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## Speculations on the “International” Via the Philippine

The word “international” may have been drained of its semantic valence, or co-opted in many ways by institutional forces in the course of time. But it proves to be an intriguingly productive term, one that invites erasure at the same time that it retains a desire for it. First, it posits an inherent relationality, a certain between-ness as opposed to, for instance, across-ness, as intimated by the rubric of the “transnational.” Second, it references one of the exemplary conditions of modernity that is the nation along with its apparatus, the nation-state, which the term “global” forecloses, or at least drastically diminishes. It is the nation, the time of its past and the geography of its boundaries, that oftentimes overdetermines the afterlife of the post-colony and secures for it the discourse of culture and identity and the aesthetic of representation. As Clifford Geertz once asked: What is a country if it is not a nation? What is a state if it is not a sovereign?

The international is complicit in this process of preemption by the nation-state, except that it also hints at an “inclination outward,” and so phases in the presences of others in different places at the same time in a climate of “comparative contemporaries.” What this outside is, this beyond-ness, that surpasses the nation deserves to be conceptualized. What locale eludes the nation? And what locality can resist being merely consigned to a region or a province configured as an international because it can no longer be confined to the national and yet cannot posture as the global? This excess and this limit need to be demonstrated, to be pointed to with interest: *that* outside in relation to *this* inside; *here* and not *over there*; *now* and not *not-yet*. This is not so much to diversify positions and to relativize temporalities as to craft intersubjectivity. Therefore, the “inter” creates a necessary nexus, an aspiration to belong across the back and forth, so to speak. Such complications brought in by the international cast the term as a critical interlocution of totalizing cartographies like the global; or the radically particular consequences signified by the translocal.

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This essay conceives of the international largely in the context of an archipelagic, tropical Philippine, a term that is a diminution, a miniaturization of Felipe, Prince of Asturias who later became King of Spain, colonizer of the islands for almost four centuries beginning in 1521 when Ferdinand Magellan, a circumnavigator of the globe, was killed on the shores of a place called Mactan after planting the Catholic cross and the Spanish flag. As a figurine, the Philippine is emblematic of the archipelagic moment, the rendering of the world in pieces, in picturesque, precious pieces, surely. These pieces are also, however, catastrophic. According to those who diagnose the epidemiology of disasters, since 1900, the Philippines was the country on the planet that had needed the most “international” succor to be able to respond to natural calamities.<sup>1</sup> In 2013, the typhoon Haiyan struck, the strongest ever-recorded to have hit ground in world history, with the strongest wind ever gauged, stirring up storm surges that engulfed land and lives of around 7000 in what is obviously a very inclement country. The international media harped on the “resilience” of Filipinos, a recurring characterization of a people that would prompt the novelist Ninotchka Rosca to take exception: that resilience is not the apt term to describe this tenacity or this insistence. Rosca thinks of survival in these parts, or better to say, of the Philippine prevailing, as metamorphic, rather than resilient: “We break, when the world is just too much, and in the process of breaking, are transformed into something difficult to understand. Or we take full measure of misfortune, wrestle with it and emerge transformed into something equally terrifying [...]. This is in sync with our indigenous worldview [...] an understanding of reality, including ourselves, as metamorphic (or, capable of transformation).”<sup>2</sup>

It is in this context that this essay pursues the problematic of the modern, one that turns intimately and cataclysmically, and transformatively. Within the archipelagic and the tropical Philippine, it moreover implicates the history of successive colonialisms, current insurgencies, and intense migrations, a formidable assemblage of historical burdens that mediates the importuning of

<sup>1</sup> Greg Bankoff, “Storms of History: Water, Hazard and Society in the Philippines 1565-1930,” in *A World of Water: Rain, River and Seas in Southeast Asian Histories*, ed. Peter Boomgaard, Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2007, 153.

<sup>2</sup> Ninotchka Rosca, “Commentary: Calling Filipinos Resilient is an Insult,” *Yahoo Philippines News*, accessed November 18, 2013, <https://ph.news.yahoo.com/commentary--calling-filipinos-resilient-is-an-insult-011053161.html>.

the outside and the sentimentality of the inside. The term international stakes out the ground on which the antinomy seemingly wedded into exclusion and equality stands. But it could be made to yield instead what may be provisionally set up as equivalence, eccentricity, and entitlement. These are terms that hope to ease the post-colonial anxiety of being late or being belated, of catching up and never having to arrive, of being hybrid or a function of sheer mimicry and not being able to take on an integrity of cosmological, existential form. To be equivalent is to translate with travail and also to fluently converse with a vernacular. To be eccentric is to distract the government of presence and to circulate without prediction. To be entitled is to not fear the outside because it is an immanent critique of whatever it is that is deemed inside, or because the outside has been always-already accorded hospitality and friendship—given care—by way of affective labor.

