



The First Ctrl+P Journal/Biennale of Contemporary Art: An Institutent Biennale

The first *Ctrl+P Journal/Biennale of Contemporary Art* is a zero-funded online-biennale consisting of seven PDF exhibitions developed by eight curators and organizers, and one proposal for a “PDF pavilion” by two critical theorists. Eighty participants are exhibiting in this biennale. Unthemed, its focus is the exploration of the potentialities of the online Ctrl+P Journal of Contemporary Art (ctrlp--artjournal.org) as a critical site for biennale-making.¹ Founded in 2021, the second year of Covid, it is also a proposal for a possible sustainable future-pandemics biennale model. The publisher of the e-journal and the self-appointed artistic director of the biennale, I invited the curators and theorists to make full use of what a hypermedia exhibition provides.

A very personal project, *Ctrl+P Journal/Biennale of Contemporary Art* is a coalescence of the objectives of my major artistic, curatorial and online publishing works of institutional critique produced in the past three decades with postmodern parody as my modality of critique. I have parodied, thus critiqued, the following institutions: the art gallery, the art museum, the franchising of art museums, the art archive, the art consultancy, the art auction, the large-scale international art exhibition and the contemporary art journal. It is therefore necessary to first write at great length (culling from my writings)² on this critical body of work to establish this biennale in terms of where it is coming from and how this body of work led me to gain agency to self-institute the *Ctrl+P Journal/Biennale of Contemporary Art* (Ctrl+P J/B) with the hegemonic biennale as its object of critique.

On my critical works that include my involvement in biennales *Scapular Gallery Nomad, the Museum of Mental Objects and the instituent*

In 1989, I resigned as museum director of the erstwhile Contemporary Art Museum of the Philippines, the most well-endowed, thus the most powerful contemporary art museum in the Philippines then. Having experienced the full force of this institution and confronted with the realities of artists, who for their legitimation, are by and large dependent on tremendous amount of resources expended by exhibiting institutions, I understood

artists as hardly having any agency to make art outside or critical of the imperatives of such heavily instrumentalized institutions. I experienced a gnawing “dis-ease” with the monolithic, co-opting, confining, centralized, exclusionary and structuralizing art institution. Thus marked the beginning of my disengagement with the inescapably institutionalized production of art and my crisis of faith in art as worthy of my vocation. I fled the institution. Seven years of general malaise and a serious visitation from a chronic illness ensued. I vowed never to make art again.

In his essay “Constitutive Effects: Techniques of the Curator,” critic and curator Simon Sheikh argues that if we are not happy in the artworld we are in,

...we will have to produce other exhibitions: other subjectivities and other imaginaries. All exhibition making is the making of a public... 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...the formats of exhibition making” (182-183).

Sheikh also refers to Cornelius Castoriadis, author of *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1975) who posits that “Society and institutions are as much fictional as functional. Institutions are part of symbolic networks, and as such they are not fixed or stable, but constantly articulated through projection and praxis” (183). Interesting to note that nearly three decades later, curator Carlos Basualdo postulated that the biennale is an “unstable institution” (124).

Providentially, from my crises and despair, came an epiphany: the act of creation was itself to be the act of self-healing (bodily and from my crisis of faith in my own agency in relation to my dis-ease with the institution of art). From my crises was birthed *Scapular Gallery Nomad*, an art gallery I made out of cloth, curated, wore and performed daily for five years. Patterned after the brown scapular worn by Catholics as a devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel, *Scapular Gallery Nomad* was a daily devotion to art. It was an imagining of different publics, different notions of stranger relationality; it was a different mode of address, a different format of exhibition making. It was a realization of a tenable subject position in relation to structures of power. It was a projection and a praxis. It is my foundational work of institutional critique, precisely the kind of art practice that calls into crisis the institution of art.

In 2005, Andrea Fraser, a second wave institutional critique practitioner wrote that artists “who in their very efforts to escape

the institution of art, have driven its expansion [...]. But we never escape it” (*Critique* 282) – the case of institutional critique (IC) eventually being institutionalized. In the same year, the research project Transform headed by Gerald Raunig, started to investigate the practices of IC that had gone beyond the two earlier phases. The project reflected on the “new forms of the organization of critical art institutions” and how the practice “can be made more productive in the sense of emancipatory policies” (Raunig and Ray xiii). Raunig advocated:

[Institutional critique] must link up with other forms of critique both within and outside the art field [...]. Against the background of this kind of transversal exchange among forms of critique – but also without naively imagining spaces somehow free from domination and institutions – institutional critique needs to be rethought as a critical attitude and as what I call an ‘instituent practice’ (Raunig and Ray 3-4).

A practice that “does not oppose the institution, but does flee from institutionalization and structuralization,” (Raunig *Instituting*) tropes to acts of emancipation include self-governing, “nomadism, desertion, destitution, withdrawal and treason to...the deliberations and actualizations of ‘institutions of exodus’” (Raunig and Ray xvi). These instituent practices, now considered the third wave of IC, are “not solely actualized as fundamental critique of institutions but rather as a permanent process of instituting” (Raunig *Instituent* 4). Exemplary of this process are the Occupy and Decolonize this Place movements which are continuously “reclaiming the institute...an interest in changing the governing structures from within rather than a critical denouncement of their power structures” (Mestre).

A postmodern parody of the white cube, *Scapular Gallery Nomad* (SGN) was the beginning of my emancipatory practice; it is the foundation of my instituent praxis. Author of *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon argues that postmodernism is a “fundamentally contradictory enterprise”:

...its art forms and (its theory) at once use and abuse, install then destabilize convention in parodic ways, self-consciously pointing to both their own inherent paradoxes and provisionality, and of course to their critical or ironic re-reading of the art of the past...postmodernist art offers a new model for mapping the borderland between art and the world, a model that works from a position within both and yet not totally within either, a model that is profoundly implicated in, yet still capable of criticizing, that which it seeks to describe (*Poetics* 23).

Hutcheon calls this subject position “ex-centric,” of being “inside yet outside, complicitous yet critical” (*Poetics* 73). As to parody, she

considers it as “a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversions” or a form of “repetition with a critical distance” (Hutcheon *Parody* 6). With this position of paradox, of being inside and outside, the form “postmodern art often takes is that of parody – the intertextual mode that is paradoxically an authorized transgression, for its ironic difference is set at the very heart of similarity” (Hutcheon *Poetics* 66). Further, the condition of “[all] cultural and artistic productions,” since they “can be viewed as texts having interdisciplinary connections with each other” (Zengin 302), “intertextuality may also be used evaluatively, distinguishing texts which attempt to cover up their intertextual nature from those which acknowledge and display it” (Heath 259).

