that alongside a number of names which were already known to me—for instance, Roberto Chabet, Arturo Luz, David Medalla—there were also 43 works whose authors were categorized as “Artist Unknown” which caught my attention. This applied to photographs, prints, paintings and two sculptures. Upon my request, the CCP Visual Arts and Museum Division staff granted me access to these works in order to engage with them artistically. After being sent available photographs of these “artist unknown” artworks, I became eager to search the archive myself and photographically appropriate the works *in situ*. As part of this effort, I paid particular attention to the conditions in which the works in the CCP art collection could be found, and my documentation process. This focus on their condition resulted on my choosing to display only my process of documentation, and not the works themselves. For me, it was more about making a conceptual gesture, rather than about producing research to update the inventory list. This also led me to question the role of the artist when working with archives.

EB: Why this interest in the “unknown”?

LMD: For me, when a museum’s archive is made publicly available, it provides not only an understanding of institutional interests, but also a reading of the so-called “gaps” and “marginal occurrences” in the system; a sort of micro-mirror of the place in which that specific archive happens to be anchored at a given moment in time. It is a place where diverse subjectivities become entangled with one another. I believe that when placed in the spotlight, archives have a certain power both to illustrate specific perspectives, as well as alternative narratives if reorganized. In this respect, working with the concept of the “unknown” sets up an artistic framework for me; it serves as a speculative suggestion where alternative thought processes are possible, and where space is left for coincidences to develop.

¹ On the CCP’s support for showing performative, conceptual and installation under the rubric of “avant-garde” practices, Patrick Flores has argued that “the ‘avant-garde’ in this situation was an investment in ‘culture’ as a mode of agency: the Filipino as an expressive force, and relationality as a scheme for the gathering of energies. It converged in the performative, in a *palabas*, that is at once spectacle and ruse.” Flores, Patrick. “‘Total Community Response’: Performing the Avant-garde as a Democratic Gesture in Manila.” *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia* 1, no. 1 (March 2017): 13-38, p. 14. For further discussions on the relationship between experimental and performative practices as espoused by the CCP in the late 1960s until the 1980s, see Pastor Roces, Marian. ‘Outline for Reviewing the Avant-Garde’, San Juan (August 1985): 8-10.; Cruz, Joselina. “Transitory Imaginings.” *Pananaw: Philippine Journal of Visual Arts*, no. 5 (2005): 18-29.

EB: In other words, the “unknown” serves as a signifier of the archive’s contingencies? It is certainly intriguing that you were already conscious at this stage of the importance of coincidence, particularly as this later came to play a very big role in this project, but we will come to that shortly. In the meantime, could you explain whether your initial motivation was to excavate and discover the collection for yourself, or did you set out to intervene?

LMD: Yes, I intended to intervene to a certain extent. With the help of the CCP VAMD team and their team of interns, I was given permission to rearrange certain works in the collection and to photograph them according to my own system of ordering over the course of two days. During the photo shoot, I was struck by three single grey paintings that seemed to be part of a series, or to comprise a section of a larger work. They lent their form to a performative play of arrangements within a framework of speculation, all of which I photographed. The students were key in playing around with and exploring how these grey-toned, L-shaped art objects could be put together.

EB: This process makes me think back to Jacques Derrida’s understanding of archives not as static, but as generative spaces. How did these experiments serve to develop your sense of familiarity with the works?

LMD: After photographing the 43 works, I noticed that some of them reminded me of pieces I had seen during my art studies at the Academy of Visual Arts in Nuremberg around 1998. Over the course of my studies, several former classmates studying under Prof. Rolf-Gunter Dienst had experimented with squares and stripes, within the context of Concrete Painting. He was known during the German post-war period for his paintings with calligraphic textures, as well as his work as editor of the art magazine, *Das Kunstwerk*, from 1965 to 1991—one of the key publications on modern and contemporary art history in West Germany. Prof. Dienst had a critical orientation towards Conceptual Art. I was now observing what seemed to be a similar influence on several of the works in the CCP art collection. I wanted to explore this resonance of forms, or parallels, more closely. Thus, I decided to look for similar, low-relief surfaces which I could work with in the form of a photographic document for my planned exhibition in the CCP Small Gallery.

EB: There is an interesting parallel here between your encounter of these works in the collection and how you perceived them through the prism of discourses from the USA and Europe. As you mentioned, this has partially to do with your own training in Germany. However, it is important to note that these very same discourses around minimalism, abstract expressionism and conceptualism also played a very influential role in the CCP’s visual arts programme after its inauguration in 1969. Many of the works which you were viewing in the collection were likely produced between the 1970s and 1980s, a period in which the discussions around “experimentalism” and “institutionalism” were central to CCP’s curatorial programme, first under the directorship of Roberto Chabet and later under Raymundo Albano.²

LMD: Indeed, this raised several questions for me; how were the paintings from the CCP art collection and those by my former classmates related? To what extent did the post-war American orientation of both countries—Germany and the Philippines—have a lasting

² The adaptation of discourses on the avant-garde, and “experimentalism” from the USA to the Philippine context and the institutional demands of the CCP was a particular point of interest for the writings and curatorial statements of the CCP’s second artistic director, Raymundo Albano, who held the post from 1970 to 1985. See Albano, Raymundo. “A Decade of Developmental Art.” Cultural Center of the Philippines, January 1979; Albano, Raymundo. “Developmental Art of the Philippines.” *Philippine Art Supplement* 2, no. 4 (July to August 1981): 15-16.



Fig. 2 Documentation of the Cultural Center of the Philippines Art Collection, 2014. Photographs by Lizza May David.

influence on the production of knowledge and the transmission of Western ideologies and aesthetics in their localities? To what extent did Concrete Painting's insistence on being "universal" lay the groundwork for transmitting ideas of modernity in the form of Western ideologies? And finally, how did all these questions relate to my own paintings which I had been producing in both countries—Germany and the Philippines.

EB: How did you go about translating these ideas into an exhibition which centered on these L-shaped forms by a (then) unknown artist?

LMD: To understand the L-shaped paintings better, I should first explain what my exhibition, *Artist Unknown* (2014), comprised. Up until that point, the unclassified works which I had found consisted of photographs, paintings, some sculptures and prints with Indian motifs. The *Artist Unknown* exhibition itself took place in two spaces of the CCP building. The first was in the Small Gallery in which I placed an installation of nine A0 formats and ten 10cm by 15cm digital photos, apart from two canvases with white backgrounds measuring 14 inches by 16 inches, and black curtains all along the exhibition space mounted from the pre-installed lighting strip. I did not work with the original pieces from the collection, but rather the work took on a documentary character. I exhibited ten digital photographs. These depicted the process of archival work, along with a small selection of photographs of the color field paintings themselves.

In addition, two unpainted canvases were included in the space as a reference to a concept which only revealed itself later in the performance: namely, the disclosure of the biographical and the interrelated questions about the value of the painting, the artwork in itself. The movable black curtains set up a field of architectonic interference, inviting the spectator to playfully observe the photographs from near and far. The second iteration took place in an atrium where I mounted three documentation pictures in a row in order to create an allusion to—and an illusion of—the L-shaped objects from the collection. Simultaneously, along the seven windows, the photo-documentation were scaled up to 240xm by 227cm, printed on tarpaulins, which gave the impression that the photographed archive shelves merged into to row of windows in the atrium.

An accompanying performance took place on another day within the Small Gallery. I changed my positioning between the curtains separating the exhibition space based on the three perspectives which I was speaking from: a curatorial description, a biographical reflection, and an iteration of the "unknown" artworks from the CCP's catalogue. Who sees the archive and who has access to which archives or collections? Who speaks and from

Fig. 3 Detail, *Artist Unknown*, Small Gallery Cultural Center of the Philippines, 2014. Photographs by Lizza May David



which space do you speak? This is why it was important for me to make a performance to emphasize the relationship between body and architecture—“Le point de vue est dans le corps,” says Leibniz/cited by Deleuze/cited by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro.

EB: This work was, in a sense, very timely. The past decade has seen a flourishing of interest, not only in the Philippines, but also across Southeast Asia to redress the histories of erasure.³ This has taken place through artistic initiatives, as well as exhibitions, archive-building and research.⁴ It seems to me that the very form of your exhibition—its fragmented picturing of the archival research process, juxtaposed with allusions to the works categorized as “Artist Unknown” lends a critical tone towards the erasures and gaps in Philippine art history. What new insights did you gain through this process?

LMD: Through this exhibition, I came closer to understanding the fragility of archives. To anyone who has ever worked with archives, it is very evident that documents can easily be lost or rendered untraceable. Even more gravely, when misused by authorities, the narratives of archives can also be treated as flexible and easily “told” in a different way. This made me think back to what a friend of mine, Claudia del Fierro, once said to me, that archives should *not* be fixed; it is in the hands of the subjectivities entangled within those archives to rewrite their own stories. For me, this remains a very interesting debate — where is the divide between the private and public, fact and fiction, violence and repair, when it comes to searching for facts and narratives in archives? When preparing for

³ For recent discussions of the role of archives in Southeast Asian art history, see Allen, F.; Kwan, A.; Wolfarth, J. (eds.), “Archives,” *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2019.

⁴ Examples of individual practices focusing on historical research, collecting, and archiving include Arin Rungjang’s *And Then There Were None, (Tomorrow we will Become Thailand)* (2016) examining Thailand’s involvement and diplomatic relations during the Second World War; Pao Houa Her’s *Hmong Veterans: Attention Series* (2017), centering on the lack of recognition afforded to veterans of Hmong descent who fought in the Vietnam War on behalf of the USA; Erika Tan’s series of works excavating the history of the Malay weaver, Halimah Binti Abdullah, who passed away in London after participating in the 1924 Empire Exhibition in Wembley. Tan has staged this research in the form of multiple expositions, including the performance debate entitled *Art Rhetoric: Debating History, Nation, and Art: The Ontological Status of the Forgotten Malay Weaver* (2015), the performance-based video installation *Halimah-The-Empire-Exhibition-Weaver-who-Died-Whilst-Demonstrating-Her-Craft* (National Gallery of Singapore, 2015), an installation featuring copies of archival footage and sculptural weaves titled *The Weavers Lament* (2016–7), the performance-based video *Apa Jika, The Mis-Placed Comma* (2017), and the installation *The ‘Forgotten’ Weaver* (2017) at the Diaspora Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2017. For a discussion of Rungjang and Tan’s research strategies, see Bentcheva, Eva. “On the Heels of Forgotten Histories: Review of Kilapsaw: Everything Must Go (2016).” *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia*, February 2018: 207-219.



Fig. 4 *Artist Unknown*, Atrium, Cultural Center of the Philippines, 2014. Photographs by Lizza May David

my exhibition at the CCP, I had to constantly question myself; who am I to intervene in this field? May I appropriate not classified works? Is it not a colonizing gesture to do so? How can I work together with those ghosts, those invisible agents in the archive and how should we deal with questions of authorship? These questions kept cropping up, coupled with a growing awareness that Philippine modernity was just one of the many thrusts which governed the CCP's archive and collection. Recognising this, I later worked in collaboration with artist Gabriel Rosell Santillán on a project tracing historical relations between Mexico and the Philippines through the lens of the Bauhinia Tree. This opened up further perspectives on the writing of history, erasures and authorship.

EB: What drove you to revisit your research and exhibition at the CCP in 2018, and to expand upon it in the form of a workshop-performance, *L-Stellen*, at Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin?

LMD: This revisitation came about after an invitation to respond to the exhibition *Hello World: Review of a Collection* that took place at Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin from April to August 2018. *Hello World* marked for me the first in a series of exhibitions happening throughout Germany which reflected upon discourses around decolonialization in order to review the contents and histories of Germany's art collections. With the participation of numerous curators from different backgrounds, the exhibition reminded me of an endeavor reminiscent of biennales; it sought to make room for multiple perspectives, yet remained at the level of an attempt. For instance, perhaps by virtue of the limitations and absences in the collection of the Nationalgalerie, no artistic position from the Philippines was featured in the exhibition. Reacting to this, I decided to work with the L-shaped wooden panels by the unknown artist from the CCP and, more specifically, to position these within the spaces of Hamburger Bahnhof as an invited "parasitic implantation." This was to take place in the form of a workshop-performance—a form of "feedback" towards *Hello World*. I wondered whether perhaps this could produce a kind of a "closed circuit" situation, in the of manner of an "echoing with post-colonial transliteration."

The title *L-Stellen* was a play on the German term *Leerstellen*, meaning "blank spaces," and the fact that objects were produced in a form that could be associated with the letter "L." The plural word "Stellen" by itself refers to its architectonic associations, both in terms of place (*Stelle* = a location/site) and as the verbal form, "site-ing" or lying down. Because of these associations, I referred to the objects as "L-shaped canvases." With your contribution, the ten participants of the workshop-performance were able to learn more about the

history of these L-shaped canvases. Finally upon your suggestion, we approached Judy as to the author of these paintings. She finally came into the picture, which gave the context of *Artist Unknown* a new twist.

EB: I recall this very well! After you initially told me about your unsuccessful search to find the creator of the L-shaped objects, we had a lengthy discussion about the nature of art which the CCP had championed during the 1970s and 1980s. We decided to take the matter of the “Artist Unknown” into our own hands and to search beyond the information in the CCP’s records, knowing fully well that there had been a large number of artists working with minimalist and conceptual art whose works had been shown at the CCP over those two decades. From Berlin, we shared images of your documentation with artist Judy Freya Sibayan in Manila, in the hope that she would be able to assist us in identifying the maker. Having previously researched Judy’s art in the context of early Philippine Conceptualism, I knew she had not only been an active artist during the 1970s and 1980s, but had also exhibited and worked at the CCP. Our initial message to her thus listed possible (and, naively on our part, all male) artists, including Roberto Chabet, Raymundo Albano and Constancio Bernardo. These were all famous figures who had worked with abstraction, readymade materials and Conceptualism in the manner which approximated the L-shaped objects.⁵ In a very surprising turn of events, Judy promptly responded that the works in question were in fact her own, explaining that they had likely remained at the CCP art storage after the exhibition *Untitled Painting No. 1 and Other Paintings* (16-30 April 1974) curated by Chabet in the Small Gallery. Over the course of time, it seemed that they had been catalogued and integrated into the collection with an unknown provenance and without the knowledge of the artist. This surprise discovery proved a very fruitful outcome. Yet, it also made me think back to an observation by Nora Taylor that in the face of archival absences and incomplete record-keeping in Southeast Asia, chance conversations, friendships and exchanges still play a formative role in the writing of art history.⁶ This was very much a case in point!

All of a sudden, it also meant that new information about the works became available. For instance, Judy explained that she had not conceived the objects as L-shapes, but rather intended them to be joined up and displayed in the form of an ‘E’ in reference to the works of Donald Judd⁷ and made to fit the measurement of the wall they were installed on. These revelations unfolded only days before your performance in Berlin. How did you go about navigating your use of the ‘L-shapes’ afterwards?