The first sortie of this theoretical effort is into the colonial. Why must we begin with the colonial? The colonial is called out at the first instance because it draws our attention to the processes of making worlds and of making modernities. In the history of Philippine culture, five indices of modernity as a mode of self-consciousness and a heightened, if not sophisticated, sense of the other or the outside may include the following: the signature the artist affixes to lay claim to a work as an agent of that work; the academy that codifies protocols of pedagogy and canon formation; the portrait that assures the representation of human likeness; the historical painting that marks the turning of time in space and the figuration of agent and event in synchrony; and the world exposition that exhibits artifacts and live people to describe a culture within a universe plotted out by empire. These instantiations index the circulation of self, a particular aspect or talent of self, across sites and across the tenure of the post-colony. Is this post-colony necessarily the nation, reducing the country to it and expanding it into a locality of similar constitutions that became a region and finally an international? These impulses carving out the colony and the post-colony constellate the nation, render their dimensions and orientations (inside, outside, far, near) relational, and therefore predispose them to incline or lean towards the international.

## I. Path to the international by way of the colonial Philippine

First thesis: *The colony is an allegorical sympathy with another country.*

In Francisco Baltazar's metrical romance *Florante at Laura* (Florante and Laura, 1838; 1875), the hero Florante speaks of a distraught homeland, in the guise of Albania, that wallows in abjection:

Within and beyond my abject country  
treachery reigns,  
while merit and goodness are prostrate,  
entombed alive in suffering and grief.<sup>3</sup>

The first scene sets the allegorical tableau and elicits sympathy with a captured exiled subject; and the citation of Albania indexes an imagination of an outside, a breakdown of the world elsewhere. Florante, Duke of Albania, is tied to a tree, speaking of the woes of his fallen world; his father has been deposed as king, and the son of the usurper has coveted Florante's beloved Laura. Two lions are about to attack Florante in this dark forest when Aladin, Prince of Persia, comes to save him. This medievalist imagination conjures an allegory. The artifice of the latter is deployed here in its unique capacity as a rhetorical strategy to grasp a quickchange reality; having said that, it also tends to skirt itself, thus the allegorical problem rests on its own provisionality, "seeming to be other than what it is. It exhibits something of the perpetually fluctuating, uncertain status of the world it depicts."<sup>4</sup>

Second thesis: *The transcendence of the colonial is the comparison with empire.*

178

In 1886, the National Hero Jose Rizal published his novel *Noli Me Tangere* in Berlin. It is a miniature universe of the Philippine colonial world, unfolding with the return of Juan Crisostomo Ibarra from Spain and finding, like Florante per-

<sup>3</sup> The translation is a variant of the translation found in *Himalay: Kalipunan ng mga Pag-aaral Kay Balagtas*, eds. Patricia Melendrez-Cruz, Apolonio B. Chua, Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1988.

<sup>4</sup> Jon Whitman, *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987, 13.

haps of the earlier narrative, a debased homeland. Ibarra strays into the novel somewhat enchanted, or better still, bedeviled. The passage runs thus:

The sight of the botanical garden drove away his gay reminiscences: the devil of comparisons placed him before the botanical gardens of Europe, in the countries where much effort and much gold are needed to make a leaf bloom or a bud open; and even more, to those of the colonies, rich and well-tended, and all open to the public. Ibarra removed his gaze, looked right, and there saw old Manila, still surrounded by its walls and moats, like an anemic young woman in a dress from her grandmother's best times.<sup>5</sup>