Therefore, as an intertextual parody, SGN was a recoding of the scapular, the apron worn by monastic orders for farm work and the scapular of the Virgin Mary into a daily votive exhibition space. SGN also parodied Duchamp’s *boite-en-valise* with the art container now worn and exhibiting original works by other artists. I also cross-referenced it to Tuyoshi Ozawa’s *Nasubi Gallery*, a milk box worn like a ruck-sack. He and I even exhibited in each other’s galleries. And we both performed them at the blockbuster exhibition *Cities on the Move* where curators Hans Ulrich Obrist and Hou Hanru referred to them as art spaces on the move. Obrist once curated the Nanomuseum, a folding picture frame placed in his shirt-pocket. Nimble and nomadic, SGN was performed anytime and everywhere. It was not a monolithic space. The works exhibited were not in the scale of the spectacular. Writing on SGN as a series of ironic inversions critical of the white cube, I referred mainly to Brian O’Doherty’s *Inside the White Cube, The Ideology of the Gallery Space*.

Literary scholar Michèle Hannoosh, writing on the essentially reflexive function of parody points also to the transformative aspect of the form: “a parody must even allow for a critique of itself such as it has performed on the original [...]. Parody mocks and transforms, undermines and renews [...]. In rebounding upon itself...parody ensures that the tradition it revises will continue beyond itself” (116). Therefore as a mode of auto-reflexivity through ironic recoding/distancing, parody has afforded artists a critical means “of emancipation” (Hutcheon *Parody* 35) from the original, the single source, or the object of one’s critique.

Indeed in 2002, writer Matt Price and I enacted an auto-critique of SGN by instituting and becoming the *Museum of Mental Objects* (MoMO) ourselves. Ten years later, furthering my parodic line of flight, I have in turn parodied MoMO with *DIY MoMO*, thereby

franchising/de-centering the museum into other bodies with the use of the [DIY MoMO Manual](#). I also workshop anyone who wishes to become a MoMO using this manual. *DIY MoMO* is a parody of the franchising of museums such as the Guggenheim. The human body as museum is a ludic parody of museums. A work for life, MoMO is again a series of ironic inversions. Artists whisper artworks to MoMO, who recites them back to the audience. No documentation is allowed during the performance. MoMO depletes the art object of all of its commodifiable aspects. MoMO of course is a parody of MoMA and a citation of Malraux's *Musée Imaginaire*, strangely translated as "museum without walls." Creating MoMO with Price, we first thought of calling it the Invisible Museum or Museum of Implants. Obrist suggested I look into Peter Fleissig's *Nvisible Museum*. He exhibits his art collection mostly in people's homes. Appropriating Thomas McEvilley's phrase "mental objects," (53) a term he used to describe James Lee Byars' work, Matt and I finally arrived at calling ourselves the Museum of Mental Objects.

As parodies, as ironic inversions of art galleries and museums, SGN, MoMO and DIY MoMO all expose the structures and logic of these institutions. They are self-governing, decentering and emancipating institutes of exodus. They are works of the ex-centric who has an instituent attitude; she is inside yet outside, complicitous yet critical. Finally, "parody's ideology as authorized transgression, (it can be seen as both conservative and revolutionary) makes it an apt mode of criticism for postmodernism, itself paradoxical in its conservative installing and then radical contesting of conventions" (Hutcheon *Poetics* 129). Hence, parody is also an apt mode of critique for me as an ex-centric artist whose goal is to have agency to self-determine her subject position in relation to structures of power through a practice that takes flight away from institutionalization and structuralization.

The Hypertext of HerMe(s), an intertextual self-writing

George Landow, author of *Hypertext 3.0*, states the obvious: "hypertext...is a fundamentally intertextual system [... having] the capacity to emphasize intertextuality in a way that page-bound text in books cannot" (55). For we now know experientially, and now take for granted, that hypertext in its de-centering/re-centering way of presenting information with the use of hyperlinks, provides the author and reader an open-ended textuality that is intertextual, multivocal, polysemic, polyphonic and rhizomatic (non-linear, multi-linear, non-sequential, multi-sequential, non-hierarchical, interlaced, networked, and cross-referenced) (Landow 2006).

My autobiography *The Hypertext of HerMe(s)* was published in 2014 as an e-book by KT Press, the publisher of the erstwhile *n.paradoxa, international feminist art journal*. It is a critique of the institution of discursive production of self-identity constructed as the “subject” of language. In autobiographical discourse, “narrative is itself the source of the self’s identity” making identities not separate “from how they are represented, so that what we think of as true or historically given, is really an ideological construct; in other words fiction” (Anderson 96).

To parody this institution, I produced an auto-theoretical self-writing³ using hypertext with 1,160 hyperlinks, half of which are linked footnotes. It is written in two distinct modes of address, the lyrical and the exegetic. There are six exegetic chapters with 333 footnotes. The one chapter written in the lyrical mode, “The Book of HerMe(s),” has 128 footnotes with a good many having more than three paragraphs. Here, I extensively cited and quoted the works of Hélène Cixous (who I considered my writing guide then) and those who theorized her work. Focusing less on self-truths and the unfolding of my life events, and more on the intertextual construction of my own subjectivity, this self-inscription constructed from my own writings and from those of others, overtly acknowledges and displays its method as a writing working through other writings. This “overt use of multiple intertext – ‘suggests’ a textualized refusal to express either a singular subjectivity or single meaning” (Hutcheon *Poetics* 167). To repeat, if narrative is itself the source of one’s identity, then the overt intertextuality of my self-writing signifies my agency to self-determine my self-identity beyond the conventions of autobiographical production by referencing critical theory and employing a form of writing that is non-linear, decentered, multivocal and rhizomatic.