LMD: I already had an intuitive impulse to work with the L-shaped objects in preparing for Hamburger Bahnhof. Apart from that, I admit my old preference for hard-edged canvases shows. Since I had already selected the L-shaped objects as the basis of my work for the CCP atrium, I picked these objects because of their performance potential. The playful approach of the students in the archive in piecing together the three grey elements

⁵ Our inquiry named Roberto Chabet and Constancio Bernardo, both of whom were Sibayan’s mentors at the University of the Philippines from 1972 to 1975. Correspondence with Judy Freya Sibayan, 26.07.2018.

⁶ Recent scholarship seeking to map performative and conceptual histories in Southeast Asian art has stressed the importance of hearsay, chance encounters, networks and coincidence, particularly when looking to account for archival documentation is often fragmented and incomplete. See Taylor, Nora A. “Performance as Site of Memory: Performing Art History in Vietnam and Singapore.” London: Tate Britain, 6 May 2016.

⁷ Judy Freya Sibayan has described classroom exercises in which her tutor, Roberto Chabet, encouraged students to make art based on the works of contemporary artists in the USA. The students’ works were therefore based on “received ideas.” Sibayan, Judy. “Judy Freya Sibayan.” *Mapping Performance Art and Conceptualism in the Philippines: Historiography*. Roundtable Discussion, University of the Philippines, Tate Research Centre: Asia, Manila, (22 August 2017).

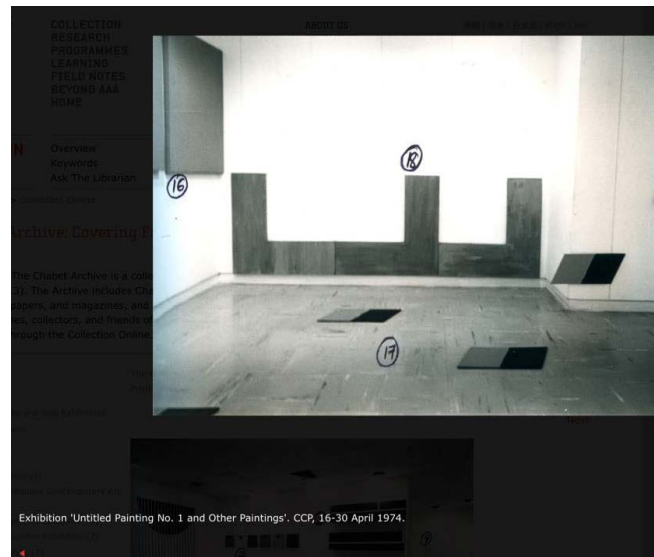


Fig. 5 Screenshot from Asia Art Archive website, *Untitled Painting No. 1 and Other Paintings* (16-30 April 1974), Small Gallery, Cultural Center of the Philippines. With permission from Asia Art Archive

had convinced me of this. The objects were shorn of their two-dimensionality and could thus relate so much more to the performer and to the architecture itself—a painting that becomes more of a sculpture as it comes into dialogue with the architecture.

I found it interesting to hear Judy say that this work was influenced by Donald Judd. In my speculative opinion, this abstract object also entails a negotiability through its simple form that seems distant to any idea of authorship; it embodies a kind of “creative commons” form. Precisely because of this, it ironically also echoes Judd’s claim that “the history of art and art’s condition at any time are pretty messy.”⁸ I point this out because I saw on Instagram how a similar L-shaped sculpture by Carmen Herrera was featured by the Lisson Gallery in New York. Having seen these very similar looking works be produced in different contexts, I now ask myself how this abstract minimalist form can lead back to a single author or place, whether New York, Manila or Berlin? It is this field of tension between collective and individual authorship that I see expressed in this form of performance. I was very happy to learn that Judy had created the object instead of a male artist from the Philippine art canon. I had a very enriching dialogue with her when we met during her project *Moving House, Unpacking a Life of Critical Art Making* (3 August - 11 November 2018) at Calle Wright in Manila where I learned about her art practice.⁹ I find her position extremely important.

EB: On a conceptual level, this project also echoes several recent attempts to artistically “excavate” art historical knowledge from archives and collections. I am thinking here in particular of examples such as Erika Tan’s ongoing series of research-led works around the history of the Malay weaver, Halimah Binti Abdullah, who was brought to England to perform her craft at the Empire Exhibition of 1924-25, and passed away of pneumonia shortly after. Erika’s practice incorporates primary research into museum and state archives, and often uses abstract modes of installation, video and performance in order to “stage” Halimah’s identity, historical presence and craft in the present. In the process, the boundary of authorship between Erika and Halimah becomes increasingly blurred and

⁸ Donald Judd, “Local History” (1964); Quoted in: Judd (1975, p. 151); and cited in: David Raskin. *Donald Judd*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.

⁹ An exploration of the gaps in institutional archives is currently the subject of Judy Freya Sibayan’s own initiative ‘Moving House: Unpacking a Life of Critical Art Making’ (3 August – 11 November 2018) at the arts space Calle Wright in Manila, in which Sibayan is revisiting her self-archive, and sorting its contents through a series of interactive and public events, discussions and performances.



Fig. 6-7 *L-Stellen*, performance by Lizza May David at Hamburger Bahnhof, 29 July 2018. Photographs by Lizza May David and Trinka Lat

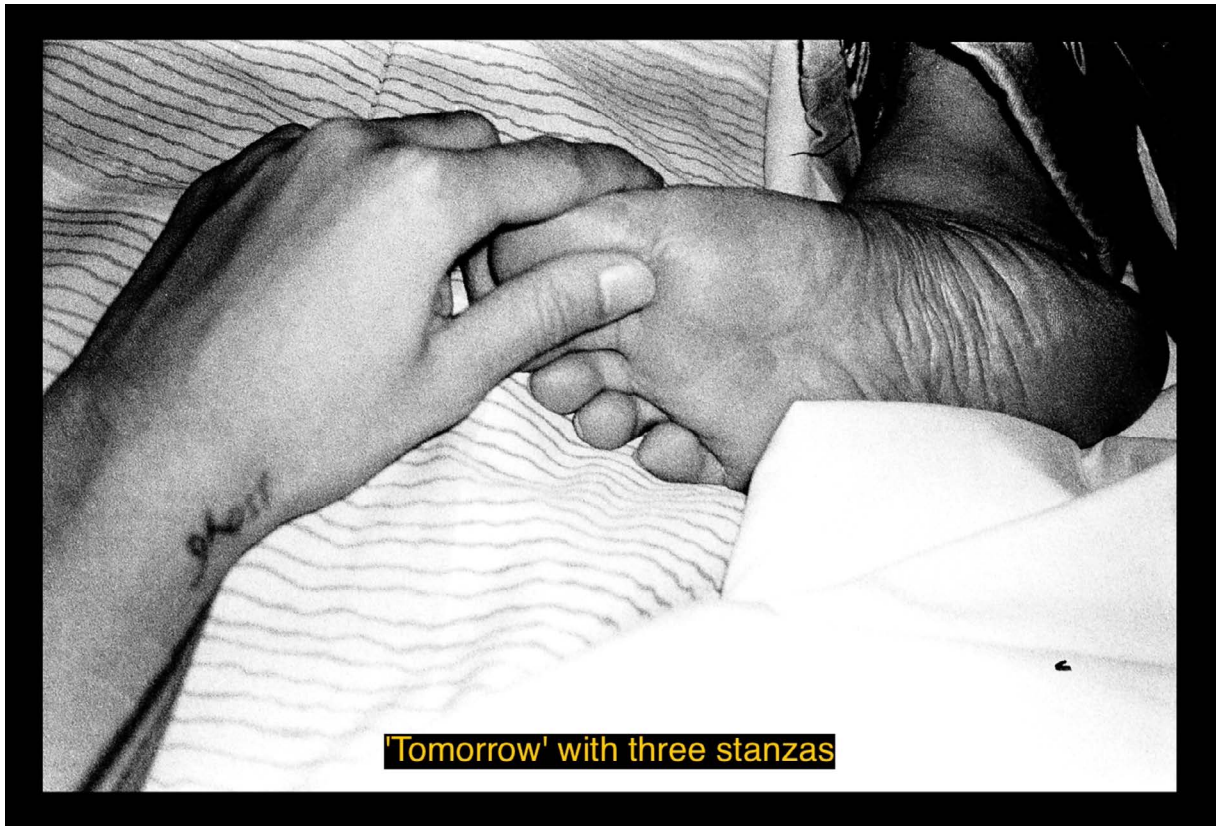
intertwined across space and time. There is a certain spirit of “transnational *resonance*,” as you have pointed out, that also reverberates in your project as it traverses Manila and Berlin, the CCP and Hamburger Bahnhof, your own voice in the present and Judy’s past practice. Yet, what I find interesting here is that the very notion of the “unknown” has remained central, both in your formal presentation and in your approach to archives and collections as sites of contingency. Even though the author of the L-shapes is now known, you have continued to reactivate the L-forms in order to evoke new “unknowns” in the art collections of Germany.



Fig. 8-9 *L-Stellen*, performance by Lizza May David at Hamburger Bahnhof, 29 July 2018. Photographs by Lizza May David and Trinka Lat

LMD: It is important to note that when we set up in the spaces of Hamburger Bahnhof, the objects worked again in another way which was different to their original appearance in the CCP. It was no longer about finding out how their forms came together, but rather they worked more as a prop to introduce a kind of interference in the exhibition space and the narratives which *Hello World* was presenting. There were spontaneous dialogues formulated around and with these objects, like horizontal movements, body movements and dance-like reactions; long and short, fast movements. Some participants even laid down with the objects, whereas others produced impromptu sculptures which were staged in relation to the architecture. Observers were irritated since there was no label for the work to be found. These are considerations taken from my own practice in painting where I incorporate errors as artistic material and allow coincidences to happen. In the context of this project, my approach to the “unknown” was to mark the space created *before* it became a “known.” In other words, marking out the space wherein things can still manifest themselves—a space for knowledge that unfolds itself.

Lizza May David’s part of the conversation was translated from German by Cecilia Avanceña.



Subtitles or a love poem in plain language

Subtitles or a love poem in plain language

Lesley-Anne Cao

From December 2016 to February 2017, I worked on artist and filmmaker Rox Lee's personal archive with curator Merv Espina for an exhibition. I digitized and inventoried his journals, magazine illustrations, comics, animation drawings, and mixed media works.

Merv Espina's involvement with Green Papaya Art Projects led to an offer to work on the multidisciplinary platform's archive. I was invited by its co-founder and director Norberto Roldan, Espina, and Chuong-Dai Vo, a researcher from Asia Art Archive (AAA), to process pertinent material for online public access through AAA. The project is also in preparation for Green Papaya's twentieth anniversary and predetermined death in 2020.

In this way, in some way, I became an archivist. I was struck by the recollection of a childhood dream: I had wanted to become a detective and librarian. I was astonished to realize I have become them by being an artist and archivist. It's funny to think that as a child I didn't know what an archive was or that art-making can mean perpetual investigation. I began to trace how and when my practice started.

In September 2017, I took part in an exhibition at the Corredor Gallery of the College of Fine Arts, University of the Philippines. It was conceived as a homecoming and gesture of gratitude from six alumni who had each received a full semester scholarship to the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris from 2010-2016 through a partnership between the two schools and the auspices of the French government. We gave it the title *Parle pas français, merci*—which literally translates to “I can’t speak French, thanks”—an erroneous utterance on purpose.

What was to be done about the parameters of home and gratitude in the context of an exhibition at one’s alma mater? I had proto-practices in mind, a term that could refer to the creative acts in youth, “un-weighted,” that manifest into what we now often consider an art practice. My own childhood and adolescence were devoted to writing poems and taking photos on film, two things not found in my artistic work as an adult. I needed a re-acquaintance. I needed to practice them again.

Subtitles or a love poem in plain language (2017) was one of three parts of an installation: a meditation on creative acts and their origins, both subconscious and deliberate, from childhood and in what comes after. It was conceived for this exhibition, a video looping on a CRT TV. Operating on mis-combinations of text and image, each four-second frame contains a line and a photograph though neither illustrates the other. We negotiate whether to read the poem or the slideshow or to oscillate between the two. It is silent to make space for the viewers’ own voice reading in their own head.

The poem began as a response to Edouard Levé’s novel *Autoportrait*, built from recollections and plain information on work, anecdotes both vivid and foggy, astrological hypotheses, references to material archives, plans for future catalogues and missed chances, arranged as a complete, running thing, probing how anyone comes into one’s life’s work. In a similar gesture, the series of images I mined from photographs taken over the last few years as an exercise without a goal or an end. Employment had afforded me a return to documenting banalities on film, having learned to develop and digitize this time around.

In succeeding projects, this process of excavation, reorganization, and reconstruction of archives and recollections, attuned to different specificities, has become integral to my work. *Subtitles* was followed by *A Stage, A Pool* written for the first volume of *Traffic*. There were also photo books, *Untitled (Book for weeds)* in 2018 and *Golds* in 2019.

The non-linear, looping and rhythmic *Subtitles or a love poem in plain language* can be encountered and walked away from at any point but with the work still imparting at least one complete thought. I imagine it mirrors how encounters with parts of an archive illuminate both continuities and gaps, complicating the narrative(s) they are built around.

Subtitles’ nine, silent minutes have thus far run and been viewed at a school, a bar, a museum, looped again at a commercial gallery, presented at a workshop, a forum, a biennial and in film festivals. In different times and platforms, its movement confounds me; this year it was shown in Berwick-upon-Tweed, Vienna, Hobart, twice in Seoul, and again in Manila in the same months I was invited to revisit it here in writing.

In December 2017, three months after the exhibition in UP, the video was included for the first time in a screening program under *Lost Frames* which was held, coincidentally, at Green Papaya Art Projects. I found the work palpably different played from beginning to end in front of an audience. It surprised me. I sat behind the twenty or so viewers’ heads, trying to see if people were reading or getting bored. In the collective laughter, sighs, and murmurs I was initiated into my own work.

Boxes and Spaces

Karla Sachse

Pre-existing Conditions

Early in my artistic life, I decided to make works only as big and heavy that I could carry alone—maybe folded, rolled or assembled from several pieces. This remained the case when I began to fill huge spaces.

The material of my choice was therefore paper. It was light in sheet form and weighty in mass. Even the sheets run through machines showed the two sides of their creation. And it was easy to dispose of. But the paper I preferred had previously gone through the hands of others. Printed, paper made evident in word and image the dreams and opinions of the those in government, or they advertised cultural events. They had wrapped food. Black and white, they came out of the darkroom. I found them in the streets scribbled with notes. They arrived in my mailbox as mail art from parts of the world beyond my reach.

Folders and boxes filled with huge collections of paper piled up on the shelves of my studio, soon to be of use, awaiting their processing.

Art out of the case.