The historian Benedict Anderson intuits "el demonio de las comparaciones" as the "specter of comparisons" while the Tagalog writer Patricio Mariano nuances it as "tukso ng pagkahawig-hawig," or the "temptation of affinities" or "phantasm of semblances." Either way, the phrase describes the condition or experience of mediating discrepant worlds coming together in an instance of a ricocheting vision (or "malikmata") that is at once belated and present and in a gap or interval that is at once memory and mimicry. In this situation, the local world exceeds itself and slips into the colonial world that is incommensurate and the imperial world to which it pretends. That said, such pretension, or such pretending, permits the local world to cohabit with the outside and to insinuate the latter within itself. Thus, the colonial country at some point integrates with the world through mastery and *mestizaje*.<sup>6</sup>

In rethinking, therefore, the international, we might want to reassess the notion of comparison, of comparability, and of comparativity. Must the international be predicated on comparison? And how must this comparison be pondered and how can the Philippine, for instance, refuse being merely compared to an imperial standard and hopefully finally assume the condition of comparativity: that is, it ceases to be a locality to be linked up in the chain of other localities to complete the international and becomes a co-producer of the international all together? It may well be anticipated theoretically that if the dialectic failed to sustain the mastery and *mestizaje* opposition, there could be a third moment

<sup>5</sup> Jose Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere*, trans. M.S. Lacson-Locsin, Manila: Bookmark, 1996, 67.

<sup>6</sup> For greater elaboration, see Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Towards a Geography of Art*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

to which the nineteenth-century metrical romance of Baltazar and the novel of Rizal have already alluded.

Third thesis: *The colony is country robustly conceived.*

Finally, the post-colony that can be nation does not have to be mapped out geographically and politically and emplaced across the grids of nation, region, international, trans-nation. It could be grasped as atmosphere. The Philippine lexicon yields the word “*banwa*.” It offers up a myriad of meanings: “mountain,” “countryside,” “terrain,” “climate,” “homeland,” “forest,” “hinterland,” “every island from sea to sea.”<sup>7</sup> It is practically the ecology, the atmosphere, or if more deeply elucidated, a local moral word that equally conceives of well-being, or *ginhawa*, breath itself in one of the vernacular languages: the air and the clearing.

A concomitant word that may inflect *banwa* is *naturaleza*, which is a Hispanic derivation. It roughly means the condition of a person’s body, or better to say, an embodiment of its life force, its level of vitality; in the old Spanish lexicon, it is essence and attribute, in other words, “nature” in the sense that it is “quality” and therefore not opposed to “culture.” In fact, the nature and culture duality is surmounted by the concept; it makes of the body a vessel of distinction and hence of discrimination; and of nature as human, a biological and political form that enlivens and enfeebles. It is perceived to inhere in the person so that whatever is perceived as coming from the outside, or the foreign, is scrupulously mediated by it. This *naturaleza* may be discerned as part of a person’s destiny, an inheritance, conditioned by lineage and the state of the body that is always vulnerable as it is self-renewing, finite as it is persistent. It may also, however, be regarded as a medium in the active process of the body’s response to the various ways by which it is acted upon by ill wind or virus or curse.

*Naturaleza* may be akin to the word favored by Spinoza, by way of Étienne Balibar, which is *ingenium*. It is, in his vernacular, a complexion or a temperament, “a memory whose form has been determined by the individual’s experience of

<sup>7</sup> See Alonso de Metrida’s *Bocabulario de la lengua Bisaya-Hiligueyna y Haria de las islas de Panay y Sugbu, y para las demas islas*, 1841, first published 1637, in Manila as cited in Marian Pastor Roces, “Pictures at an Exhibition: Re-presenting the Sugar Industry at the Negros Museum, Philippines,” in *House of Glass: Culture, Modernity, and the State in Southeast Asia*, ed. Yao Souchou, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2001.

life and by his various encounters, and which, as a result of the unique way in which it has been constituted, is inscribed both in the mind (or soul) and in the disposition of the body."<sup>8</sup> Pierre Bourdieu's habitus and hexis come to mind as well. Resonant, too, is what the anthropologist Aihwa Ong imagines as "sheer life in the tropics," or how the fundamental need of human survival is organized in this part of the world between the endemic, or the vernacular, and the epidemic, or the viral: "The region is characterized by an outmigration of threatening pathogens. This 'latitudinal biodiversity' makes Southeast Asia a tropical region of uncanny surplus wealth and diseases."<sup>9</sup>