The first chapter of my autobiography, “The Book of HerMe(s),” a meditation on my lifework, was inspired by *The Book of Promethea*, Cixous’ meditation on love. Writing in the lyrical mode, I extensively quoted and cited Cixous’ radically intertextual work. I also mimicked and transposed the formal patterns of her phrases and paragraphs on mine and mimicked her use of word-plays and complex puns. The word HerMe(s) for example, is constructed to make obvious the words Her, Me and the plural me – Me(s), thus creating in name a female Hermes (the multirole border-crossing soul guide and messenger god), which also refers to Cixous’ idea of the feminine plural I. More crucial, I followed her urging to write from the position of the multiple I, a subject position from whence to resist, write against and emancipate myself from

received suppressive/oppressive ideas, roles, histories, traditions and institutions of master narratives such as autobiography which “provides ready-made identities to subjects” (Smith and Watson 21) and are “complicit in reproducing dominant ideologies” (Smith and Watson 22).

The critical rethinking of autobiography opened up options for women to write and construct an alternative self in the act of self-writing and to use anti-autobiographical forms that are “eclectically ‘errant’ [...thereby engaging] in culturally disruptive writing practices” (Friedman 76). Cixous believes “it is only through linguistic changes that social changes are possible. Thus Cixous encourages women to write themselves; that is, women should write their bodies and their desires, which have always been written and discussed by men” (Sellers). Barbara Page, author of “Women Writers and the Restive Text, Feminism, Experimental Writing, and Hypertext,” echoes Cixous by quoting Ellen Friedman and Miriam Fuchs who consider “the woman in the text [...being] also an effect of the textual practice of breaking the patriarchal fictional forms; the radical forms – non-linear, non-hierarchical, and decentering – are themselves, a way of writing the feminine” (qtd. in Page 111). To Page, this claim is “itself radical.” Women who write in hypertext,

...can produce themselves – as new beings or as ones previously unspoken [...]. Their restiveness with the fixity of print signifies [...their] aim to rend the surface of language and to reshape it into forms more hospitable to historical lives of women and to an aesthetic of the will and desire of a self-apprehended female body that is an end unto itself and not simply instrumental (112).

Hence, just as the institution of autobiography is a powerful discursive site where I as subject is constructed, so is the institution of art a powerful site where my work is constructed as it is read and valued as a “social sign entangled with other signs in systems productive of value, prestige and power” (Foster 100); and also analyzed “in relation to the structure of the field and to the specific agents involved” (Bourdieu 58) – the condition of artists struggling in relation to other social agents in the cultural field for subject positions establishing them in the art world. Thus, my use of hypertext befits a discursive modality of constructing my art and my subject identity as an ex-centric artist.

The online Ctrl+P Journal of Contemporary Art

In 2006, critical art publications in the Philippines were almost non-existent due to lack of funding.⁴ In response to this crisis, *Ctrl+P Journal of Contemporary Art* (Ctrl+P J) was published online as a zero-

funded project made possible by the generosity of everyone writing and working gratis. Inadvertently, this also allowed the journal to engage beyond the local. In my paper “How We Have Represented Ourselves as Ctrl+P Thus Far” delivered at the 2008 International Symposium on Electronic Art, I presented the journal as enabling the presence of minor and not-so-central voices in the crucial project of meaning production and circulation in the era of globalization. Ctrl+P J is a critique of highly capitalized art journals.

In [Ctrl+P J's 2008 survey issue on Chinese contemporary art](#), I framed the survey in light of the field of cultural production as site of struggle over discursive formations and closures by dominant forces and by cultural producers marginalized and excluded precisely because of their project to resist, contest, evade capture and assimilation by such dominant forces. Oppositional-meaning making is now the lot and responsibility and perhaps a fatal space for those who continue to be consigned to the margins. Rejecting assimilation or eluding capture means devising a whole new language of resistance. How is this language to be shaped? Who will now speak from the margins when margins and centers are already a too-appropriated site? Taking part in the survey, Saskia Sassen wrote on globalization, digital media, and the making of presence of invisible voices and conditions. Below, I quote extensively from her essay, “Narrating Unsettlement” since it is applicable to Ctrl+P J as instituent work:

...what concerns me here is a set of deeper, structural changes that can be quite ambiguous or diffuse, and difficult to grasp – a domain that feeds what we experience as unsettlement. This is a domain that cannot be mediated via “design.” Contestatory and transgressive practices, whether by artists or activists, are one bridge into this domain – an in-between space that is in principle underspecified, ambiguous, under-narrated. Artists and activists can and are doing some interesting work here. This is a type of work that might be political, but not necessarily in the narrow sense of the word. Rather, I am thinking of a kind of politics that has to do with “making present” of giving voice to actors and conditions usually rendered invisible. Often art can make present that which is not clear to the naked eye in ways that rational discourse cannot. [One] type of instance is that of new media artists using computer centered network technologies to represent and/or enact politico-artistic projects. What I want to capture here is a very specific feature: the possibility of constructing 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.

One of the outcomes of these contributions is uses – ranging from political to ludic–of technology that subvert corporate globalization. We are seeing the formation of alternative networks, projects, and spaces. Emblematic is, perhaps, that the metaphor of ‘hacking’ has been dislodged from its specialised technical discourse and become part of everyday life. In the face of a predatory regime of intellectual property rights we see the ongoing influence of the free software and open source movement. Indymedia gain terrain even as global media conglomerates dominate just about all mainstream mediums. The formation of new geographies of power that bring together elites from the global south and north find their obverse in the work of such collectives as Raqs/Sarai that destabilize the centre/periphery divide.

Such an outcome/creation is to be distinguished from the common assumption that if ‘it’ is global it is cosmopolitan. The types of global forms that concern me here are what I like to refer to, partly as a provocation, as non-cosmopolitan forms of globality. Through the Internet (or, more generally, internetworking) local initiatives and projects can become part of a global network without losing the focus on the specific of the local actor/project/imaginary. It enables a new type of cross-border work, one centered in multiple localities yet intensely connected digitally. [Works] that can develop networks for circulating not only information but also political work and strategies.

In an effort to synthesize this diversity of subversive interventions into the space of global capitalism, I use the notion of counter-geographies of globalization: these interventions are deeply imbricated with some of the major dynamics constitutive of globalization yet are not part of the formal apparatus of global firms and global markets nor of their aims. These counter-geographies thrive on the intensifying of transnational and trans-local networks, the development of communication technologies which easily escape conventional surveillance practices, and so on. These counter-geographies are dynamic and changing in their locational features.

The narrating, giving shape, and making present involved in digitized environments assume very particular meanings when they get mobilized to represent/enact local specificities in a global context. Beyond the kinds of on-the-ground work involved in these struggles, new media artists and activists – the latter often artists–have been key actors in these developments, whether it is through tactical media [or] indymedia.