What I found, picked up, cut out, and sent, I transformed and reinterpreted critically and poetically. Some done for working off anger could end up in the drawer. Others found their way into exhibitions because they were ambiguously defined. But I also glued paper into new compositions





onto worksite fences in the streets—in a profusion that blurred the eyes of ideological guardians... These temporary walls stood for THE wall, so to speak, which was not far away. And I sent things that fit only into letter envelopes to friends in the international network of mail art hoping that they would avoid controls by intelligence services—the scissors in my head kept me away from collages that might have sent me to jail. Living with and without the wall is a part of my existence as a human being and artist and left traces in my mental and material “collection.”

Departure 1

Suddenly, in 1989, many paths opened up to freedom. I always took just a few pieces of paper with me out into the world. I travelled light. I picked up what I found, bundled or transformed it—and sought out the spirit of spaces... Meanwhile, everyday life was inundated by a swelling flood of paper, news and things —documents all lost their value at the same time and became unusable. Identification cards, insurance documents, forms were replaced. I had rid myself of the scissors in my head by then. But as fast as I processed everything arriving in space-filling installations, the boxes did not empty.

The idea that saved the day drew on the resource of the good old post. Before parts of large installations were returned to the studio, I wrapped and sent them to friends in every corner of the world—as gifts, hoping that they could unfold their poetry better as part of a world-space-installation through personal encounters rather than packed away in shelves. In addition, international projects increased—initiated for example by Judy Freya Sibayan—where artistic collaboration had a greater playground than those given to art objects.

Departure 2

Still, the shelves were filled to the ceiling with works and materials when my studio came under notice for eviction in 2012, with no possibility for appeal.

This gave me the chance to sort out the collection and to unload more ballast. One-third of the material, which I had not touched for years, went to the paper bin in the courtyard. A usable third went to the school where I taught. The last one-third, now well-labelled, I brought to the new shelving rack in my apartment. Likewise, I examined and labelled the boxes containing the remaining works. For the larger ones, my son built a false ceiling in the corridor.

Many satirical postcards still remained from the estate of my partner Joseph W. Huber.

These filled two heavy cabinets that had to be put on top of one another in the dressing room of the apartment so that they would always be accessible to me. Fortunately now, precisely in times of political and social denial in Germany, interest in these cards is great once again. People want to have them back and the drawers are emptying slowly.

Departure 3

The baskets that I had woven this year out of strips of advertising leaflets for an exhibition, I will give away piece by piece, because I cannot find a place for them anymore.

At the same time, for the public areas in my district, I am preparing a project for next year that will commemorate the political and artistic protagonists of the breakup of the social conditions thirty years ago.



Aufbruch im Herbst 1989

9.9. 9.10. 9.11. 9.12.

Erinnern 2019
Prenzlauper Berg
Weissensee
Pankow

Ein Projekt der Künstlerin Karla Sachse mit Bodenzeichen im öffentlichen Raum, dem Online-Zugang zu Interviews mit Zeitgenossen und Zeugen jener Zeit und vielen Begleitveranstaltungen vom 9.9. bis 9.12. 2019

Lange bevor DIE Mauer geöffnet wurde, hatten Menschen in unserem Bezirk und andernorts im Land gegen die so festgefügten erscheinenden Verhältnisse protestiert, diese ignoriert oder unterlaufen, durchhöchert, aufgebrochen – Bürgerrechtler/innen, Umweltaktivist/innen, kritische Wissenschaftler/innen, Kirchenleute, Schriftsteller/innen, Schauspieler/innen, Bildkünstler/innen, Musiker/innen, Punks, auch einzelne Angestellte von Institutionen, Gewerbetreibende, Lehrer/innen.

Wiele von ihnen leben bzw. leben – noch immer oder wieder – hier in Berlin Prenzlauper Berg, Weissensee oder Pankow.

In **INTERVIEWS** erinnern sich zahlreiche dieser Menschen an den Herbst 1989, als sich Ereignisse und Aktivitäten überschlugen, markiert vom 9. September (Gründung des Neuen Forums), 9. Oktober (Einde der Polizeikolonnen gegen Friedliche Demonstranten), 9. November (Öffnung der Mauer), 9. Dezember (erste Tagung des Runden Tisches). Das führte zu dem, was die einen Friedliche Revolution nennen, andere Wende oder Zusammenbruch.

Das dichte Gewebe aus verschiedenen Stimmen bildet den Kern der permanenten WEBSITE, die diese Geschichte(n) des Berliner Bezirks Pankow neu und auch anders erzählt.

Von September bis Dezember 2019 werden temporäre **BODENZEICHEN** vor den Hausingängen von Wohn- und Arbeitsorten sowie Treffpunkten die sichtbaren Bezüge dazu herstellen. QR-Codes verlinken diese Orte direkt mit Interviews und/oder Text-Bild-Montagen.

Diese Zeichen streben zuallererst eine Würdigung der Akteure an. Sie sollten aber auch die Erinnerung von uns allen anregen. Die heutigen und insbesondere die neuen Bewohner/innen des Bezirks mögen diese Zeichen informieren und ermuntern, ihre Nachbarschaft besser kennenzulernen.

<https://aufbruch-herbst89.de/>

30 years of oral history in commemoration
of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Project produced by the author



This project is related to the “archive” in my head—and to my address books from the years before 1989. Having lived for 37 years in my apartment in Prezlauer Berg, I had connections with many of the political dissidents, alternative writers, visual artists and musicians—most of them living in the same area.

I see the conversations to come and my own memories for this project as starting points for getting down to unpacking my life as Judy Freya



Sibayan has done. From 2020 onward, I will not just reopen my cases and boxes and decide where they are to stay, but also critically review all other things in my life. I may find new spaces in them and for them. Above all, I want to expand my thinking space for all the ideas still wanting to be made real.

Conclusion

An archive by definition is a “filing cabinet” or a “memory institution” in which documents and objects are preserved without restrictions, at least as long as we live, even if they are no longer needed for current tasks. It is good that they can be grasped in the hand. However, it remains questionable as to whether they construct memory that is more of a forgetting. So should I not rather release myself from them? But is my website not also an archive?

For a long time, I hesitated to digitize my work, which can show a mere part of my being—and anyway, it dissolves in it everything that can be grasped.

But since it exists and I continue to make it, some of my thoughts and feelings can be inspected in my work—now and also in the future.

Still, I would neither speak about my “archive” nor of my “collection.” I have always seen all things (including artistic things), thoughts (including teachings) and feelings as a natural mixture surrounding me (as a natural medium in which I was immersed) open to incoming and outgoing streams.

All images courtesy of Karla Sachse

Kisten und Räume

Karla Sachse

Voraussetzungen

Früh schon in meinem künstlerischen Leben hatte ich beschlossen, nur Werke herzustellen, die so groß und schwer waren, dass ich sie allein tragen konnte—gefaltet, gerollt oder aus mehreren Stücken zusammen gesetzt vielleicht. Das blieb

auch so, als ich begann riesige Räume zu füllen.

Das Material meiner Wahl war folglich papier.

Es war leicht als Blatt und gewichtig in der

Menge. Selbst die durch Maschinen gelaufenen Bögen zeigten die zwei Seiten seiner Entstehung. Und es konnte leicht entsorgt werden. Doch die von mir favorisierten Papiere waren zuvor durch die Hände anderer gegangen.

Bedruckt zeugten sie in Wort und Bild von den Träumen und Vorstellungen der Regierenden oder sie warben für kulturelle Ereignisse. Sie hatten Lebensmittel verpackt. Schwarz und weiß kamen sie aus der Dunkelkammer. Bekritzelt mit Notizen fand ich sie auf der Straße. Als Mail Art aus für mich unerreichbaren Weltgegenden erreichten sie meinen Briefkasten.

In den Regalen des Ateliers türmten sich Mappen und Boxen mit einer riesigen Sammlung von Papieren, die bald gebraucht werden sollten, die ihrer Verarbeitung harrten.

Kunst aus der Kiste heraus

Was ich gefunden, aufgehoben, ausgeschnitten, zugeschickt bekommen hatte, verwandelte ich und deutete es kritisch und poetisch um. Manche Verarbeitungen des Zorns konnte nur in der Schublade landen.

Andere fanden den Weg in Ausstellungen, weil sie

doppelbödig gesichert war. In neuer Zusammensetzung klebte ich

Papiere aber auch an Bauzäune in den Straßen – in einer Fülle, die den





Wächtern der Ideologie den Blick verschwimmen ließen ...
 Und was in einen Briefumschlag passte schickte ich an die Freunde
 im internationalen Netz der Mail Art in der Hoffnung, dass es die
 Kontrolle durch den Geheimdienst passiert—
 die Schere im Kopf bewahrte mich vor Collagen,
 die mich ins Gefängnis gebracht hätten.

Aufbruch 1

Plötzlich öffneten sich 1989 viele Wege ins Freie.
 In die Welt nahm ich immer nur wenige Zettel mit. Ich reiste leicht.
 Ich sammelte auf, was ich fand, bündelte oder verwandelte es – und
 machte den Geist von Räumen ausfindig ...
 Der Alltag schwemmte inzwischen eine ständig, schwellende Flut
 von Papieren, Nachrichten und Dingen an—zugleich verloren alle
 Dokumente ihren Wert, waren unbrauchbar geworden. Ausweise,
 Versicherungen, Formulare wurden ersetzt. Die Schere im Kopf hatte
 ich längst entsorgt. Doch so schnell ich auch alles Ankommende in
 raumfüllenden Installationen verarbeitete, die Kisten leerten sich nicht.
 Die rettende Idee griff auf die gute alte Post
 zurück. Bevor die Teile großer Installationen ins Atelier zurückkehren
 konnten, verpackte ich sie und schickte sie an die Freunde
 in allen Gegenden der Welt—als Geschenk, in der Hoffnung, dass
 sie als Teil einer Welt-RaumInstallation und in der persönlichen
 Begegnung ihre Poesie besser entfalten können als verpackt im Regal.
 Außerdem mehrten sich internationale Projekte—zum Beispiel initiiert
 von Judy Freya Sibayan—in denen das künstlerischen
 Zusammenwirken einen größeren Spielraum
 hatte als die Objekte.

Aufbruch 2



Dennoch waren die Regale bis unter die Decke gefüllt mit Werken und Materialien, als mir das Atelier gekündigt wurde im Jahr 2012 ohne eine Möglichkeit eines Widerspruchs.

Dies gab mir die Notwendigkeit und die Chance, die Sammlung zu sortieren und weiteren Ballast abzuwerfen. Ein Drittel des Materials, das ich jahrelang nicht angefasst hatte, wurde dem Papier-Container auf dem Hof übergeben. Ein brauchbares Drittel wanderte als Material in die Schule, in der ich unterrichtete. Das letzte, gut beschriftete Drittel trug ich in das neue Regal in meiner Wohnung.

Ebenso prüfte und beschriftete ich die Boxen mit den verbliebenen Werken. Für die größeren davon baute mein Sohn einen doppelten Boden unter die Decke des Korridors.

Es blieben noch die vielen satirischen Postkarten aus dem Nachlass meines Partners Joseph W. Huber. Sie füllten zwei schwere Schränke, die in der Kleiderkammer der Wohnung übereinander gestellt werden mussten, damit sie jederzeit für mich zugänglich sind.

Glücklicherweise ist gerade jetzt in Zeiten der politischen und gesellschaftlichen Verwerfungen in Deutschland das Interesse an diesen Karten wieder groß, so dass die Leute sie wieder in der Tasche haben möchten und die Fächer sich allmählich leeren.

Aufbruch 3

Die Körbe, die ich in diesem Jahr aus Streifen von Werbeprospekten für eine Ausstellung flocht, werden ich Stück für Stück verschenken, denn ich finde keinen Platz mehr für sie.

Zugleich bereite ich für nächstes Jahr ein Projekt vor, das im öffentlichen Raum meines Bezirkes an die politischen und künstlerischen Akteure des Aufbruchs aller gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse vor dreißig Jahren erinnert.

Die Gespräche und eigenen Erinnerungen für dieses Projekt sehe ich als der Ausgangspunkt, wie Judy Freya Sibayan das Auspacken meines Lebens in Angriff zu nehmen. Ich werde ab



2020 nicht nur meine Kisten und Schachteln wieder öffnen und über ihren Verbleib entscheiden, sondern auch alle anderen in meinem Leben kritisch begutachten. Vielleicht finde ich neue Räume in ihnen und für sie. Vor allem will ich meinen Denk-Raum weiten für all die Ideen, die noch verwirklicht werden wollen.

Fazit

Ein Archiv ist per Definition ein „Aktenschrank“ bzw. eine „Gedächtnisinstitution“, in der Dokumente und Gegenstände unbegrenzt bewahrt, zumindest solange wir leben, auch wenn sie für aktuelle Aufgaben nicht mehr benötigt werden. Schön ist, dass sie in die Hand genommen werden können. Jedoch bleibt fraglich, ob mit ihnen nicht ein Erinnern konstruiert wird, das eher ein Vergessen ist. Also sollte ich mich nicht besser davon lösen?

Aber ist meine Webseite nicht auch ein Archiv?

Lange habe ich gezögert, meine Arbeiten dafür zu digitalisieren, wodurch ja nur ein Segment meines Seins gezeigt werden kann— und ohnehin alles Begreifliche darin aufgelöst ist.

Da sie nun aber existiert und weitergeführt wird, können dort einige meiner Gedanken und Gefühle in Augenschein genommen werden— jetzt und auch später noch.

Dennoch:

Ich würde weder von meinem „Archiv“ noch von meiner „Sammlung“ sprechen. Ich sah stets alle Dinge (einschließlich der künstlerischen) und alle Gedanken (einschließlich der unterrichtenden) und alle Gefühle als natürliche Mischung, die mich umgibt, offen ist für eingehende und ausgehende Ströme.

Contemporary Ink Art as Archive

Ruby Weatherall

In recent years, the definition of an “archive” has expanded to include any “non-random collection of things,”¹ able to encompass a wider variety of perspectives that challenge the construction of collective memory, the formation of subjectivities, identities, and the accountability of history.² This has served a progressively relativist and inter-subjective agenda, focused on unearthing previously marginalised historical narratives and ideas. Hal Foster identifies an “archival impulse”³ at work in contemporary art, which motivates artists to “make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present,”⁴ by comprising found images, objects or texts in an installation format. Such impulse compels the contemporary ink art of Tao Aimin (b.1974, Hunan), who extracts and pushes obscured traces of female domestic labour to the forefront. In Tao’s words, she aims to “give people in the future more opportunities to see and understand the objects and people of the past” by elevating the status of disused, domestic-use washboards “into the realm of history and culture.”⁵

Tao Aimin has travelled extensively across rural China, talking to women and collecting their unwanted domestic-use washboards. She is drawn to the boards’ time-worn wooden surfaces, lined by years of water-born physical labour. Tao also spent a year studying *nüshu*, a unique female-authored script. *Nüshu* developed in the late nineteenth century between the women of Jiangyong, in Hunan Province, to communicate sisterhood letters, wedding missives, worship verses, biographical laments, folk stories and personal histories.⁶ Tao views both *nüshu* and the act of washing with a wooden board as culturally significant and endangered traditions that deserve to be preserved for future generations. She meticulously documented her process of accumulation; writing diaries as she travelled, and filming interviews with and shooting portraits of each washboard owner. This documentation offers insight into Tao’s personal interactions with these women, a record of their lives and the erosion of their communal domestic space due to increased access to washing machines and other mechanical aids.