With *banwa* and *naturaleza* in place and in flux, the colony is not so easily localized and reconstitutes the outside at various levels of debility and cogency. This sensibility of thinking about the local may well be "archipelagic." Simone Pinet has written a luminous book on insular fictions from chivalric romance to the novel, imagining the archipelago as a corpus of elements like the island and the forest, which the *banwa* encompasses. The island is delineated as marginal but prone to legend, a "space open to imagination, where dreams and hauntings take place in their floating contours."<sup>10</sup> The forest, on the other hand, bears aspects of the *locus amoenus*, "a concept of geological configuration" that finds affinity with "deserts, islands, and mountain ranges, rendering the link between the literary motif and the geographical obvious."<sup>11</sup>

The essay invests in the colonial because it is the colonial moment that produces an elusive modernity. It is one that incites a revolution and conceives the nation and yet at the same time exposes the limit of that revolution and nation because it supplements the colonial civilizing process: Why must a post-colony merely end up as a nation when it could be a more encompassing country, an inclusive archipelago? That said, this elusive modernity finds a way to belong to a domain beyond the typifications of nation, carving out its distinction by inhabiting the space of the international. This is the reason the discussion here extends to a locus outside the nation, which encroaches on the "region" that is Southeast

<sup>8</sup> Étienne Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, trans. P. Snowdon, London: Verso, 1998, 29.

<sup>9</sup> Aihwa Ong, "Scales of Exception: Experiments with Knowledge and Sheer Life in Tropical Southeast Asia," *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 29 (2008), 7.

<sup>10</sup> Simone Pinet, *Archipelagoes: Insular Fictions from Chivalric Romance to the Novel*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011, 37.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

Asia. By positing a relationship between the national and the non-national, the international is foregrounded as a more hospitable modernity that was built up as layers of defense to constantly calibrate the hegemony of the national, which cannot be the only future of the post-colony if it truly abides by the promise of a radically reworked modernity. The international is incrementally bred by a *naturaleza* that bears traces of the passage of a corpus, a body of work, an oeuvre of persons and things that may be deemed “modern” but only to the degree that it is post-colonial, refusing the colonial overdeterminations of the national and strongly placed to be at home with others, open to affinities, and keen on solidarities. The modernity of the international is a form of risk of repressing the distinctions of nation and nurturing a *naturaleza* borne in relationalities and intersubjectivities.

The international reflexively opens up the modern and exceeds its progressivist instinct, and as such articulates a calibrated form of modernism, the kind that is thrilled by the “new” and is simultaneously anxious about the “originary.” The “neo-ethnic” may be paradigmatic of its aesthetic, that is, it is resolutely fluent in the idiom of a supposedly authentic vernacular, which in itself is an invented tradition of the modern, and yet aspires to the idiosyncrasy of an acquired language to which it feels indebted and entitled. The modernism of the national is purposive, rigorous, almost singleminded, and assiduous in its fulfillment of identity, the integrity of its form. The modernism of the international, on the other hand, is distracted or distracting, sensitive to the afflictions and complicities of others, suspicious of containments and dualisms that reduce modernism into the representation of a coherent, exceptional volition. Thus, the succeeding discussion foregrounds instances in which these “distractions” are made intelligible in the guise of the “world,” of “people,” and of a myriad “self.”

## II. *The International in Polemical Texts*

At this point, the text shifts from the Philippine to another context, another level of the inter-nation. This is Southeast Asia, a geopolitical construction of colonialism, imperialism, and the Cold War that is oftentimes characterized as a region. Again, we ask if a region is anything but a locality of countries, which can only in the end be nations. Here, the international is fleshed out in three polemical texts. These texts are selected to evoke both the register of language and the discursive urgency of what is spoken to. The polemical is a salient aesthetic



that needs to be harnessed for its ability to insert fantasy into the description of the political. These texts had emerged from Southeast Asia or had shaped the relationship of Southeast Asia with the international.

1. Final Communiqué of Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia (1955).

The Asian-African Conference in Bandung was organized by Burma, Ceylon, India, Indonesia, and Pakistan, attended by 29 countries including Afghanistan, China, Ethiopia, Liberia, Libya, Sudan, South Vietnam, Yemen, among others. It brought together figures like Nasser of Egypt, Chou En-Lai of China, Sihanouk of Cambodia, and Nehru of India. It was a seminal moment for what would later be called Non-Aligned Movement in Belgrade in 1961 after a series of incipient initiations in India after the war.