This is one of the key forms of critical practice and politics that the new media can make possible: A politics of the local with a big difference – these are localities that are connected with each other across a region, a country or the world. Because the network is global does not mean that it all has to happen at the global level (10-12).

Needless to say, the *Ctrl+P Journal/Biennale of Contemporary Art* has the same ethos as the *Ctrl+P Journal of Contemporary Art*. In hiatus for the past five years, hopefully, the e-journal’s conflation with a biennale will reinstitute it into a hybrid enterprise with a healthier longevity.

From off-line to online, the Ctrl+P J/B as a critical hyper-discursive biennale

Curating online

I started co-curating online in 2002 with *xsXL, Expanding Art*, an exhibition of works that were sent small in size from Manila but expanded once installed in Sculpture Square in Singapore. Then in 2005, with no funding but relying mostly on the resources of the participants, I co-curated *600 Images/60 Artists/6 Curators/6 Cities: Bangkok/Berlin/London/Los Angeles/Manila/Saigon*, an exhibition of 600 photographs by 60 artists, 6 curators and simultaneously held in 6 different cities. I conceived and was lead-curator of both exhibitions which were curated entirely online. For *600 Images*, the formula for co-curation was simple: I invited five artist-friends with each one of them curating the works of ten artists, each producing ten black and white photographs, resulting in 100 images from each city. Including the 100 images I curated here in Manila, the exhibition generated a total of 600 images. Produced in the time when the sharing of large digital files was not yet possible for most online users, it required the curators to send their 100 images (stored in DVDs) to each other via courier or by post. The 600 images were printed for exhibition from these files. Activating our network of friends, we were able to hold the exhibitions in a bar, a hotel, an old brewery-gallery, a museum and two café-galleries. *600 Images* was actually a precursor to Ctrl+P J in terms of my self-initiated/instituted work that allowed individuals who have no access to or have no need for financial institutional support (with this as basic to their *raison d'être*) in order to take part in the crucial project of producing and circulating meanings in this era of globalization. *600 Images* was a critique of highly-centralized/-capitalized international large-scale exhibitions.

My conviction that Ctrl+P J/B1 was possible without any funding and relying completely on the resources of all those involved, is based on my experience of co-curating *600 Images* online with very minimal problems. Ctrl+P J/B is modeled after *600 Images* with regard to the biennale's organizational format.

My participation in biennales

On the other hand, my experience with biennales was problematic. In my participation in two major biennales, my works were neither executed nor accepted by the curators as specifically proposed. With *Scapular Gallery Nomad Portable Archive-in-Progress*, my work at the 2002 Gwangju Biennale, the archive did not progress. To mark the end of five years of performing SGN, I installed the open-archive with some folders empty of materials. I requested the curators of

the biennale for 23 young Korean artists to perform SGN galleries, with each gallery exhibiting a work by one of the 23 biennale artists who contributed to the project such as Teching Hsieh, AES+F, and Wilhelm Sasnal. These artists were to go about performing the gallery in the city everyday, collecting materials the audience saw fit to include in the archive in response to the artwork. At the end of each day, they were to bring the materials back to the exhibition hall and place them inside the empty archive folders. I was not provided these artists.

For the 2019 Singapore Biennale, I proposed *The Other Biennale Archive: Archiving Biennale Artists Openly, Collectively*. I asked for archival boxes for each of the artists in the biennale where the audience would place/donate materials relevant to any of the artists. But I was told the gallery did not have the “real estate” for the work nor the staff to mind it. Undeterred and inspired by the trope of the archive as compost, I eventually asked for a huge rubbish bin where the audience could simply dump the materials. I revised the title of the work to *The Other Biennale Archive, Archiving Biennale Artists Collectively, Openly, Evolving to DUMP (Detritus, Unused Materials, Past/Present)*. This proposal was also not approved for the reason that all publicity materials had already been printed, a reason that didn’t make sense to me. In the end, I decided to just have my email conversation with the curator assigned to me printed and installed on the wall as my work. In hindsight, perhaps the outcome of the near-impasse (at some point I proposed to withdraw from the biennale) was befitting of a conceptual artist’s work as it was an articulation – a representation in the written word of my response, “to the budgetary, structural and administrative limitations within the biennale framework” (Goh 66) as curator Goh Sze Ying concluded, to which I will add as more to the point, of my response to institutional constraints. Goh further commented, “Upon closer inspection, the email threads over a period of eight months reveal what is typically obscured from public knowledge, outlining the nature of artistic process and the inner workings of biennale-making alike; the end results are at times coerced into shape by a lack of time and resources” (67). An archive produced by the audience is archiving not from above but from below. The two archives were meant to be critiques of the institution of archives and archiving in terms of authorial production, control and consecrating functions. Instead, they ended up as critiques of the institution of biennales which in the final analysis are a larger project.

The Other Manila Biennale

As early as 2017, I started thinking about the possibility of making a biennale without any funding and relying solely on the resources of all the participants. *The Ctrl+P Journal/Biennale of Contemporary Art* evolved from *The Other Manila Biennale* (TOMB), an attempt to establish an other biennale in 2021. As the self-appointed artistic director, I invited five artists and one curator as members of the curatorium. With no funding, our task was to embed the biennale within a two-kilometer radius from my home, based on the fact that I don't usually leave home to see art unless it is within a two-kilometer radius from where I live: a mixed-use area at the heart of the City of Manila of high-rise condominiums and hotels, many small businesses, karaoke bars, drugstores, money-changers, tattoo studios, massage parlors, a lot of small restaurants, one major shopping mall, three hospitals, patches of houses, a good number of banks including the Central Bank of the Philippines; and other public buildings such as the Philippine General Hospital, the Supreme Court, National Museum of Fine Arts, National Museum of Natural History and the National Library. There are also historic sites such Intramuros, the walled city of Manila declared as the capital of the Spanish colony in 1571. The first Manila Biennale was held in Intramuros in 2018. In front of the condominium where I live is the US Embassy and Manila's children's museum. A stone's throw away is Rizal Park, a 58-hectare historic park which is twenty-percent of the total area where the biennale was to be situated. It was here where the Philippine national hero Jose Rizal, found guilty of conspiracy, sedition, and rebellion against our colonizers, was executed in 1896. Some areas of the Port of Manila are adjacent to the park. About forty-percent of the two-kilometer radius area of the biennale is Manila Bay. TOMB was going to be located sixty-percent on land and forty-percent on the sea.