Yet, Tao’s work moves beyond this initial archive. She further integrates the use of traditional Chinese techniques of reproduction—printing and rubbing—to preserve the washboards’ surfaces in ink on *xuan* paper. She then inserts these imprints into typically androcentric mediums; for *The Secret Language of Women* (2008) (fig. 1), Tao produced eight classically-bound collections of rubbings in the format of a scholar-book, and inscribed *nüshu* into the margins. In doing so, not only does Tao preserve the physical traces of female domestic labour and the writing of *nüshu*, but also subversively disrupts the canon of classical Chinese culture. Tao’s use of ink and the esoteric methods of printing and rubbing index the monumentality of China’s artistic and intellectual traditions. Until the twentieth century, ink was considered “a form of cultural-linguistic signification

¹ Hong, James T. “The Suspicious Archive, Part I: A Prejudiced Interpretation of the Interpretation of Archives.” *e-flux*. Web. 30 June 2019. [<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/75/67172/the-suspicious-archive-part-i-a-prejudiced-interpretation-of-the-interpretation-of-archives/>]

² Hsu, Claire, Chantal Wong, et al. “Note from the Editors.” *Field Notes*, Issue 2: Archive as Method. Hong Kong: Asia Art Archive, 2012. 22 June 2018.

³ Foster, Hal. “An Archival Impulse.” *October*, 110. 2004. pp.3-22, p.3

⁴ *Ibid*, p.4

⁵ Merlin, Monica. “Tao Aimin 陶艾民.” *Tate*. 2013. Web. 14 May 2018.

⁶ Liu, Fei-Wen. *Gendered Words: Sentiments and Expression in Changing Rural China*. Oxford University Press, 2015, p.1

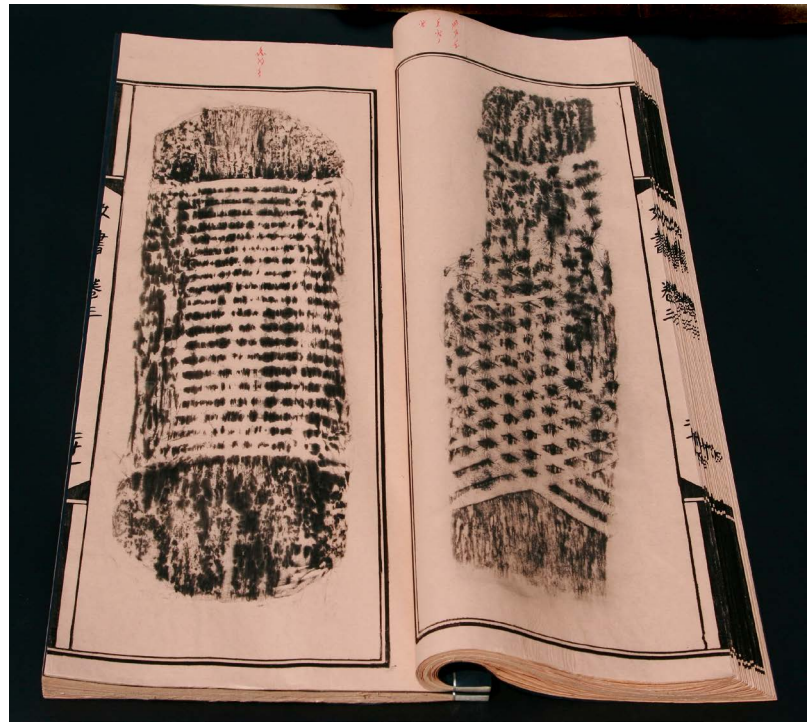


Fig. 1 Tao Aimin, *The Secret Language of Women No.4*, 2008, ink on paper, 271/2x221/8in. Ink Studio, Beijing. [<https://www.inkstudio.com.cn>]

with the workings of power and state in Imperial China,”⁷ closely associated with its male scholar-gentry class,⁸ or Literati. By using ink to take rubbings of domestic-use washboards, Tao displaces the materiality, authorship and gendered identity of scholar-official painting, book-binding and stele rubbing with the collective memory of rural Chinese women. She critiques the elitism of scholar-class culture and its institutionalised approaches to archiving and linguistic preservation, as sites for the construction of male-authored historical narratives.

By re-imagining antiquated art forms and incorporating obscure language, historical fact and social myth into her work, Tao also participates in the visual language of the New Wave and Experimental Ink Art movements of the 1980s. Due to its unequivocal association with China’s imperial elite, the ontological status of ink changed after the Communist party’s ascension to power in 1949. Yet, artists challenging the authoritarian regime after the death of Chairman Mao in 1977 began to re-explore traditional practices of replication,⁹ while experimenting with unconventional media and abstraction. This included illegible graphs or pseudo-languages, which stimulated a provocative dialogue between elitist and popular culture, classical writing and the vernacular. While visually similar, Tao’s *nūshu* inscriptions serve to preserve a linguistic tradition that is at risk of dying out, rather than forge a new form of symbolism. While women were historically denied a formal education in Imperial China, male education, artistic practice and scholarly hobbies flourished. Although *nūshu* allowed women to transcribe male-authored literature into personal, female interpretations,¹⁰ it was dismissed as a “trivial and vulgar” form of lamentation that was “excluded from the formal forum of poetry and scholarship.”¹¹ Thus, Tao’s work serves

⁷ Gladstone, Paul. *Contemporary Chinese Art: A Critical History*. London: Reaktion Books, 2014. p.8

⁸ *Ibid.* p.8

⁹ Lin, Wei-Cheng. “Replicating the Past: Ink Rubbing and Its Related Ideas in Contemporary Chinese Art” Pearce, Nick and Steuber, Jason. Eds. *Original Intentions: Essays on Production, Reproduction and Interpretation in the Arts of China*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012. pp.213-235, p.223

¹⁰ Liu, Fei-Wen. *Gendered Words: Sentiments and Expression in Changing Rural China*. p.1

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.2

Fig. 2 Tao Aimin, *The Secret Language of Women*, 2008, ink on paper,



to disrupt this binary of “educated male; uneducated female,”¹² by creating a reclamation site for *nüshu* as an important cultural phenomenon.

Tao Aimin believes that by positioning this work within a public gallery setting, the “rustic origins” of the washboards undergo a transformation; they change from mundane, everyday objects belonging to anonymous rural women, to important, historical “relics” that will be remembered by future generations. By excavating these traces, Tao constructs a site for their remembrance and appraisal which has the potential to destabilise reductive social and historical narratives. Ultimately, she redefines the relationship between class, gender, domesticity and scholarship in the context of the monumental medium of ink. Tao’s praxis of archiving extends beyond the act of collecting disused objects; she draws on her physical collection of washboards and understanding of *nüshu* to create “found yet constructed”¹³ works of art which, coupled with the processes of ink, printing and rubbing, challenge the institutionalised male-authorship of Chinese artistic and archival practice, written histories and knowledge production.

¹² Xiaojing, Li. “Writing and Weaving: Engendering Documents in History.” *Asia Art Archive*. 12 July 2018.

¹³ Foster, Hal. “An Archival Impulse”. p.5

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Prestige Machines and Performance Anxieties in the Age of the Economy of Recognition

Lyra Garcellano

At the section of a Manila mall where the telco businesses cluster, consumers get to exercise their dodgeball skills against stall barkers who are trained to scope and sniff out the gullible among the promenaders. With zumba music blaring in the background, and a cloud of sales agents yelling out guarantees of discounts, the very act of purchasing just one item can end with the sellers' triumphant offerings of other accessories. The customer, caught in this maelstrom, either feels fired up about the shopping aftermath or becomes glassy-eyed, unsure of what had just transpired (*did I really need to buy that much memory?*).

With an unexpectedly enhanced new gadget, one of the perceived interesting outcomes is this: I am presented with an operating system that can finally open (art) websites, which never used to be possible with my recently short-circuited seven-year-old device. In principle, with the exchange of something of value (in this case, money), I am pulled a (slight) notch deeper into the matrix; with my new OS, I am coaxed to believe that my participatory possibilities are heightened.

This instant access to other parts of the internet makes me think of all the things I have (and may have) missed out on given my previous equipment handicap. With my old phone, the warning "You are using an old version of..." blinked incessantly; and that alert signaled the inability to access some sites. It should be fine, really. But, figuratively, if one doesn't have the "proper" apparatus (whether in symbolic or cultural capital), some bits of information are hard to come by.

This ownership of an upgraded OS is passage (and hook) to the more convoluted mechanisms of a wired world: My digital encounters are possibly amplified given all the obtrusive apps my new phone is now permitted to download. The appeal of the tech boost is given another surge with the so-called assurance of hassle-free flow of transactional needs connected to banks and government bodies. Zero traffic for shared files is also given as bait.

The internet has always been a site for recognition and transfer. If one's physical body cannot be transported, certainly, with a few clicks on the mobile phone—representations of the Self: portfolio, resumé, reviews, passport photograph, digitized documentation can be propelled and distributed "out there" (from local to global) at a faster rate and with greater impact.

As an institution, the web is an authority when it comes to beginnings and endings; or openings and closings. Aside from its purported advantages, the politics of the web has perpetually included weak or dropped signals, disconnections, surveillance, censorship, as well as stolen concepts and identities. We may earn prestige through instant shares of "good" news but we also get deleted, screwed, and blackballed via the Net. By capitalizing on the strength of the grid, even to exhibit troll-like behavior has become so easy.

Still, given this new(er) and supposedly more sophisticated equipment to present and frame myself, I'm now in tune with contemporaneity and no longer living under a rock, so to speak. All the universe has to do now is keep up with me. Or so it seems.

The whole busy-ness (or business) and messiness of art are that they comprise a system. Art is a social institution likened to "the police or the church, but operates to perpetuate artistic practice."¹ It has an operating system similar to that of an android phone: If one is

linked and google-able, then, by definition, one “exists.” To be visible in the “scene” signals the prospects of harnessing more “power.” To be constantly “seen” or acknowledged by the “right people” at the opportune time has become the stimulus to (collect and) maintain the steady stream of art currencies needed to run the proverbial marathon.

But even if artists (and their works) are the primary beginning productive node in the artworld they are only a component of a bigger wheel or circuitry that involves white cubes, curators, art historians, critics, financiers and consumers. Unfortunately, Arthur Danto's conception of the artworld did not illustrate the accompanying aggression (or depression) that often emanates from engaging with the various institutions that compose, control, and commodify elements found in this circle. As this field becomes more intensely magnified through the market lens, correspondingly cocooned in this environment are the wearying tension, agitations and vulnerabilities that an artist endures just to be able to practice.

The current understanding of a practice continues to be woven into the historical, social and political undercurrents of prestige-making. In a country where the market and cultural intermediaries are extremely blurred, either artists are oblivious of the complicity of the various institutions, or their awareness is obscured as to how a select few can hold the door ajar for the artists to enter or exit.

Many practitioners who are fully plugged into this matrix (and attuned to its complexities) are able to actively exploit this arrangement. The savviest players always know how to be “entrepreneurial” and are equipped (with the skill set) to maximize ambitions, reputations and situations ordained by the rules of patronage.

Considering that government support is scant, members of the Philippine artworld have to rely mostly on private individuals for sustainability. It is in the instability of endowments that sometimes drives us to latch on to and create the seemingly required but precarious connections. In today's setting, the myth of the “reclusive artist” is negated— instead, “networking” replaces the solitary agent. To network is deemed necessary if one wants to achieve relevance and be comprehended in this field; plus, to network is to form alliances with those entrenched in the system in order to attain and pursue the artworld's contemporaneous recommendation of earning a “global artist” brand (or even a local standing, for that matter). In many cases, networking is softened to mesh with the more benevolent traits of “friendship”— where the language of affection is used to cloak the operations of networking with other terms such as “care,” “teamwork” and “fraternity.” Yet, even if the implications of friendship evoke such affinities, it intrinsically harbors issues of prioritizing and marginalizing while enveloped in the whole DNA strain of inclusivity and exclusivity.

In this system of networking not only are artists producers of art, they must also become judicious distributors of such productions and representations, all of which are steered and coursed through the (occasionally brittle) bonds of artworld relationships.

The intricate ways currencies are operationalized are what socially constructs an artist's position in the artworld. In an attention economy, to participate is to be included; to be included is to be enmeshed in varied forms of transactions. For many practitioners, it is the only “system” they are taught to know. Ergo, aspirations of getting vetted across established channels of validation have become the perennial source of artists feelings of abandonment and loss, fear and desire, as well as anxiety and longing.

Writer Ivan Emil A. Labayne expounded on the challenges and limitations of the concept of “participation and inclusion” when he tackled the unspoken rules of such gestures in the

context of an art event in Baguio. Labayne argued that one is only “permitted” to take part in activities as long as one does not critique the existing status quo.²

Feelings of being trapped in a kind of time/space deficiency get intensified, too, as many of these validating channels have their own “expiration” dates. Nominations for local art awards are geared toward artists below the age of 36 or 40. Artist-in-residence programs with open calls (whether here or abroad) also peg their criteria for artists under 35. Even if there is a sprinkling of funds obtainable to artists up to 40 (which transforms to by-invitation-only grants to those over the requisite age), the idea of a dearth in opportunities further reinforces this sense of urgency. There is the belief that if one surpasses the age deadline the openings to the world of art become dimmer.

What kind of art do you do? Are you a painter? A media artist? An installation artist? What would you call yourself? Are you represented by a gallery? Who manages you? Do you have a website? Do your works sell? Who are your collectors? How many shows do you do in a year? What's your timetable like? Which curators have you worked with? Is your work part of a museum collection? Any art prizes? Have your works been auctioned? What's the hammer price? What about art fairs? International exhibitions? Who has written about you?

Those are some of the questions that serve as seemingly harmless points of departure for conversations that dominate an artist's practice. Depending on the tone these discussions take, one can either swiftly answer with aplomb or stammer one's way to possible humiliation and slow death. Whichever adventure scheme one inadvertently chooses, one is nonetheless “appraised” by the designated value makers accordingly.

Such exchanges diagnose the various trajectories an artist as producer wrestles with if one is to uphold a level of presence in the field. Acting as a measure of success (or failure), this line of interrogation presupposes a kind of public that equates the meaning of art with culture anchored on prestige or the power of the curriculum vitae. Which makes it indicative of a world where art seems to have developed into an economy of desire, consumption and recognition.

Usually, if the discussants find no value in what one has to offer, the conversation flounders in dead air. The pained amateur shrinks in a corner while the shrewd ones move on with enough finesse and self-assurance that can rival anyone in a speed-dating game.

How the CV becomes attractive is contingent on the contemporary art currencies in which one is able to participate. The more one is able to establish oneself in the value chain, the more one achieves “worth” in almost the same way one wins “extra lives” in video games. To collect these reserves is to have one's imagined shelf life lengthened, considering that these “accomplishments” are what are envisioned to help a person buy more (playing and, hence, career) time.