- a. The Asian-African Conference took note of the fact that the existence of colonialism in many parts of Asia and Africa, in whatever form it may be, not only prevents cultural cooperation, but also suppresses the national cultures of the people.

Some colonial powers have denied their dependent peoples basic rights in the sphere of education and culture, which hampers the development of their personality and also prevents cultural intercourse with other Asian and African peoples.

This is particularly true in the case of Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, where the basic right of the people to study their own language and culture has been suppressed.

- b. The Asian-African Conference deplored the policies and practices of racial segregation and discrimination which form the basis of government and human relations in large regions of Africa and in other parts of the world. Such conduct is not only a gross violation of human rights, but also a denial of the fundamental value of civilization and the dignity of man.
- c. The Asian-African conference discussed the problems of dependent peoples and colonialism and the evils arising from subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation. The Conference agreed:

First, in declaring that colonialism in all its manifestations is an evil which should be speedily brought to an end;

Second, in affirming that the subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental rights.

Sukarno, the President of Indonesia said in his speech that: “This is the first intercontinental conference of colored peoples in the history of mankind.”<sup>12</sup> He talked of the Lifeline of Imperialism that “runs from the Straits of Gibraltar, through the Mediterranean, the Suez Canal, the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean, the South China Sea and the Sea of Japan. For most of that enormous distance, the territories on both sides of this lifeline were colonies, the peoples were unfree, their futures mortgaged to an alien system.”<sup>13</sup>

The Conference proved to be a critical initiative that sought to provide an alternative to the superpowers United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. In this particular citation, the bipolarity that a hegemonic international in the Cold War assumes is reorganized by way of a non-alignment that insists on an unrelenting critique of the colonial or coloniality as a fundamental basis of inhumanity. It is argued that the Bandung affair, which had precursors beginning in 1900 across different parts of the world, “constituted a foundational moment of the early postcolonial era.”<sup>14</sup> As a herald of a possible “geopolitical *communitas*” that was committed to the project of decolonization and emancipation, it also, however, “contained the existential predicaments of newfound sovereignty and the internal and external political claims and responsibilities that would soon challenge it.”<sup>15</sup> That the event took place in Indonesia is significant in light of the kind of modernity that had formed in the country. We might want to study, for instance, how the workshop model or the *sanggar* in the thirties, site of apprenticeship and peer-to-peer ideological discussion, would be rearticulated in the production of biennales, artist-initiated spaces, and archives, platforms that have been sustained in Indonesia more than anywhere else in Southeast Asia. The non-aligned formulation of a third moment may lead some scholars to spin the idea of a “non-aligned” modernism or cyber-

<sup>12</sup> George McTurman Kahin, *The Asian-African Conference Bandung, Indonesia, April 1955*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1956, 39.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-42.

<sup>14</sup> “Introduction,” in *Making Worlds After Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives*, ed. C. J. Lee, Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010, 3.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

netic socialism that merits further theoretical pursuit.<sup>16</sup> Finally, in the sphere of Southeast Asia within the ambit of the Pacific and the Third World, gatherings like the First Southeast Asian Art Conference and Competition in Manila in 1957 and The Asian Art Show in Fukuoka in 1979-1980, as well as the Sydney Biennale in 1979<sup>17</sup> and the Havana Biennial in 1989<sup>18</sup> are key moments in the long durée of the international and the lasting latitude of the Third World.

2. "Between Two Worlds," Imelda Marcos, First Lady and Governor of Metropolitan Manila, 1976 International Monetary Fund-World Bank Joint Annual Meeting, 1976, Manila.

- a. The Philippines is an archipelago of 7,100 islands slung between two mighty seas—the Pacific Ocean and the China Sea; two vast continents, America and Asia; two competing ideologies, capitalism and communism; indeed between two worlds.

For a long time we have been torn between the culture of the Orient, into which we were born, and that of the Occident, which held us in captivity for centuries. We were once the farthest outpost of Islam; we are now in the outer reaches of Christianity in Asia. Geography and history have conspired to place us at the crossroads of the world, constantly buffeted by the conflicting cross-currents of different religions, cultures, ideologies, political and economic systems.

You have come to our country at a most exciting time, though at a somewhat awkward stage, when we are negotiating the challenging transition from a traditional order to a progressive humanist society.