I envisioned the biennale as an organism of many parts installed and performed within different symbiotic relationships with many of the enterprises in this very dense area of the city. Will they be relationships of mutualism where both organisms experience mutual benefits? Or parasitism where one organism benefits at the expense of another organism. Perhaps relationships of parabiosis where both organisms occupy the same place, but do not interfere with each other. Or commensalism where one organism benefits while the other is neither harmed nor helped. We envisioned endless possible works and expected enormous challenges considering we would have had very little control over the found already-inhabited-other-than-art spaces and over a good number of people to negotiate and collaborate with.

The biennale was originally offered a generous funding from a non-commercial art space⁵ where in 2018, I did a three-month performance art installation of my self-archive of 48 years. The place is a 20-minute walk from my home, certainly within the two kilometer radius of TOMB. I was commissioned by the directors of the art space to develop an exhibition as a way of growing my archive. I had a few ideas in the past of producing a biennale and with TOMB, all conditions were met to realize one. But in the end, we had to decline the funding. Our thinking then was, if TOMB were truly an instituent biennale, it had to be independent of any institution. For the work to be auto-critical, it must have the freedom, to use Andrea Fraser's words, to "critique the uses to which artworks are put: the economic and political interests they serve" (*Highlights* 56). As a critical self-instituting project, TOMB was precisely about problematizing the production of a biennale. It must be a critique of the biennale in terms of the ideologies biennales serve. Working with an institution therefore, would not have allowed us the autonomy to have this criticality. We needed the autonomy to develop and practice a critical way of producing a biennale that will be accountable only to itself for its own making and its own failures. TOMB was going to be a postmodern parody of the institutionalizing and structuralizing monolithic biennale. Or, relying completely on the resources of all the participants and with the enormity of its demands, it might have been just a project of sheer folly.

Since TOMB was not possible in the years of the Covid pandemic, an online biennale was ideal in the times of forced isolation. Nearly all of the businesses around me were closed. The Philippines had one of the strictest and longest lockdown in the world. Thus, also born out of crisis not unlike the Ctrl+P artjournal, an off-line biennale turned into a biennale online. I invited a new group of curators and rather than having a very local biennale, it was now possible to have international participation. Now a larger project, nothing less than the hegemonic biennale became its object of critique.

Parody, intertextuality, hypertextuality, hypermediality, criticality and Ctrl+P J/B

In discussing Ctrl+P J/B as a "hyper-discursive" biennale (a word I coined based on the term hyper-discourse⁶ and on the particularities of this biennale), I will interchangeably use the terms hypertext and hypermedia since the latter is only an extension of the former. With hypermedia, more forms of information beyond the text such as graphics, still images, video, and audio are linked together by a hypertext program. Located in cyberspace, the biennale is freed

from the tyranny of real space and the very commodifiable art object. Another kind of freeing that happens with “hypertext (and hypermedia) intertextuality [...is the] opening up, [...the] freeing one to create and perceive interconnections, obviously occur[ring]” (Landow 55). Landow concludes that with “intertextuality, attention is shifted from “the triad constituted by author/work/tradition to another constituted by text/discourse/culture” (55) since as Thais Morgan suggests,

[intertextuality] as a structural analysis of texts in relation to the larger system of signifying practices or uses of signs in culture, [... replaces] the evolutionary model of literary history with a structural or synchronic model of literature as a sign system. The most salient effect of this strategic change is to free the literary text from psychological, sociological, and historical determinisms, opening it up to an apparently infinite play of relationships” (qtd. in Landow 55).

As a critique of the hegemonic biennale, Ctrl+P J/B fittingly uses both parody and hypertext for their fundamental and explicit intertextuality toward the production of a hyper-discursive exhibition. Both are also emancipatory means of producing an instituent biennale whose aim is to flee from institutionalization and structuralization. Writing on biennales of resistance, Ranjit Hoskote, critic and co-curator of the 2008 Gwangju Biennale, considers that eventually a biennale is “a discursive environment: a theater that allows for the staging of arguments, speculations, and investigations concerning the nature of our shared, diversely veined, and demanding contemporary condition” (308). Certainly, as a hypermedia that conflates an e-journal, a biennale and an exhibition catalogue into one, Ctrl+P J/B is literally a hyper-discursive site arguing for a biennale resistant to neoliberal hegemonic forces.

Panos Kompatiaris, author of *The Politics of Contemporary Art Biennales, Spectacles of Critique, Theory and Art*, observes that “Along with [...the] tendency toward education, a parallel trend has also been made visible in contemporary art discourse since the end of the 1990s”:

a drive to discover a “new emancipatory potential” through the articulations of cultural producers, a potential capable of pointing toward new ontologies that aspire to decenter “the common *capitalocentric* vision” (von Osten, 2010, p. 7), or as Mark Fisher has recently put it the “business ontology” (Fisher, 2009), which largely informs the mental framework of neoliberalism of Hardt’s and Negri’s *Empire* (2000) [...]. In fact, the last decade has seen several editions of contemporary art biennials conceiving themselves as educational laboratories and sites where discursive and dialogical models come to be tightly connected

with political utterances most usually articulated in opposition to the dominant neoliberal hegemonic orders (79-80).

Discourses on the hegemonic biennale

In 2020, the online journal *On Curating* published a 552-page anthology on “[Contemporary Art Biennials – Our Hegemonic Machines in States of Emergency](#).” Issuing from a conference of the same title, the journal refers to one of the aims of the conference: “to potentially refresh the biennial format.” They argue:

not much has changed in the last twenty years: the premise of the conference then was to critique biennials as an instrument of imaginary reproduction of national or regional identities, or at least with close ties to national and international funding bodies with their own ‘soft power’ agendas. Still, newly founded biennials are considered as vehicles for city branding, modernity, democratization, and internationalization, often initiated with an urge to show off economic, political, and social development prowess and to create new cultural spheres where translations of cultural knowledge may potentially occur. Nevertheless, biennials are, as the political theorist Oliver Marchart has remarked, big hegemonic machines. They make proposals about how to understand the world in which we live – locally and globally – and how to be in the world as a subject (Kolb et al. 9).