In various art communities, contests/competitions are thought to be the only “conceivable” paths to attain possible money and career stability. For instance, the Philippine Art Awards is recognized as a formidable entry point or stepping stone to the artworld for artists nationwide with its utopian promises of further rewards that come upon bagging it: more exposure and connectivity to a wider appreciating (read: collecting and investing) public.

If there are machineries in place that secure the (artworld's) status quo, what, then, are the repercussions for the artist who is being evaluated by this prevailing system? How stable and/or desirable is this model? Has the critical role of the artist metamorphosed and been diminished to that of merely “managing” a personal career? If the existing system evaluates artists according to how they gain relevance and value in the artworld through these so-

called “measures of success,” is it then correct to say that one is judged a failure if one does not pass these standards? And if it is true that whenever one is rendered visible, someone/ something is made invisible, what becomes of practitioners who slip through the cracks of these institutional validation mechanisms?

God's a kid with an ant farm, lady. He's not planning anything.
- Constantine (2005)

The determining notions of time, standardizations, attention economy, distribution channels, and the ensuing performance anxieties can deplete an artist operating within and along the confines of a daunting exhibitionary complex. How one navigates and negotiates institutions, and how one is constituted as an artist through “career markers,” are dependent on portals (read: wiggle room) that can span a spectrum of dimensions: Some are narrow, some are wide, some are mere slits, while some can turn to cul-de-sacs.

Ordinarily, in the Manila an art-calendar year in its very basic form has the first quarter reserved for local and international art fairs. Summer (or any time of the year, actually) brings visits from curators who can act as bridges to other avenues (international and local exhibitions). If August is the beginning of awards season, September to October are auction months in the Philippines. November and December present a litany of group exhibitions and festivals. All year round, solo and group shows abound in two- to three-week durations.

Participations in foreign artist-in-residence programs and in biennales, and in all other projects that fit within the exhibition economy are compressed in the timetable as well. Inclusions in books, best-of lists, and other written, recorded, and archived materials that aid in knowledge production are all readily crammed in the 12-month time frame. Necessary to this art schedule are the work to be produced; the research to conduct; the proposals to write; and the funding bodies to tap. Even the unpaid labor of hours spent on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to curate one's online presence has essentially become part of the “work.” All these are targeted and expected to gel with other constants in an artworld that tie in with the neoliberal stamps of commerce, visibility and competition.

The calendar is what dictates and regulates time. It is the schedule that influences our productivity.

My work “*Dear Artist*” (2015) a three-minute video/monologue set against a bevy of cakes and cake-slicing, unloads questions on standards and suggests the type of transactions an artist must make in dealing with the preexisting dominant value systems. Using images of sugar and sweets, it un-twists or, at least, surfaces the entanglements that the governing social order lays upon an art producer (which often puts the artist into a binary systemic bind of either being considered an outright success or a dismal failure.) While this binary approach clearly demonstrates a myopic view of one's understanding of the artworld, it nevertheless underscores the artist's predicament of immersion/emersion in a sea of competitiveness.

Dear Artist,
Imagine the choices presented to you as if to say you have the liberty to decide whichever path you want to take.
These choices revolve before you like a carousel, and for a moment there you come to believe you have the power to select which among these are ripe for your picking.
How much of that sugar were you taught to desire?

*But how do you make that choice?
How do you make that commitment?
Who will bestow upon you the privilege and say "go ahead"?
And how will you pay for that selection?
Some choices we make are based on the narratives in which we find ourselves trapped.
Some make theirs in ponds bigger than ours.
Some from smaller ones.
And some from where you find yourself.*

*Sooner or later you'll be asked:
What's your number?
What's your relevance?
Who are you?
What are you?
And how big is your slice of the cake?*

*Was there ever a time when you wondered if it's really just about wanting something and then actually getting it?
That's what institutions like to say: that you are always welcome and have always been free.
That is, free to choose your heart's desire.
But have you ever wondered who determines what you can get?
How much of a slice you can be given?
Sometimes, many times, it's someone else who decides.*

*So what is your provenance?
What is your pedigree?
Are you allowed 100 percent of that cake?
50 percent? 83? 2? Or none?
And from what type of cake is that?*

Because not all cakes are created equal.

*And as the carousel turns, you come around to ask:
How much of that slice do you wish for?
How much do you think will be speculated on you?
How much do you think you need? Need and want – are those two things the same?*

*How much of the frills, the sprinkles and the icing on top do you dream of?
How much prestige do you think you deserve?
What value do you wish to be conferred on you?
And by whom?*

*Can we actually recreate our storylines and re-imagine our serving size?
Can we actually have our cake and eat it too?*

Then again, what if you're now the cake of whom everyone wants a piece?

*So Dear Artist,
How much are you worth?*

I had periodically wondered about the dynamics of such operating systems and/or tools even prior to my unplanned escapade at the telco hub. Certainly, some gadgets/brands may have more market dominion but the common denominator prevails. These machines will

break down in a year or two (or three). Gone are those bulky Nokia phones of a generation past which can be hurled across the room and still be blinking with life. With these new devices' more delicate configurations and shorter lifespans, we are all programmed and triggered to constantly need an upgrade. Perhaps, in almost the same manner, artists are schooled, conditioned and primed to abidingly perform and reinvent themselves in order to "get with the times" in this economy of recognition. Failure to meet accepted standards will incur expected consequences.

To conform or not is, perhaps, the most logical action to take as an artist. One can just have a checklist and set one's sights on each validating mechanism and be considered successful if one becomes steadily involved in all of them—provided that they are the "right ones at the right time." Which is actually what is happening for the most part; artists abiding by that prescribed "menu."

However, when artists are unable to fulfill this inventory, there is an appearance of short circuiting (or the pain of unfulfilled potential). Carrying out what is on the list becomes a combing through of another catalogue of pressure points and lingering anxieties.

The level of seduction with which consumers/users are captivated by such contraptions and systems is very much measured in the same calibration; the underlying goal of manufacturers is to seduce (and, perhaps, dupe) us all. To "do art" has never been a simple manifestation of the Nike "Just do it" campaigns which are formulaically devised to play on stimulating a person's sense of agency and so-called empowerment. Because the moment (public) enthusiasm peaks or levels off, whether for an object or for life, obsolescence inevitably sets in.

In the ecosystem of the prestige machine, an art practitioner is only considered important by the kind of institutional networks one's apparatus is able to generate in its directory or has the capacity to connect with in its speed-dial. If we were to interpret this prevailing system, the logic will be this: the demands and regulations of such "machineries" are what will determine an artist's actions. Without these linkages, the chances to (continually) participate is profoundly more difficult or *differently-abled*. The lapses and interruptions that prevent one's involvement become longer and more permanent.

In any case, to be cut off from circulation channels brought about by circumstances such as old age, contest defeat, language issues, social ineptness, noncommercial viability, political beliefs etc., is to be rendered stale, outmoded and useless. In this hardened exercise of "bio (CV) power," this form of devaluation becomes the backbone of everyone's enduring fear-induced anxiety. There should be something more to artmaking than this.

In "Qualities," cultural theorist Neferti X. M. Tadiar stated how "we are buckling under the burden of our own aspirations. Or the aspirations we are made to own (but which end up owning us)."³ In referring to the life of value as becoming part of a programmed "social metabolism," the life we are made (or forced) to live has had us tethered into circulatory systems that will eventually consume us. It is the kind of metabolism that churns qualities into quantities.

Tadiar's essay was a response to a piece I wrote regarding my concept of scarcity within the context of the Manila artworld. I had reasoned that given the artworld's colonization by a powerful few, most artists are doomed to being reduced to a life in the combat zones riddled in self-projection and performance. And with such behaviors on overdrive, artists go instinctively on survival mode to fuel their practice.

Still, Tadiar proposes to me (as well as other readers) to turn qualities into other qualities: “What if we only allowed those qualities to effect (to shape, nudge, generate, move, touch, electrify, galvanize—the verbs of connection are potentially innumerable) other qualities?”⁴

It is the core of these actions that seems to squeeze out some clues. Critical art making can always be found sprouting in the interstices. (Perhaps, in the compromised mainstream spaces too). Despite the artworld's overwhelmingly clogged arteries, one should believe that within its nooks and crannies are possible radical sites that serve as pipelines to explore the untried.

To foster the growth of such practices/movements is to creatively counter the metastasizing of dead ends in art. By diligently *identifying, fragmenting and breaking apart the mechanisms that dominate, centralize, and contain*—the consequent re-construction and re-ordering can only set in motion what was once conceived as inconceivable. To crack open what has been locked in the long-established or standardized ways of meaning- and art-making is to also open the self and community to decolonized (non-neoliberal) processes of engagement. Such efforts can be cultivated by welcoming practices in non-expected conduits (and comprehending them with non-expected rules). Re-wiring is key. It will take time. And perhaps a whole lot of unfamiliar anxieties, but weathered and generated, not by the will to keep up with the assertions of prevailing historically, socially, and economically accepted inequitable cultural structures, but by a system overhaul.

¹ Wartenberg, Thomas. *The Nature of Art*. Chapter 19 on Art as Institution: George Dickie. Thomson Wadsworth, 2007. p 218.

² Labayne, Ivan. <https://ivanemilabayne.wordpress.com/2018/11/22/some-notes-after-participating-in-baguios-entacool/>

³ Coined by critic Jens Hoffman to refer to the activities that go beyond exhibition-making, such as talks and publications.

⁴ Tadiar, Neferti X. M., *Qualities*. TRAFFIC Vol. 1. Published by MIKI LTD and Project Space Pilipinas. 2017. p120.

⁵ Tadiar, 124.

City of Bawal, part I
 An ambulatory poem
 Roy Voragen

“Art...is a foreign city, and we deceive ourselves when we think it familiar.”
 Jeanette Winterson

“hesitant gestures...accompany encounters with the unknown.”
 Gilles Deleuze

“loneliness is cheered by this elegant hope”
 Jorge Luis Borges

For fifteen years, I lived in Indonesia, where I carved out a tenuous sense of home, then upped and moved to Manila. Along the way, my Dutch derailed, after being physically removed from other users of this vernacular for so long. For the longest of time, it was a source of frustration to write and speak in a borrowed tongue. Slowly it dawned on me to further other this globalized lingo by playing with punctuation to create an idiosyncratic rhythm to give words, sentences and paragraphs a cohesive yet tentative skeleton. The unpublished poem *Futile Erasure* takes this a step further. For this poem I copied Part I of Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s *Notes from Underground* and then I copied the copy again but only the 1053 commas.

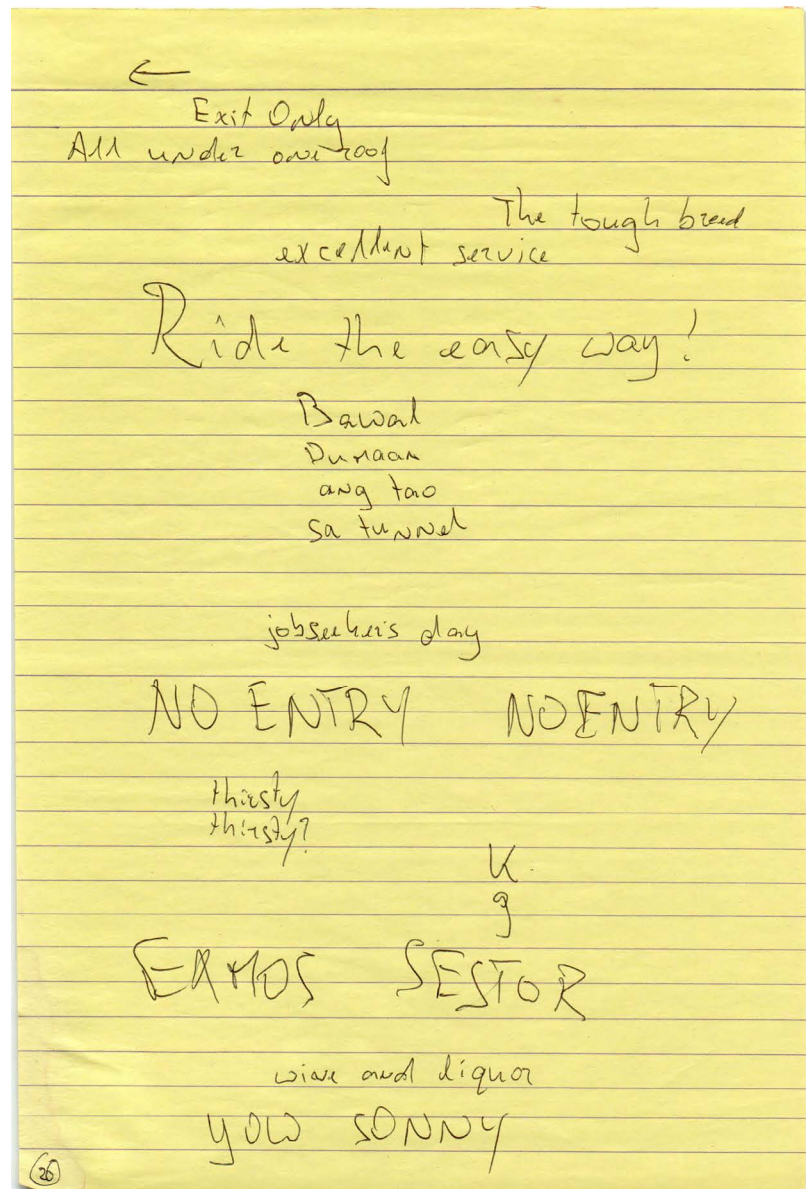
On September 9, 2018, a sunny Sunday, I walked from my place in Malate, Manila City, to my workplace in Karrivin Plaza, City of Makati, which took me approximately seven-and-a-half hours. Along the way, I jotted down words and phrases. I walked without the use of a map; also, I didn’t request directions. Detours were deliberate as encounters of the aleatory.

That night I didn’t sleep—urban signs touching my sunburnt skin, penetrating my body. In a way, walking/writing as a mnemonic device failed: there’s only so much that can be absorbed and re-called. And walking/writing as a mnemonic device is futile in another way as well: even if I would be able to traverse each street between Malate and Makati, which is doubtful, each street would have become a different street experience-wise by the time I would have walked its length.

I have been writing and walking the city for decades now—real, imagined and imaginary—with each activity feeding on/feeding each other. Recently, I finished *Playing with Space*, which I started in Bandung and finished in Manila. This diary-like poem is inspired by Georges Perec’s *Species of Spaces*. For 365 days, I tweeted one performance score a day.¹

Walking is prevalent in a number of the scores, but *Bawal* is the first poem for which walking is the principal method—for good reasons; writing while walking is not the most convenient of combinations: I used pen and paper instead of a camera. During the walk, like writing, reading the city involved editing as well as making mistakes—many edits were incidental: misspelled words, acronyms that were accidentally abbreviated, cut off sentences—restless eyes could not see everything, the weary hand was even slower to register representations of the real.