This new complex of buildings, erected on land reclaimed from the sea, stands in dramatic contrast to the slum areas which blight our city. The contrast of shrine and shanty symbolizes the shining future against our impoverished past.

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<sup>16</sup> See Armin Medosch, "Non-Aligned Modernism—the International Network and Art Movement New Tendencies (First Phase, 1961-1965)," paper presented at the conference Postwar Art Between the Pacific and the Atlantic 1945-1965, Munich 2014.

<sup>17</sup> See Anthony Gardner, Charles Green, "The Third Biennale of Sydney: 'White Elephant or Red Herring?'," *Humanities Research*, 19 (2/2013).

<sup>18</sup> See Rachel Weiss *et al.*, *Making Art Global (Part 1): The Third Havana Biennial 1989*, London: Afterall Books, 2011.

- b. Further, we have freed ourselves from the excesses of transplanted cultures. We have gone to our past and our roots, a rich indigenous culture that continues to flourish among our more than 85 national cultural tribes. Fortunately, a few years ago, we discovered the Tasadays—a tribe of Stone Age Filipinos hidden for centuries in the rain forests of Mindanao. In this we see our origins: the purity, the gentleness and the beauty of our land and people at the beginning of time.
- c. Last month, we assembled in Manila, an international conference of scientists to discuss how science and technology should be harnessed to cope with the problems of human survival. With the Philippine experiences as a frame of reference, no aspect of modern life escaped its scrutiny. From human habitat to sea-farming; from the population explosion to solar energy; from storm control to oceanography; from telemedicine to remote sensing.

In Imelda Marcos's speech, we see the intersection of three discourses that supported the vision of an international belonging: development, identity, and democracy. Imelda, the First Lady of Ferdinand Marcos who took office in 1965 and declared Martial Law in 1972, unreels a montage of transformation, of the past and the future colliding, or better to say, constellating in the present. While the Bandung meeting implied a realignment and a potential non-alignment, Imelda gestured towards some kind of synchrony with the world and at the same time asserted the distinction of the Philippines as it sought this synchrony, a recalibration of its hybridity within the international.

This engagement with the international may also reference an engagement with the avant-garde. This disposition to assimilate and appropriate western fine-art expression does not only produce mestizaje or hybridity but in many ways mastery, with the Philippine artist feeling entitled to the "western" and making such an entitlement an intimate part of its talent and temper. Such a process played out exceedingly well in the field of the arts that Imelda Marcos liberally advocated as evidenced in, among other endeavors, the building of a cultural center of brutalist internationalist design on reclaimed land; the curation of international art and local experimental art, including *musique concrète* broadcast through public radio; the commissioning of symphonies and chamber works; the establishment of the National Music Competitions for Young Artists; and the promotion of world-class virtuosi who could sing and play piano like natives of empire and compete with those born into the culture of the forms needing the

expression, from the polyphony of Palestrina to Chopin to Tchaikovsky. This schema complicates the notion of national identity and the process of indigenization or decolonization and unsettles the theory of mimicry as one of critique. Perhaps, the language of critique has to give way to a language of intimacy, of obligational reciprocity, of importuning rather than negating. In this light, the term "neo-ethnic," as suggested earlier, might be worth looking into as we analyze how this thing called the western, regarded as outside of the ethnic, is renewed from within because the ethnic is entitled to transform.

Another aspect of the avant-garde implicated in the life of the Cultural Center is the resistance itself to the institution, or to the centralization of culture under the auspices of the state. This comes by way of the performance of David Cortez Medalla at the opening of the Cultural Center in 1969. Medalla, who later moved to England and became well-known for his kinetic sculptures and took part in Harald Szeemann's exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form* in 1969 and in Documenta V in 1972, unfurled banners in the foyer of the building and staged an impromptu performance. He confronted security personnel; he talked to himself in his seat, annotating the gala presentation; and delivered a speech in front of the magnificent fountain outside after the ceremony. Medalla was disturbed by the "nerve-wracking fragmentation"<sup>19</sup> generated by the state policies of the Marcos government, and his intervention at the Cultural Center was a way of recovering some kind of nexus between him and others.