In this anthology, Lara van Meeteren and Bart Wissink cite key writings in recent years on the “political nature of biennales...awash with references to hegemony”:

Oliver Marchart...discusses hegemonic shifts regarding Eurocentrism and Occidentalism in *documenta* exhibitions, Panos Kompatsiaris looks at art in relation to neoliberal hegemonic orders, and Michel Oren studies small, innovative art biennials in the context of “Western hegemony, whether of global capitalism or the Euro-American art world.” These references illustrate that in the biennial discussion, the term hegemony is mainly employed to foreground two types of dominance. In the early 2000s, the pendulum of attention first swung from the instrumental nature of biennials in relation to economic ‘hegemony’ to appreciation of their subversive potential regarding cultural ‘hegemony’ in a postcolonial world. Carlos Basualdo’s seismic essay, “The Unstable Institution,” has been instructive in this first shift. While acknowledging that biennials are created to promote the context – city, region, country – in which they are organized, Basualdo argued that criticism of this instrumental nature disguises the radical, subversive potential of biennials in helping to open up the very Western art world. At stake here, is the potential of the biennial to help breach the Western ‘hegemony’ on signification that was not only controlling the art world, but also the world in general. This would become the go-to-argument legitimizing biennials for years to come (158-159).

The two authors also plot the pendulous movement of biennales from projects of criticality to projects of “complicity in economic dominance”:

In the last decade several biennial editions aligned themselves with the most critical sides of the contemporary artworld (Day et al., 2010), embracing an attempt to “politicize culture” (Lafouente, 2009), engaging in a practice of exhibition-making that prioritizes critical educational and emancipatory practices (Rogoff, 2009). This takes place against a political background that as O’Neil and Wilson put it, is “increasingly dominated by rhetorics of culture-as-service, knowledge production, the creative economy, immaterial labour and educational outcomes” (2010, p. 14). In this regard, several grandiose statements have been made regarding the emancipatory/political potential of such shows. Various curators and scholars have seen biennials as apparatuses capable of transforming in one way or another aspects of contemporary social life; capable for example of introducing “into the public debate political themes” (Marchart, 2010, p. 467), creating “new public formations that are not bound to the nation-state or the art-world” (Sheikh, 2010, p. 157), nurturing an “agonistic repoliticization of cultural labour” (Hlavajova, 2010, p. 293), or even being a “force for the breakdown of class distinctions” (Basualdo, 2010, p. 133).

In recent years, the pendulum has swung back to attention to the complicity of biennials in economic dominance. Revisiting earlier debates about the instrumental nature of biennials, this time the discussion is explicitly framed in terms of neoliberal ‘hegemony.’ The main target of this literature is a certain type of biennial, organized through entrepreneurial strategies of states and corporations, aiming to lure tourists, middle-class consumers, and the international art crowd to art spectacles that promote the economy of cities, regions, countries, or corporations. These events accommodate contemporary capitalism’s need to continuously mobilize people’s desires while shaping their identities. In view of their promotional agendas, they tend to be risk-averse, employing forms of censorship or self-censorship; after all, who wants to risk inconveniencing their paymaster? For Chantal Mouffe, their emergence reflects the “post-political” reality of late-capitalist societies, in which the public sphere has been transformed from a core battlefield of explicit agnostic political disagreement into an advertisement domain of consensual soft power, and where critical gestures are quickly appropriated and neutralized (159).

Marchart, Hlavajova, O’Neill, and Basualdo’s papers were published in the seminal *The Biennial Reader* (TBR) published in 2010 where Sheikh refers to biennales as both “spaces of capital,” and “spaces of hope” in his contribution titled “Marks of Distinction, Vectors of Possibility: Questions for the Biennial” (150). With their call for a “biennialogy,” the editors of TBR argued “for the possibilities – indeed the necessity – of treating this contemporary phenomenon as a serious subject of study” (Filipovic et al. 16) particularly because

it has been postulated that biennales, triennales and documenta are the exhibitions that created contemporary art (Gardner and Green 2016). The editors of TBR conclude:

It can be said that for more than a century museum and gallery exhibitions have largely been “the medium through which most art becomes known,” then it is the biennial exhibition that has arguably since proved to be the medium through which most contemporary art comes to be known. And this is the case, no matter what one’s position on or opinion about it may be. Indeed, biennials have become, in the span of just a few decades, one of the most vital and visible sites for contemporary art and the production, distribution, and generation of public discourse around it. This shift demands a revision of how we think about not only the way in which art is being conceived and received today, but also the way in which its history can be written. Art history has long been built on an analysis of individual, autonomous artworks (open any art history book and you will see this), yet, as scholars have recognized in recent years, the writing of that history should also involve the analysis of the site or context in which the artwork first gains public visibility. It can also be argued that the history of contemporary art must be written through, with, and alongside an understanding of the biennial in particular, because to take into account the armatures for art’s presentation today means, increasingly, to attend to the history and specificity of the large-scale, perennial exhibitions of our contemporary period (Filipovic et al. 15-16).

Ctrl+P J and its discourse on biennales and documenta 12

On biennales

In this section, I will simply quote extensively Ctrl+P J’s contributors who wrote on biennales. In the e-journal’s [October 2009 issue on art and the market](#), arts journalist and curator Gina Fairley cites several biennales in her contribution “Re-framing the Biennale: 2010” in the “recasting of a ‘narrative’ as the geography of the biennale has changed suturing, if you like, its very ability to immerse contemporary art practice within a city and its audience with an equally recent phenomenon, the Asian art market” (11). She observes:

It is almost as though we have gone through the full motion of an inverted bell-curve, returning to that wide arching popularism with expo-style exhibitions hell-bent on attendance figures and crowd pleasers in the face of widespread competition. As the sociologist Pascal Gielen observes, “Afterall, [the biennale] fits easily in a neo-liberal city marketing strategy of so-called ‘creative cities’” (11).

Further, she asks,

What currency does the voice of the nomadic curator have to this local population, where he or she steps centre stage for a short moment? As

‘the biennale’ has been deployed across cities and regions, these events increasingly are brokered on themes of social responsibility as witness to the boom of new engagement. The ‘political issue’ is inserted into their artistic agenda to in order to counter their genericism with local triggers. But do they become staged dialogues as a result? How can such themes bridge the cultural gaps between China, Havana and Sydney erstwhile catering to a local appetite? Perhaps the only way to do so is to bring them closer the endorsement of the global art market. Writer Jorinde Seijdel sums it up in his question, “can biennials really represent an alternative political voice in these neo-political times? (12-13).