¹ Published by Stale Objects Depress: bit.ly/PlayingWithSpaceSOD



A page from
[City of Bawal, part 1](#)

Where to locate the body? To describe it. To inscribe it. To name it. To map it. To trace it. To travel it. Is to invent it. Is to locate it. To locate it as and within a labyrinth. A labyrinth of other spaces. A labyrinth of other bodies. A labyrinth of other voices.

The streets are a transactional space: freshly baked pandesal, sex, plumbing, beer, metaphysical hope. Massage parlors offering their services. Open calls for female “bed spacers.” Ayas looking for bosses. A motel offering lodging transvestites. Men and women selling boys, girls, porn and Viagra. Men selling knockoffs.

We are told to be proud citizens. It isn't just about being good citizens of a polity but being citizens of *this* polity who obey *these* particular laws. No jaywalking. No trespassing. No littering. No loitering. No loading and unloading. No parking. No U-turn. No texting and driving. No drinking and driving. No entry. No guns allowed. No smoking. No illegal vendors. Not for hire. Post no bill. Do not blow horn. Obey speed limit. Do not delay. Obey god. Slow down. Bite me. *Gago*, call me!

While the built environment doesn't speak as it is voiceless unless we speak for it in of our countless stories, the built environment can set the stage, as urban geographer Kim Dovey states in his book *Framing Places*—to constrain what's possible in our everyday lives.

Contemporaneity is urban; hence, contemporary art/poetry deals with urban questions in many occasions.

Ambulatory writing mirrors—albeit, in fractures—a city of multitudes, a city riddled in contradictions.

Walking can be implicitly political, in the sense of Georges Perec’s concept of the infra-ordinary: an empathetic questioning of the minutiae of the mundane. Perec’s everyday is “neither ordinary nor extraordinary, neither banal nor exotic.” Perec’s approach calls for a slow-reading—so as not to jump to moralizing judgments.

How to describe in minute detail the infra-ordinary everyday minutiae? Someone discards a slipper on the street. Did she or he return home on one bare foot? What will happen to the discarded slipper? A pothole is so wide and deep, can it swallow an automobile or dead bodies whole? An ambulance is stuck in traffic; who prays for the passenger-patient to reach the hospital in time? Why are security guards armed with shotguns? Do they ever have to draw their weapons? Why does it smell like piss right next to the bawal umihi signage? Who is the “we” in the neon “in god we trust”? Who writes of revolution on the city’s walls? Who reads these messages? How to respond?

Slow-reading hinges on the hermeneutic *verstehen*, which is a situated practice, an attentive engagement with the urban nitty-gritty, the seemingly trivial and futile, the fragments.

But *Bawal*, attempts to do more than come to a possible understanding of urban space and its uses. I didn’t just walk, I wrote while walking—privately in public.

In my poetic practice, I attempt to denaturalize the connection between signs and meaning. A signifier that doesn’t signify is noise. A noise that ends in silence. And I aim to make silence stutter. My ongoing poem *Primal #m74207281*, for which I copy by hand the largest known prime number (which has 22,338,618 decimal digits) is an example of this strategy at the time of this writing. I have written 427 pages² and when done, I erase all of it back to zero.

Bawal stutters plenty. And what comes after the silence? Writing can be an act of becoming. A stuttering becoming—queering words written on the city’s walls absorbed by a reluctant body, absorbing words both in the sense of understanding as well as feeling so that it becomes part of who one is becoming. Queering a body (st)uttering foul-smelling words—defying straight lines.

And this becoming, stuttering becoming, is set in the messy, mesmerizing, chaotic, cacophonous city—Metro Manila that is—and through the reflexive acts of attentive listening, close-reading, walking and writing, a sense of familiarity can eventually emerge—perhaps giving the alien body a (temporary) home.

² A preview of the first 97 pages can be found in bit.ly/PrimalM74207281

A Case Study in Making a Magazine Public

Gillian Brown

A Friday evening in September 2018 saw 200 people gathered around Barbara Hepworth's *Head (Ra)*, 1971, a work in the collection of the Art Gallery of South Australia. They were listening to—reading—a text by artist Brigid Currie, the first article of *Transcriptions*, a live issue of *fine print* magazine.

fine print is an online platform for critical arts writing, published from Adelaide, Australia. It was founded by Rayleen Forrester, Joanna Kitto and myself in response to what the editors saw as the diminishing number of voices in arts writing in Australia. As printed publications folded and mainstream arts journalism retreated from the visual arts, we intended our self-published magazine to welcome as many perspectives as possible. As believers in the need for print, why make the decision to publish online? Cost inevitably, for a non-commercial endeavour, is one factor. Being cheaper to publish means the ability to exist without the compromise of accepting advertising, and therefore the ability to remain independent. We could also accommodate early-career writers, and allow established ones to experiment with form. But the ability to reach out, from an often overlooked location, to national and global conversations, to invite thought, critique and participation from anywhere in the world was particularly attractive. Publishing online makes a diverse audience possible.

How diverse an audience is really possible for arts writing? It is a niche, if we are being honest, hence the view of mainstream newspapers the world over that it is an easy indulgence to cut. The audience it attracts is already engaged. Opportunities to write have not in reality diminished; though print continues to find new ways through its challenges, as the existence of *fine print* and other online journals (such as Ctrl+P) demonstrates, it is in fact easier than ever for writers to self-publish and find a reader. Rather than a growing audience, what we are actually concerned with is the depth of critical thought around the art we make. Publishing online felt evolutionary but are we, as writers and publishers, continuing to push the audience for arts writing? In 2010, David Beech spoke of art only being able to consider itself revolutionary if it “committed to shifting its ‘empirical’ public to a new public,” a deepening rather than an expansion.¹ Beech was commenting on an art of encounter, a social relation that reimagines the viewer as involved, be it in interaction, participation or collaboration.² For *fine print*, an expressly digital publication in intent and execution, a live issue seemed an interesting way to test how publishing might sit within this notion.

Carefully structured, *Transcriptions* was “edited” to adhere to the framework of a magazine—with a certain pace, and texts of particular lengths, and no possibility of real-time input from readers. It seemed important to adhere to the architecture of a magazine. Taking place within the actual and conceptual constructs of a state gallery, we were determined that this was not to be simply another part of institutional public programming, for a “university with a playground attached” as the new conception of galleries was described by Frances Morris, the director of the Tate Modern.³ Public programming has become one way (and speaking as a worker in another institutional gallery, a crucial one) of growing audiences.

¹ Beech, David. “Don’t Look Now! Art after the Viewer and beyond Participation,” in *Searching for Art’s New Publics*, (ed) Jeni Walwin, (London: Intellect, 2010), 17.

² Beech, p.24.

³ See Stephanie Dieckvoss’s interview with Morris in Apollo: <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/a-university-with-a-playground-attached-frances-morriss-vision-for-tate-modern/>

Fig. 1 Bridget Currie, *fine print*:
TRANSCRIPTIONS, Melrose Wing,
Art Gallery of South
Australia, September 2018.
Photo by Sam Roberts



Our experiment with a live issue was not concerned with a qualitative shift (logically, the move to an ephemeral, localised experience holds no advantage in this over the global reach of the internet) but a quantitative one. We were curious to see where the existing boundaries of publishing could rub against established sites of encounter, and what kind of texture this would add to the reading of a text.

The act of engaging with the written word has changed in the digital era, in much the same way that we seem to experience art. In using electronic means to view and read, the physicality of experience—the textures, dimensions and space—has been diminished. In a recent opinion piece in Guardian newspaper (accessed online), Maryanne Wolf identified skim reading as now default, with deep reading potentially becoming “unintended collateral damage” as we move to scrolling and away from page-turning.⁴ The studies cited by Wolf highlight touch as lending “geometry” to words, a method unconsciously employed in the human need to understand where they are in time in space, in order to travel back and forward through a text. The experience of reading is a physical, embodied one.

The publishers of *fine print* were firstly curators, and it is from here that our interest in writing unfolds, and what words might lend to the experience of the visual or the aural. Writing about art is a translation of experience; a task that, as John Berger put it, requires us to work triangularly, moving from one language (the visual) to another (the written word), all the while caring for that third, unknowable, “thing” behind, around and between the text.⁵ It is this dimensionality that we are trying to maintain. The live issue looked to all the forms of communication we have to hand to transcribe an experience—texts were written, spoken, danced and sung. Testing all the forms of communication we can deploy allowed for the highlighting of the ability of words to call back across sentences, to fill space and resonate in gaps. This publishing decision—to perform a magazine—was an attempt to force deep reading. Real time comments were deliberately deflected by an early request for the audience/readers to hold them for later, a refuting of the immediate feedback loop that online publishing encourages. Articles moved from the poetic, to the humorous and to the urgent and back; the pace was deliberate, and edited with the assumption, after Wolf, that the internet has permanently altered our attention spans for the worse in mind. We

⁴ Wolf, Maryanne. “Skim reading is the new normal. The effect on society is profound,” *The Guardian*, 25 August, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/aug/25/skim-reading-new-normal-maryanne-wolf>

⁵ Berger, John. *Confabulations*, (London: Penguin Random House, 2016) p.4

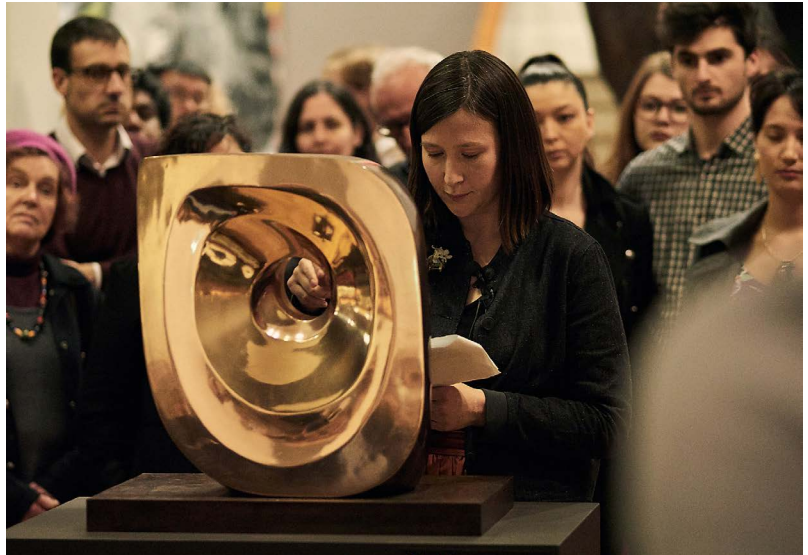


Fig. 2 Monte Masi, *fine print*:
TRANSCRIPTIONS, Melrose Wing,
Art Gallery of South Australia,
September 2018.
Photo by Sam Roberts



Fig. 3 audience view, *fine print*:
TRANSCRIPTIONS, Melrose Wing,
Art Gallery of South Australia,
September 2018. Photo by Nat Rogers

expected readers to dip in and out, to wander and come back. Reassuringly, it seems that the dystopian future of screen culture is not quite here; the issue was largely read in full.

There are (so far) five years' worth of articles archived on the *fine print* magazine website. How did we conceive of a live issue as sitting within this trajectory? This deliberately ephemeral issue (though represented on the site, we consciously chose not to represent the full experience of each article online) was self-reflexive, a questioning of why we publish and where this activity might lead. The exercise was not a refutation of digital publishing, or print publishing for that matter. Online publishing has been embraced by institutions and individuals as a quick salve to the economic and demographic wounds inflicted on print in recent years; *fine print* is an independent example of a mode of publishing that museums, newspapers and individuals have all taken up to some degree. Likewise, the embrace of discussion and performance is well established. In 2014 Dorothea von Hantelmann commented on "the experiential turn" in art, a turn, in progress since the conceptualist and Minimalist movements of the 1960s, from what a work says to what a work does.⁶ Following Hantelmann's idea, as writers and publishers we are speaking to an audience already conditioned to the experiential qualities of art, a public for whom the

⁶ von Hantelmann, Dorothea. "The Experiential Turn." In *On Performativity*, edited by Elizabeth Carpenter. Vol. 1 of *Living Collections Catalogue*. Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2014. <http://walkerart.org/collections/publications/performativity/experiential-turn>.



Fig. 4 audience view, *fine print*:
TRANSCRIPTIONS, Melrose Wing,
 Art Gallery of South Australia,
 September 2018. Photo by Nat Rogers

aesthetic experience is “an experimental relation with oneself and others.”⁷ To what extent can an endeavour like a live issue of a magazine really push for a new public to evolve from one already versed in these approaches?

It is easy to get caught up in utopian ideas of meeting Beech’s imperative shift from the empirical to the new; that an experiment in delivery might result in a publication having genuine affect. A clearer-eyed view might be that the act of performing a magazine is symptomatic of von Hantelmann’s experiential turn. *Transcriptions* made the triangular relation of subject/writer/reader visible. On reflection, our insistence on editing the event in the way that we did, looking to pace and tone and restricting feedback loops in order to test established boundaries, points to a reciprocation of the art experience rather than a revolutionising or changing of its audience in our own right. If an audience now comes to art seeking to connect the social and the cultural perhaps the endeavour of live issues is a logical one for a hereto virtual publication. Witnessing authoring and reading happening simultaneously, in front of the work and conditions to which it was in response, was a reminder of the primacy and resonance of art. And as each writer rejoined the crowd at the conclusion their text, it was also a reminder that we write and publish from the same place— the audience for art. *fine print*’s first live issue may have been symptomatic of an experiential turn, but was it also a producer of a deeper, more critically engaged public? Perhaps it is more accurate to conclude that we are part of one.

⁷ von Hantelmann, Dorothea. “The Experiential Turn.” In *On Performativity*, edited by Elizabeth Carpenter. Vol. 1 of *Living Collections Catalogue*. Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2014. <http://walkerart.org/collections/publications/performativity/experiential-turn>.

What's missing?

Joni Low

A Reprint

Nine months after *Flotilla*,¹ and much in the world has changed. The polarization of global relations, rise of the far right, a breakdown in constitutional and political norms, and a loss of faith in government and civic institutions as they forsake environment for profit. The *#MeToo* movement swept across many fields, revealing continued sexual violence and misogyny. We are experiencing a crisis in liberal democracy, a deterioration in communication and a lack of consensus on shared facts, amidst vibrant social movements in defense of human and environmental rights. Reality is fragmenting, showing that things are more than what they seem. Everything feels precarious—open yet uncertain.