As Imelda Marcos was undertaking this cultural program, Ferdinand Marcos was trying to shift the Philippine foreign policy to some kind of non-alignment. For example, he opened embassies in Eastern Europe and initiated formal relations with China in 1975 and Soviet Russia in 1976. Right after the Vietnam War, the Philippines forged official ties with Vietnam in 1976.<sup>20</sup> In 1975, Marcos shaped a foreign policy prioritizing "ASEAN relations; relations with Socialist states, especially the Soviet Union and China; closer identification with the Third World; continuing beneficial relations with Japan; supporting Arab countries in their struggle for a just and enduring peace in the Middle East; and finding a new basis, 'compatible with the emerging realities in Asia, for a continuing

<sup>19</sup> Guy Brett, *Exploding Galaxies: The Art of David Medalla*, London: Kala Press, 1995, 83.

<sup>20</sup> Ricardo Jose, "The Philippines During the Cold War: Searching for Security Guarantees and Appropriate Foreign Policies, 1946-1986," in *Cold War Southeast Asia*, ed. M. H. Murfett, Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 2012, 78.

healthy relationship with the U.S.” According to a historian: “Marcos moved towards non-alignment, even with the U.S. bases still on Philippine soil.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, Imelda’s partly naïve, partly clever rhetoric sketches out the Cold War polarities of capitalism and socialism, colonial critique and international integration, as it deftly transacts the geopolitical enterprise.

Finally, there is a difference that could be gleaned in the way Imelda would envisage the world and the place of the Philippines in it from the way the architects of Bandung would. In 1948, Indonesian Prime Minister Hatta read a speech titled “Rowing Between Two Coral Reefs” and intoned the need to “become an object in the arena of international politics, but rather that we must continue to be a subject with the right to determine our [...] position [...] of a fully Independent Indonesia.”<sup>22</sup> His trope of two seemingly impenetrable coral reefs and his binarism of object and subject protract a Cold War imaginary, while Imelda’s “cross-currents” portend a more archipelagic world sphere.

3. “The Yan’an Forum in Literature and Art,” Mao Zedong, 1942.

- a. The first problem is: literature and art for whom?

This problem was solved long ago by Marxists, especially by Lenin. As far back as 1905 Lenin pointed out emphatically that our literature and art should “serve [...] the millions and tens of millions of working people.”

- b. Who, then, are the masses of the people? The broadest sections of the people, constituting more than 90 per cent of our total popular, are the workers, peasants, soldiers and urban petty bourgeoisie. Therefore, our literature and art are first for the workers, the class that leads the revolution. Secondly, they are for the peasants, the most numerous and most steadfast or our allies in the revolution. Thirdly, they are for the armed workers and peasants [...] and the other armed units of the people, which are the main forces of the revolutionary war. Fourthly, they are for the laboring masses of the urban petty bourgeoisie and for the petty

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-80.

<sup>22</sup> Samuel E. Crowl, “Indonesia’s Diplomatic Revolution: Lining Up for Non-Alignment, 1945-1955,” *Connecting Histories: Decolonization and the Cold War in Southeast Asia, 1945-1955*, Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009, 249-50.

bourgeois intellectuals, both of whom are also our allies in the revolution and capable of long-term co-operation with us.

The texts of the forum resonated with struggles in Southeast Asia against colonialisms and signaled the urgency of address premised on the people. Surely, here the international is translated as a collective struggle, informed by the ethical and the political. The international is, moreover, imbued with the socialist, the socialist international and reminds us of actually existing revolutions in the world even after 1989.

The production of manifestos in Southeast Asia in the seventies must be noted. Four such manifestos were crafted, and two of them referenced Mao's Ya'nan Forum lectures. These were the manifestos of Kaisahan in 1976 and The Artists' Front of Thailand in 1975.<sup>23</sup> These texts represented a kind of artistic practice that critically negotiated the demands of national identity, western art history, political action, and local values. It is possible that their strong affirmation of Mao's commitments profoundly imbricated them with socialist movements and their armed revolutions as in the Philippines, or modulated the persuasion of Buddhist values in everyday life as in Thailand.