Fairley’s questions are framed within the optimistic belief that biennales be auto-critical particularly in light of these projects as being highly capitalized thus co-opted by nation-states and corporations functioning within a neo-liberal economy and politics. It is this totalizing condition that Joselina Cruz, writing on her experience as co-curator of the second Singapore Biennale, grappled with:

When I was asked to work on the second Singapore Biennale, all the missteps that I had seen and critiqued regarding the first, as well as the criticisms that surrounded biennales which I had shored up all these years came rushing to the fore. All the criticisms, especially that of the biennale being staged together with the International Monetary Fund meeting, were problems I was determined to resist and desist. The rate of my success in resistance was dismal (22).

Cruz’s summarizes one basic criticism about biennales:

The biennale structure allows very few of its proponents the ability for true criticality without sacrificing the exhibitionary aspect of the enterprise...Biennales do not seem to have the ability to turn into itself and create self-reflexive exhibitions that continuously and successfully question the foundation on which it exists (22).

And one such problematic foundation is the case of the host city-state described by Cruz quoting, strangely enough, from a government website as a country that “has constructed a veneer of democracy, development and freedom that largely insulates it from international criticism”:

While Singapore is a parliamentary democracy in name, the effectiveness of its democracy is undermined by the PAP’s rigorous controls over speech and the press. It is perhaps because of their economic prosperity that the people of Singapore do not protest more at their exclusion from the political process. From a human rights stand point, however, the Western-style prosperity of the place makes denials of civil and political rights all the more offensive (22).

She despairs: “While such facts may be fodder for Human Rights activists, it makes for a very difficult position for criticality in art to subsist. So much so that other ideas have to be put into play for the site of the biennale to be activated” (23).

In contrast, Patrick Flores, co-curator for the Philippines for the Third Asia-Pacific Triennial in Brisbane in 1999 and curator of the Philippine Pavilion at the First Melbourne Biennale in the same year, had more “latitude” in his work as curator of one of the exhibitions invited under one of the biennale’s three components titled “Position Papers.” Flores expounds:

In these forays, the focus was either representation of an art world or exploration of energy of contemporary art. But for Gwangju, I had more latitude to link up my research in curation in Southeast Asia, my theoretical reflections on contemporary art, and the actual practice of curation within a biennale context under the directorship of a well-known curator from Nigeria based in the United States. Clearly, there was a discernible post-colonial critique in this sortie, but one that would be inflected with a reconsideration of radical political strategy or democratic discourse evoked by the site itself, Gwangju, in which an uprising in May 1980 helped topple a tenacious dictatorship and sparked the minjung movement. The specter of the minjung would be raised by Okwui as a foil to the privileged totem of rupture in Europe, the May 1968 student protest and strike in France. These historical coordinates are salient in trying to understand the foundations of contemporary art or any other critical modernities that partly arose from resistance to authority, norm, establishment, and master narrative. That Okwui was insistent on this thoroughgoing theoretical discussion (workshops, seminars, and a thick catalogue) invested the biennale with a robust theoretical framework, a commitment that was quite absent in the other eight biennales that opened in the same season of the year in Asia. This was an unprecedented ascendancy of exhibition making in the region, prompting some observers to herald an [Asian century](#).

The section for which I was asked to contribute was called Position Papers, which was a series of five small-scale curatorial projects initiated by five curators with divergent persuasions, from the enigmatic to the carnivalesque. We were given a free hand to propose anything; and this liberty was key to conceiving unpredictable, uneven, and idiosyncratic platforms. The section was meant to create another level to the biennale, which consisted of an anthology of the previous year’s exhibitions and commissions for specific sites in Gwangju. Our section had a more vertical orientation as it tried to probe certain impulses in contemporary art without regard for the new and the now.

I proposed *Turns in Tropics: Artist-Curator*, a discussion of the practice of four germinal figures in Southeast Asia who started out as artists of an avant garde inclination and then became pioneering independent

curators in their respective art worlds: Jim Supangkat of Indonesia, Apinan Poshyananda of Thailand, Redza Piyadasa of Malaysia and Raymundo Albano of the Philippines. This exhibition of art works, texts, and documentation of curatorial initiations surfaced a range of problematics: the role of the hybrid personage like the artist-curator; the transformation of the trope of curator in makeshift modernities, and the intimation of a discourse of the avant-garde in Southeast Asia.

Okwui titled the biennale *Annual Report*. It was not framed by any theme. In fact, he would say that there is in the present a crisis in thematic exhibitions: the biennale could be an occasion for a pause or an introspection as well as a retrospection. I think my proposal fit into this scheme, because it was in the same vein a way of looking back at the seventies in Southeast Asia, the Cold War, the formation of civil society and democracy, and the heady times of the nineties when exhibitions in Asia and the Pacific began to draft their own cartographies. According to Okwui,

These exhibitions, proposals, processions, and activities can be understood as a chain of traveling cultural worlds and idioms; a network of incommensurable experiments in global culture within the contemporary calendar. Whether originating from a shopping mall, a folk theater, a makeshift display in neighborhood, alternative gallery systems, non-profit institutions, local cultural centers, or the commercial gallery circuit, art fairs, museums, festivals, and a wide array of exhibition systems and spaces, the biennale's goals is to illuminate the adventure-time and everyday localities of contemporary artistic practice...In presenting these exhibitions, proposals, and projects, the biennale does not aim for one singular dominant vision, nor will it assume any sense of grandiose authorship. But by linking together the work of many curators, artists, institutions, and galleries, the objective is to achieve within the biennale a forum of collective authorship (20-21).

Both Flores and Cruz went on to curate the Philippine participation in the Venice Biennale with the former curating the Philippine's return in 2015, fifty-one years after the nation's first participation in 1964. Cruz was curator of the next edition in 2017.

Ctrl+P J's documenta 12 postmortem issue and the documenta 12 magazines

In 2006, Ctrl+P J was invited to take part in *documenta 12 magazines*, a collective of 94 publications which were to respond to the three "leitmotifs" of *documenta 12* (d12): life (what is bare life?), modernity (is modernity our antiquity?) and education (what is to be done?). Ctrl+P J chose to publish on the first and the third motifs, and a d12 postmortem issue. All the quoted passages below are from [Ctrl+P J's d12 post-mortem issue](#).