Embracing provisional forms of organization seems wise in this shifting climate, though I find myself craving an anchor. I feel conflicted about how art can respond at this time, and how our tools need to change. I feel conflicted about writing on an online platform, when these mediums for engagement seem unable to accommodate the more nuanced conversations needed to keep divisiveness from winning. Occasionally, the network activates us to fight for change and gets us out of our heads and into the world, while simultaneously being manipulated, our data tracked and mined. The initial vision of the Internet as a space for free information, sharing, and connection has been saturated by other agendas. As artist Paul Chan has written, connection ≠ communication: “Time deepens connections, whereas technology economizes communication. Despite the growing number of ways to be seen and heard, tele-technologies have ironically made harder for people to comprehend one another. What matters in communication—understanding, relationality, interchange—has somehow gotten lost in the transmission.”²

Flotilla sought to create these spaces for in-person relational discussions and transmissions. Bracketing an ideal hypothetical space for art, over the course of four days it made the hypothesis a reality. Perhaps due to Charlottetown’s modest size, its openness to the Atlantic and self-embrace as a periphery, and the familiarity between artists coming together across Canada, the conversations carried an honest and open tenor. There was showing and also sharing: art on the streets, occupying storefronts, and on the Floating Warren pavilion which extended into Victoria Park harbour; and performances and intimate discussions in neighbouring houses over food. I fondly remember [Jordan Bennett and Lori Blondeau’s *Samqwan/Nipiy*](#), a generous lobster boil offered to all who converged at Confederation Landing on Sunday morning. Linking together the Mi’kmaq and Cree words for water, and through a subtle collective pleasure, it lovingly brought new meaning and sovereignty to a site named for its colonial organization.

Yet how much real change can spark from a short-term utopia? How do we create and hold space for art within a loose network—what are our safety nets, and what is required to sustain it? How do the conditions need to change, to allow for a greater diversity of voices in the arts? Incidentally, *Flotilla* overlapped with a west coast gathering for [Primary Colours](#), a three-year initiative designed by Chris Creighton-Kelly and France Trépanier that seeks to place Indigenous art practices at the centre of the Canadian art system, and to have artists of colour play a critical role in any discussion that imagines Canada’s futures. Were these two gatherings aware and connected with one another? How can such imaginings take place, apart and together?

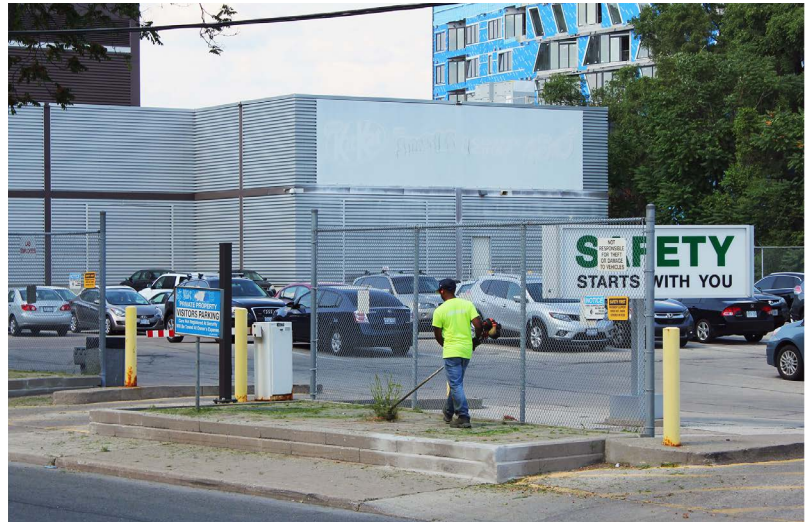


Fig. 1 Luis Jacob, Sterling Avenue, Toronto, “The Weed-Whacker,” 2017

Reflecting on Flotilla projects that left distinct impressions, I find myself returning to the relationship between internal and external spaces, especially amidst current social-political sensitivities. To what extent do we knit the two together, and when do they need time apart? Shifts in consciousness take time to materialize into societal change. Another question that comes up is: *what's missing?* Be it certain conversations, representations, a type of accustomed comfort, or a moment longed for since passed. What's missing may signal what we need to seek out and spend time with.

Artists took risks tackling an undercurrent of difficult topics, politics and emotions. [Divya Mehra's performance](#), *grief flows very easily into anger and disdain, and creates a soft and radical rage*, connected her father's recent passing with incidents of ongoing racism, POC labour, and misunderstandings in the service industry and online. With brilliantly comic-tragic timing she had me laughing one second, and crying the next. Troubling whiteness, she professed frustration at performing “otherness” at her family's Indian restaurant (*does my tone of voice or skin offend?*) while sardonically resisting identities assigned to her. Her quips landed against a backdrop of personal snapshots, Bollywood movie clips, Yelp restaurant reviews, Tinder and other online forums that show “the public being public”—or rather, how uncivil communication has become in and beyond virtual spaces, and how these judgements now sit and haunt at the surface. She touched on internal spaces and inexpressible feelings (*limiting, with dark, sharp corners*) and questions on public grief: how much do we share, and how safe is it to share, even with those that ask, about how these inner spaces really feel? The act of refusal can be a form of self-care.

How can we learn to read within past absences and obfuscations a more balanced representation of histories, from the things that are *not* represented, invisible, or overlooked? [Luis Jacob](#) spoke on the metaphor and persistence of the vacant lot, examining how colonial and capitalist territories were visualized as empty spaces to be turned into something of value, rather than acknowledging existing inhabitants. Citing *The Ward* in Toronto, he showed an archival City photograph from 1957 depicting the area as an abstract white square. In actuality, *The Ward* was a working-class neighbourhood in the 19th to mid 20th century where many immigrants settled upon arrival to Canada: Toronto's African-Canadian community, many of whom escaped slavery in the United States; Italian, Jewish and Eastern European refugees; it was also the city's first Chinatown. When the City of Toronto authorized the expropriation of the area for business development in 1946, these communities were pushed out, replaced by the present-day City Hall and Nathan



Fig. 2-3 Charles Campbell, “Actor Boy: Travels in Birdsong,” 2017. Photograph by Oakar Myint

Phillips Square. As with much of Jacob’s practice that destabilizes the act of looking, he revealed these perceptions of external space as projections of an erroneous imaginary, one that we acknowledge as no longer adequate. How might we re-orient our readings of space, visual culture and art?

Jacob’s research intersects with [Charles Campbell’s](#) *Actor Boy: Travels in Birdsong*, a project I curated for *Flotilla*. We discovered a similarly forgotten neighbourhood in central Charlottetown, The Bog—home to a racially-mixed community of working class poor and African-Islanders from the early 1800s to the 1900s, located near a pond where songbirds visited. Though labeled a slum, it evinced strong community ties, solidarity and resilience—including a free school, athletic clubs, and family lines that continue on island to this day. By the 1900s The Bog dissolved, dispersed by redevelopment, discrimination, and opportunities in larger communities elsewhere. It was largely forgotten until a local historian pieced together the outlines. (Incidentally, Charles had also grown up in Charlottetown, but had not been aware of this past.) We were fortunate to connect with historian Jim Hornby, musician Scott Parsons, and other members of the Black Cultural Society in Charlottetown who have been actively preserving and sharing these histories. With new migrants from Africa and the Caribbean arriving on island, they’ve been linking stories of past and present-day black communities to show how these multiple histories are continually morphing, complicating dominant Canadian narratives.

Actor Boy is a six-dimensional being from an alternate future who can travel time, pointing to different outcomes in other parallel universes, when disruptions open an array of possible futures and points of agency from which to act. Part trickster, his roots stem from the Jamaican carnival celebration Jonkonnu—when slaves upturned the social order by mocking their master's dress. For the performance and installation, Actor Boy travelled time through birdsong to trace the histories of Trans-Atlantic slavery, emancipation, migration, and settlement linked to the Maritimes. Birdsong acted as both carrier of memories and a signal of ecological and cultural ruptures, pending imbalances. Interrogating these memories, he revealed the tensions of Black Canadian history—of violence, discrimination, denial and solidarity. As a one-sided dialogue, the audience was left to imagine the other side of the conversation, an internal imagining telling us more about ourselves than the other. Sound was a preferred medium, acting as anti-monument: a way of transmitting but not solidifying stories so that their open-endedness might transform us in more active ways.

The stories of *The Bog* and *The Ward* are not isolated incidents. Many racialized communities in Canada share a history of displacement and dispersal—be it under the pretense of reservations, internment, or gentrification. Campbell's ongoing *Actor Boy* project resists historical amnesia, engaging with the histories of black communities across Canada—including Birchtown and Africville in Halifax, Amber Valley in Alberta, Vancouver's Hogan's Alley, Salt Spring Island and Victoria—to activate open questions. His work, alongside other artists, writers, and filmmakers currently, are creating a greater public awareness of these histories, so that the longer continuities of these founding populations in Canada—and their struggles with discrimination—might be acknowledged and better understood.

Perhaps it's the mediums which cannot be easily captured—sound, performance, discussions, and the temporary nature of *Flotilla* itself—that are what is needed in this moment. A different kind of transmission that requests presence: to allow for understandings to not become calcified by language or representation too quickly, so as to remain an energy that infuses action in time.

This article, written in July 2018, was originally published for Flotilla Atlantic's online publication in March 2019.

¹ *Flotilla* was the first transnational gathering focusing on nomadic and temporary elements of contemporary artist-run culture in Atlantic Canada. From September 21st to 24th 2017, participants from around the world worked alongside regional artists and practitioners to re-imagine artist-run culture in a series of public exhibitions, events and discussions in and around Charlottetown, PE. Taking inspiration from a nautical metaphor of boats banded together in open water, FLOTILLA speaks to the shifting tides within cultural practice: ideas of nomadism, isolation, transition, exchange, and innovation. (<https://www.flotillaatlantic.com>)

² Paul Chan, "The Unthinkable Community," in *What's Love (or Care, Intimacy, Warmth, Affection) Got to Do with It?* (Stenberg Press and e-flux: Berlin and New York, 2016), 250.

labor pains

Arianna Mercado

1

lately, i have been thinking about what it means to be a curator. in school, we talked about the various labels that curators often take—author, custodian, mediator, facilitator—and in my work in Calle Wright i never knew where to place myself. could i take authorship for projects that have one artist? perhaps it was the occasional bout of imposter syndrome, but i always felt myself leaning towards facilitating good relationships when at times i wanted to express conflicting opinions. there were many things that i wanted for/from/with Calle Wright that i felt like i was its maternal caretaker more than anything else.

these thoughts, of course, were never bad things. and i don't mean to say that i wanted to take authorship for everything that i worked on. while we talk about critical art making, i suppose it is in the same vein that i think about my own critical curatorial practice.

it was through Calle Wright that i understood the inherently *very regular* operations that go behind running an art space. coming in young and naive fresh off a short stint at a museum, i had envisioned working as a curator to be a whirlwind of exciting events spent writing, reading, talking to artists, and installing their work. what i discovered instead was that on a regular day, with sometimes nobody to talk to, the afternoon would be spent delivering letters to the barangay hall, calling up the air-condition cleaners, paying electricity bills, or organizing for PLDT¹ to come install fibr internet.

2

i have no idea how Calle Wright really began. having parted with it now, i feel that my memory of it has become even more hazy. i remember being told that it started with this old unoccupied home that was being split among relatives until it was finally bought. i have also been told that when Gary-Ross Pastrana stepped foot into it, he thought it would make a great exhibition space, imagining its precarious architecture as mixed in with different kinds of work.

the space had once been a complete mess. uninhabited for years, it was missing grills, doors, and was filled with mud. old photos of the house in between reconstruction reveal an unfortunate yet inevitable history of it being abandoned and irrelevant. on a trip to Manila, Heman Chong used the newly renovated house as an apartment, though at this time, the monsoon rains caused a leak and flood in the kitchen.

i have been told that the idea of Calle Wright had floated around for ages, with Heman's visit being a year or two before having his exhibition with Gary, *Never is a Promise*. the old files that i had sifted through before envisioned Calle Wright as a library and research space, though as of now, these plans have yet to be implemented.

¹ PLDT Inc., (formerly Philippine Long Distance Telephone Company) a telecommunications, internet, and digital service company in the Philippines

3

the guard on duty once told me about how our front door neighbors, a dormitory of seamen, asked him what was going on inside the house. it only makes sense that it was strange for them to see random people come in and out every week, when nobody really seems to be living there. was it a drug den like they had imagined? the guard told me he laughed and said that it was for art.

4

i was reading an essay by Tara McDowell² yesterday that summed up the condition of labor that cultural workers face today as being “post-occupational.” nowadays, those who work in the arts exist through a vast expanse of tasks. the work put into curatorial care has gone past collections management and into interdisciplinary fields that include the realms of education and publishing. now, it has become increasingly difficult to label what we actually do because not one word seems to encompass it all.

this fluidity of tasks i relate to what Paul O’Neill³ once described as the constellation of the “paracuratorial”⁴ in the sense of activating networks and collaborating with different people and disciplines to compose a more critical and expansive curatorial practice. yet at the same time, this fluidity leaves cultural labor so easily entrenched in a potential loop of exploitation and continuous work. as Hito Steyerl reminds us, “This mess is kept afloat by the sheer dynamism of loads and loads of hardworking women.”⁵

5

when Calle Wright was in development, there seemed to be a fixation with the slowness of time in the space. ideas tended to gestate very slowly and without much urgency. being there felt like spending afternoons with your grandparents in between naps.

6

it’s difficult to tell what will happen to the future of Calle Wright. leaving artists and curators up to nomination is an exciting yet unpredictable premise. to me, it’s beginning to feel almost outdated if it remains merely as an exhibition space, though i guess the space itself has never played around with ideas of being “alternative” or “community nurturing.” it is an art house, after all, and for the past year, it has done exactly that—house art.

it was fascinating to witness how different artists occupy space (physical, mental, emotional). Judy’s *Moving House* was vastly different from Lani’s *school of love*, and the same can be said with Gary and Heman’s *Never is a Promise* to Nap, Tapio, and Robin’s *Underbelly* and to Lesley and Lao’s *More light than heat*.⁶ the energy of the space seems to morph every time the exhibition is changed that i can’t be certain about what the space will become in the next few months and years.

² McDowell, T. (2016). The post-occupational condition. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, 16(1), 22-38. doi:10.1080/14434318.2016.1171723

³ O’Neill, P. (2012). The curatorial constellation and the paracuratorial paradox. *The Exhibitionist* 6, 55-60.