The manifesto from Bangkok begins with the existence of historical inequity:

For thousands of years, "small groups of big people" have taken power over politics and economics of a country or an area, have used their "power" to frighten or hurt and take advantage of "big groups of little people" The "small groups of big people" waged wars against each other, but have deceived the "big groups of little people" into fighting to the death for their parties. The "small groups of big people" have formed constitutions without an agreement of the "big groups of little people."<sup>24</sup>

And the manifesto from Manila proposes a program:

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<sup>23</sup> For excerpts of these manifestos and a more in-depth discussion of this subject, see Patrick Flores, "First Person Plural: The Manifestos of the 1970s in Southeast Asia," in *Global Studies: Mapping Contemporary Art and Culture*, eds. Hans Belting *et al.*, Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2012, 224-271.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

We realize that our search will be meaningless if it does not become a collective experience, an experience that is understood and shared by the broadest number of people. In its beginnings, art was not the isolated act that it is now; it was as necessary, as integral, a part of the people's lives as the knowledge of when to plant.

For us, therefore, the question "for whom is art?" is a crucial and significant one. And our experiences lead us to the answer that art is for the masses. It must not exist simply for the pleasures of the few who can afford it. It must not degenerate into the pastime of a few cultists [...].

We shall therefore develop an art that not only depicts the life of the Filipino people but also seeks to uplift their condition. We shall develop an art that enables them to see the essence, the patterns behind the scattered phenomena and experience of our times.<sup>25</sup>

It is also important to recognize the idea that socialism may have actually fostered the international, partly because of the internalized subjectivity of workers as workers of the world, and of the primordial character of the revolution. It is maintained, too, that Moscow had been a cosmopolis. Boris Groys is of the mind that Russians thought themselves "international." When the Soviet Union was dissolved, Russians became Russians.<sup>26</sup> In Documenta V, the Filipino artist David Medalla proposed a work under the banner of the Artists Liberation Front and the slogan "Socialist Art Through Revolution" and exhorted all the "progressive artists all over the world" to intertwine their practice with the "practice of the revolution" and with the "peoples of the world...the great masses who are fighting for liberation." He thought that his "participatory propulsions" would be realized at higher levels through the wisdom of the masses, quoting Mao who believed that "the masses have boundless creative power."<sup>27</sup>

190

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*; and Patrick Flores, "Social Realism: The Turns of a Term in the Philippines," *Afterall*, 34 (Autumn/Winter/2013).

<sup>26</sup> Boris Groys, "The Thaw: Soviet and Eastern European Art before and after the Death of Stalin," paper presented at the conference Postwar Art Between the Pacific and the Atlantic 1945-1965, Munich 2014.

<sup>27</sup> David Medalla, Statement for Documenta V Catalogue, Kassel 1972, 197.



The idea of the international may be productively reflected upon by revisiting the concept of the colonial and the post-colonial afterlife and the post-colonial promise. From this reconsideration, we may be able to more sharply facet the angle of the national and its inclinations outward across a gamut of terms: the international, the translocal, the neo-ethnic and the polyethnic, the global, the transnational, the worldly, the cosmopolitan, the polytropic. The process of walking through the colonial and the post-war as this essay has tried to accomplish is instructive to the degree that it infuses people and things, texts and events, with agency in parts of the world that have been portrayed as peripheries but figure here as provinces instead, in the sense that they are bodies of discipline and knowledge "firmly rooted in essence" though may be "errant in form."<sup>28</sup>

The trope of the international lends to a deconstructive procedure and yet also splices a circuit away from the dialectic of the national and a multitude of its repressions, on the one hand, and of the unity of an economic and political "order," on the other. It is perhaps the polysemy of the prefix *inter* that suffers the condition so that it could adumbrate a space that is not an alternative. It is a melancholy and exhilarating space, instilling the sadness and frisson of belonging. And it is a reciprocal constituency of equivalent, entitled, and eccentric others. Such a constituency of "animate" others should, moreover, open up into lush diversities of species and histories as we inevitably revisit the exotic and the tropical, or to risk a theoretical category, the Philippine.

In terms of historicizing the inter-nation, we might want to look back on the post-war era through the eighties within particular art worlds to understand the various ways by which relationships between nations were shaped in light of the forces that had sought to gain ascendancy, from post-independence nation-states to a sequence of wars from the Pacific War, the Vietnam War, and the Cold War; the visionaries who cognitively mapped culture and the people as a totality like Mao and Imelda; and of course, collectives and the world makers within them from Bandung and beyond, this *banwa* from forest to island.

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<sup>28</sup> José Lezama Lima. "Baroque Curiosity," in *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest*, eds. L. P. Zamora, M. Kaup, Durham: Duke University Press, 2010, 213.