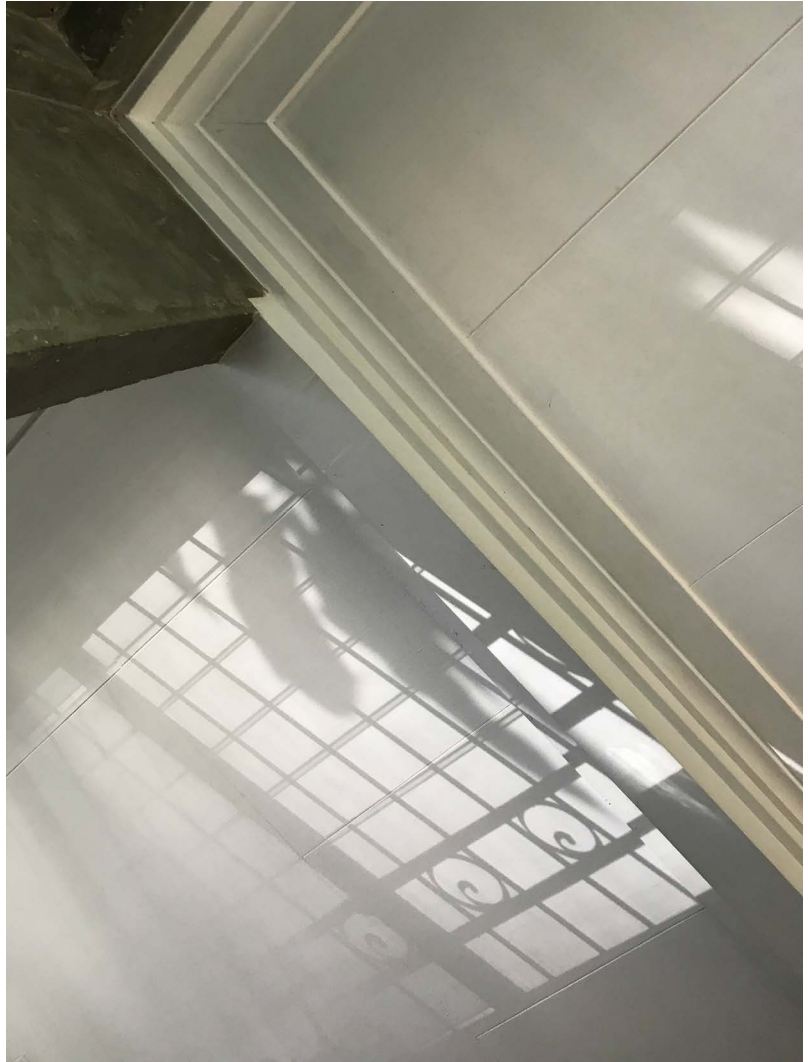
⁴ Coined by critic Jens Hoffman to refer to the activities that go beyond exhibition-making, such as talks and publications.

⁵ Steyerl, H. (2010). Politics of art: Contemporary art and the transition to post-democracy. *E-flux Journal of Art* 21. Retrieved from <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/21/67696/politics-of-art-contemporary-art-and-the-transition-to-post-democracy/>

⁶ The artists who have exhibited at Calle Wright thus far: Judy Freya Sibayan, Lani Maestro, Gary Ross Pastrana, Heman Chong, Nap Jamir, Tapio Snellman, Robin Rivera, Lesley-Ann Cao and Lao Lianben.

7

the best time to see Calle Wright is at around 330-4pm when the light hits the trees at the right angle. the sun, mango, and *balete* trees cast the best shadows that Judy and I could never stop taking photos of. one afternoon, a bird perched itself on a branch, sang and preened at us. we watched it for 15 minutes before getting back to working on the archive.



Photograph by
Judy Freya Sibayan

CALLE WRIGHT HOUSEWARMING



MOVING HOUSE

29 July 2018

A Prayer Piece for the Proliferation, Health and Survival
of Places and Spaces of Critical Art Making such as Calle Wright
in the Face of Most Art Being Made Instrumental
in the Maintenance of the Dominant Culture



On the premise that most art are mere instruments contributing
to the maintenance of the dominant culture, and thus the status quo,
we pray that places and spaces of critical art making
such as Calle Wright remain,

(Response: For these places and spaces of art we pray)

Sites of art open to the dynamics and forces of change

Sites of art steadfast in their resistance to merely feeding the market

Sites of art allowing cultural agents the freedom
to articulate thus formulate their own positions and politics

Sites of art where “oppositional discourses and practices
can be formulated and circulated”

Sites of art that do not coopt or “neutralize critical forms
through their exhibitionary techniques”

Sites of art transparent and accepting but critically reflexive
of their own complicity in being part of an institution that participates
in the formation of power structures resulting in social inequities

Sites of art involved in projects reflecting on “the conception of publics,
and the contingencies and histories of various modes of address”

Sites of art that fully understand “it is the mode of address”
(the formats and intentions of exhibition making) “that produce a public”

Sites of art engaged in a plurality and diversity
of intentions and “formats of exhibition making”

Sites of art producing counterpublics “in an effort to address
other subjects and other imaginaries”

Sites of art supportive of works that attempt
“to imagine and produce different [subjectivities and] publics”

Sites of art for those who actively refuse to “maintain
the dominant imaginary of society, subjectivity, and possibility
but instead partake in other imaginaries”

Sites of art that are places from which “to see
(and see differently, other imaginaries)

Sites of art where these imaginaries are themselves articulations that have
“to do with the processes and potentialities of artistic production itself”

Sites of art where the usual repetitive and predictable modes of re/presentation
and use-value could be transformed into continuity
“literally doing the same to [radically] produce something different,
not in the products but in the imagination”

Sites of art where this kind of repetition toward continuity
allows artists and curators to go “into the depths” of their critical inquiry
and thus their critical positions in the world

Sites of art committed to “rethinking the structure and event
of the exhibition altogether since a work of art is a proposal
for how things can be seen,” how one can imagine an other/ideal world

Sites of art where artists and curators develop long term relationships
with their “imagined audience, constituency and/or community”

Sites of art where artworks “can indeed be seen as new modes
of instituting, of producing, and projecting other worlds
and the possibility for self-transformation of the world”

Sites of art that are:

Shelters to those who offer radical ideas
Sanctuaries for activists/visionaries
Home to inside-outsiders, to ex-centrics
Models of critical institutional praxis
Refuge for disruptors of the status quo
Agencies of change



Let us pray

O Divine Universe which in thy unfathomable providence
was pleased to make possible places and spaces of critical art making,
grant these sites health, longevity and the spirit of endurance
to remain steadfast in their commitment to the production of critical art.

O Divine Universe, visit Calle Wright,
a place and space of generous sharing and gathering.

Let thy hallowed energies dwell herein
to preserve us all as a community

that continues to work for the health of all cultures.

And may thy blessing be upon us forever through the Tao of one and all.

We offer you our deepest gratitude, and we ask all these in your name,



Amen

About Ctrl+P

Ctrl+P was founded in 2006 by Judy Freya Sibayan and Flaudette May V. Datuin as a response to the dearth of critical art publications in the Philippines. It is produced in Manila and published on the Web with zero funding. Contributors write gratis for Ctrl+P. Ctrl+P provides a testing ground for a whole new culture and praxis of publishing that addresses very specifically the difficulties of publishing art writing and criticism in the Philippines. It took part in documenta 12 magazines project, a journal of 97 journals from all over the world (<https://www.documenta12.de/en/magazine.html>).

Contributors

Eva Bentcheva is an art historian and curator with a focus on transnational performance and conceptual art. She completed her PhD at SOAS, University in London. She is currently a Postdoctoral Fellow with the Paul Mellon Centre in London, writing a monograph on cultural politics and transnationalism in performance art in Britain since the 1960s. She was previously a Goethe-Institut Postdoctoral Fellow at Haus der Kunst in Munich and Adjunct Researcher for the Tate Research Centre: Asia in London. **Gillian Brown** has been curator at the University of South Australia's Samstag Museum of Art since 2011, having previously worked in galleries across the private and public sectors in Melbourne, Australia. A regular contributor to public discussions and judging panels and a member of the editorial advisory committee for arts journal Artlink, Brown holds a Master of Arts in Art History from the University of Adelaide. She co-founded and was co-editor of the online critical arts writing platform www.fineprintmagazine.com from 2014-2019, and in 2018 spent time based at the Museum of Contemporary Art & Design, Manila as part of the Asialink Arts Global Project Space Creative Exchange. **Lesley-Anne Cao's** practice revolves around the idea of a life-work where artworks and exhibitions are not self-contained nor complete but are dispersed, supplementary to other things, and are never finished. Recent works use recognizable materials such as plants, debris, precious metals, and money, enacting displacements and substitutions by way of creating mise-en-scènes and narratives. She holds a BFA from the University of the Philippines. Recent exhibitions include "The hand, the secretary, a landscape" at the Cultural Center of the Philippines (2018) and "More light than heat" with Lao Lianben at Calle Wright, Manila (2019). **Clarissa Chikiamco** is a curator at National Gallery Singapore and a PhD student at King's College London Department of Film Studies. Her past co-curated exhibitions include Between Worlds: Raden Saleh and Juan Luna, A Fact Has No Appearance: Art Beyond the Object and Between Declarations and Dreams: Art of Southeast Asia since the 19th Century. She recently curated a profile on Kiri Dalena for the Oberhausen Short Film Festival. **Lizza May David's** multidisciplinary practices involves autobiographical narratives relating to identity, memory, knowledge and its loss in a personal and collective sense. Responding and resonating to these through mark making on canvas allows her furthermore to question how ideologies run through our bodies, influencing human/nonhuman relations, materialities, and indexical affinities. David studied at the Academy of Fine Arts Nuremberg and University of Arts Berlin, Germany. **Patrick D. Flores** is Professor of Art Studies at the Department of Art Studies at the University of the Philippines, which he chaired from 1997 to 2003. Flores is Curator of the Vargas Museum in Manila, and Adjunct Curator at the National Art Gallery, Singapore. Flores is also Artistic Director of Singapore Biennale 2019; curator of the Philippine Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2015 and was one of the curators of the Gwangju Biennale (Position Papers) in 2008. Among his publications are *Painting History: Revisions in Philippine Colonial Art* (1999); *Remarkable Collection: Art, History, and the National Museum* (2006); and *Past Peripheral: Curation in Southeast Asia* (2008). **Lyra Garcellano's** research revolves around the investigation and critique of art ecosystems and her output is often presented in installations, paintings, moving images, comics and writing. She

is particularly interested in how prevailing economic models impact artistic practice. Garcellano, a graduate of Interdisciplinary Studies from the Ateneo de Manila University, also holds a BFA degree in Studio Art and an MA in Art Theory and Criticism from the University of the Philippines. She is co-founding editor and co-publisher of *Traffic*, a continuing volume that is described as a collection of texts prompted by conversations between practitioners in the field of culture and arts. **Joni Low** is an independent curator and writer in Vancouver. Her curatorial research explores interconnection, intercultural conversations, public space, sensory experience and the impact of telecommunications technologies on everyday life. Recent curatorial projects include *What Are Our Supports?*, a series of 5 artists' interventions in public space, *Hank Bull: Connexion* (Canadian tour), the symposium *Underground in the Aether*, and *Afterlives: Germaine Koh and Aron Louis Cohen*. She has presented projects at Galerie de L'UQAM (Montréal), Confederation Centre Art Gallery and FLOTILLA Atlantic (Charlottetown), Saint Mary's University Art Gallery (Halifax), Burnaby Art Gallery and Or Gallery (Vancouver). Her essays and criticism appear in exhibition catalogues, artist monographs, online, and in publications including *Canadian Art*, *The Capilano Review*, *espace art actuel*, *Momus* and *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*. **Arianna Mercado** is a curator and writer based between London and Manila. She is the co-founder of Kiat Kiat Projects, a nomadic curatorial initiative with a focus on alternative exhibition formats. Mercado is the recipient of the 2017 Purita Kalaw-Ledesma Prize for Art Criticism and has worked on projects with Calle Wright, the Museum of Contemporary Art and Design Manila, and the Cultural Center of the Philippines. She is currently completing her MFA in Curating at Goldsmiths, University of London. **Marian Pastor Roces** started writing critically about contemporary art in 1974. Immediately critical of art criticism, she pursued a research trajectory into traditional art of the Philippines, principally to understand local categories and measures of excellence. The critical imagination she shaped through this bifurcated track further into analytic work on cities, international art events, local politics, and clothing; and identity construction. Through the corporation she founded in 1999, TAO Inc., Roces curates the building of museums. She is also the author of *Gathering, Political Writing on Art and Culture* an anthology of her writing from 1974 to 2018. **Karla Sachse** (born 1950 in Zschopau, Saxonia, East-Germany) holds a PhD from Humboldt-University Berlin. She lives and works in Berlin where she has realised several artworks in public spaces, most recent of which is a memorial of the peaceful revolution of 1989 including a website with more than 150 interviews as oral history of her district around Gethsemane Church in Berlin: www.aufbruch-herbst89.de She installed and directed art studio programs at several institutions. Her solo and collaborative art projects are exhibited nationally and internationally: www.karla-sachse.de **Roy Voragen** taught undergraduate and graduate courses in philosophy and political science at universities in Bandung and Jakarta between 2003 and 2010. Since 2010, he has worked as a curator. He has curated, organized and participated in projects, talks and seminars in Bandung, Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, Yokohama, Hong Kong and Cologne. He also writes, publishes and performs conceptual poetry. In 2019, he co-founded the publishing and curatorial platform *Comma*. He currently resides in the Netherlands. **Ruby Weatherall** is a researcher from the UK. She has a BA in Chinese Studies from the University of Leeds and completed an MA in Contemporary Art and Art Theory with a focus on Asia at SOAS last year. She is interested in the intersection between arts and learning and currently works as a Programmes Intern at the Asia Art Archive in Hong Kong, with a research focus on pedagogy in relation to recent art in Asia. Ruby was part of Para Site's Workshops for Emerging Art Professionals in 2019.

Board of Editors

Flaudette May V. Datuin is Associate Professor of the Department of Art Studies, University of the Philippines. She is the author of *Home Body Memory: Filipina Artists in the Visual Arts, 19th Century to the Present* (University of the Philippines Press, 2002). She curated *Women Imaging Women* held at the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) featuring the women artists from Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand and the Philippines; balaybay@kasibulan to celebrate the 15th anniversary of KASIBULAN, a group of Filipina artists in the visual arts, *trauma interrupted*, an international and interdisciplinary exhibition both held also at the CCP. Datuin is co-founding editor of *Ctrl+P Journal of Contemporary Art*. **Varsha Nair** was born in Kampala, Uganda, and studied at Faculty of Fine Arts, Maharaja Sayaji Rao University, Baroda, India. Inviting multidisciplinary collaborations her work encompasses various approaches and genres. Co-organizer of *Womanifesto*—an international art exchange in Thailand, she has also exhibited her work internationally. Nair has published her writings in various art journals such as *n paradoxa*, *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia*, *Art AsiaPacific*, and *Ctrl+P Journal of Contemporary Art* of which she is Editorial Board member. Nair is currently guest lecturer and mentor to graduate students at Lucerne School of Art. She lived in Bangkok since 1995 and has recently moved to reside in her hometown of Baroda in India. **Judy Freya Sibayan** is co-founding editor and publishers of *Ctrl+P Journal of Contemporary Art*. A conceptual artist, for the past 25 years she has been doing self-instituting projects as her modality of institutional critique. Former director of the erstwhile Contemporary Art Museum, she is the curator of the *Museum of Mental Objects*, a performance for life. She has participated in three biennales: the 1986 3rd Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh, the 2002 Gwangju Biennale and in the 2019 Singapore Biennale. Her autobiography, *The Hypertext of HerMe(s)* was published by KT Press in 2014. She holds a Doctor of Fine Arts degree from De La Salle University where she taught for 30 years.



the will "to connect what cannot be connected" in archival art...
is not a will to totalize so much as a will to relate—to probe
a misplaced past, to collate its different signs (sometimes
pragmatically, sometimes parodistically), to ascertain
what might remain for the present.

Hal Foster
An Archival Impulse