Matt Price writes about how pleased he was with the local art community of Kassel having organized the Burgestolz & Stadtfrieden Festival, a “fringe festival of sorts” to coincide with d12. Having no public funding, it was mainly financed by the co-director of the local art association and heavily reliant on the work of volunteers. Price gleaned that,

a meeting had taken place with an official from the cultural department of the local authorities. Rather than being hostile, he responded to the idea of an artist-led festival with interest and asked why the association hadn't put in a funding application. Sadly – and as is often the way – they had left it too late, only getting organised a few weeks before the festival began...If Kassel is serious about the community though, by the time the next Documenta takes place it will have taken a more proactive stance and set about approaching the community to facilitate an artist-led contemporary art festival to complement Documenta. It is a modest but perhaps essential step towards an ongoing nationally and internationally-connected contemporary art economy, beyond the global cultural tourism it periodically hosts (9).

There is an expectation that as hegemonic machines, perennial large scale international exhibitions “[m]ore than any other institution in the art field...mediate the local, national and transnational” since they “link the local to the global within the field of symbolic struggles for legitimation” (Marchart *Resistance* 22). “[I]ntricately entwined...both the local and the global, in equal measure, constantly need to be reconstructed” (Marchart *Resistance* 28). Sadly, as Price experienced, this was not the case with d12 and the local art community for alas, the entwining refers to “first and foremost to local politics, since biennales and similar events...contribute to more efficient marketing of cities and regions” (Marchart *Documenta* 467).

Eileen Legaspi Ramirez, managing editor of *Pananaw, Philippine Journal of Visual Arts*, the other Manila-based journal that contributed to the magazines project was amongst the many editors invited to d12. Her critique of d12 is quoted here almost in full:

Pananaw volume 6 served up its thematic foci of curation and criticism both as response and pro-active gesture. By 2006, it had become almost immediately obvious that the D12 Magazines Project was a more populist though not as lavishly supported channel through which we, as primarily independent publications (about 90 as of last count) were being brought (maybe ‘sneaked in’ is the better term) through. Given the still obvious invisibility or voicelessness of much of Asia in this exhibit platform, we were quite obviously, the intercultural garnish, at least for that week. Yet by the time we had set foot on Kassel and all the international press reviews had already seen print and online time, the suspicion that this lab experiment in getting audiences ‘to experience’

rather than be shepherded or hand-held in chomping down all the bits and pieces that Documenta had to offer was triggering all sorts of unexpected as well as predictable reactions (2).

Legaspi proceeds to what many found crucially problematic with d12:

That gaps, more pointedly, a perceived lack of references or cognitive handles for audiences who would not fork the additional £ 27.50/3 euros to score a catalogue or iPod/ S-guide only gave credence to the worn down biennale/triennale gripe of these blockbusters being mere cultural smorgasbords. There was much spirited talk about the ‘absence of the text’ and whether there was something wrong with visitors who failed to catch the curatorial drift.

Of course it should go without saying that when one trumpets oneself as being “the most important exhibition of contemporary art” and having “advanced to become an authoritative worldwide seismograph of contemporary art,” contending interest groups of multiple degrees of critical deft will expectedly scream for some form of reckoning.

One particularly insightful Indian man in that forum’s audience pointed out how the text had very much to do with resonances beyond the object/ experience within Documenta’s physical spaces. Here, he was obviously hinting at the politics of representation and meaning-making, and how this dynamic plays into how people choose to read or not read texts.

To be fair, Documenta did tangle with the reception and circulation of art in other overtly transgressive ways. In fact, it may have been in these much more deliberately local audience-focused/interventive gestures that engagement was at least unarguably accomplished though still debatably problematic in terms of a bloated confidence in experience virtually exclusive of discourse (2-3).

In the preface of the d12 catalogue written by Roger Buergel, artistic director and curator Ruth Noack, I found, by their own admission, that they did not trust the acuity of their own audience:

To do documenta, an exhibition without form, means entering a field of highly contradictory forces. The fascination emanating from the show, as well as the expectations it raises are enormously high. This is due to the fact that people are not really well equipped to deal with radical formlessness. They tend to feel the challenge deeply and they counter this challenge by seeking for identity” (11).

So that Legaspi-Ramirez questions Buergel’s curatorial (discursive) accountability or the lack of it:

Buerger's own expressed interest to find the interstice between phenomenology and heavy-handed curation was articulated this way in the official online literature: "Today, education seems to offer one viable alternative to the devil (didacticism, academia) and the deep blue sea (commodity fetishism)." That his Documenta presented its own set of curatorial provocations, there is no doubt. Yet what was made obvious, at least by the time we had gotten there, was that the tension between a romanticization of unpreempted spectatorial cognition vis-à-vis even subtle attempts at contextualization manifested in a near absence of didactic aids may have almost incontrovertibly come across as curatorial conceit. One Nigerian member of the audience at the abovementioned forum articulated how worried he was at the "absence of curatorial conclusions," and that since the exhibit itself was text, those behind D12 could have considered that "discourse was not the only avenue for engagement." This to my mind directly played into questions of accountability of meaning producers (artists, curators, audiences included), that is, when the spectator is left to his or her own devices, does the curator then get absolved of responsibility?

What is indeed articulated in Documenta's catalogue is that the curatorial team behind D12 insisted on the validity of an "exhibition without form" or a "radical formlessness," where allowing the influx of non-Western thought through the "migration of form" presumably paves the way for an imaginably efficient cipher—that of the language of contemporary art. In hindsight, however, insisting on the primacy of 'organic' experience, also easily redounds to a naïve if not orientalist formalism, where a privileging of senses makes for a classic case of curator playing coy mediator. In the end, it is perhaps this inevitable locking of horns between text and image that keeps such multi-channel platforms as D12 compelling enough to talk about even when those in the conversation never 'actually' get to physically encounter the exhibits in question.

On an even much more concretely problematic level, we departed from Kassel informed by the ironic case of a Burmese publication whose representatives, from the onset of earlier D12 editors meetings, were literally risking life and limb to engage with this blockbuster infrastructure. In the end, their participation would be ultimately thwarted. Thumbed down for a German visa, the Burmese contingent's travails unfortunately suggest that the Magazines Project may still need to shake off the nagging notion that "the Magazine of magazines" impetus was no mere public ablution—a washing of sins anchored on still resonant colonial engagements in times past and in the continuing future. Indeed there are reams and reams of learning and re-learning to be embarked upon, and this on more than one continent (3-4).

Participating in the *d12 magazines'* lecture program, Katy Deepwell, editor of the ertswile *n.paradoxa, international feminist art journal* and I were in conversation on "Regendering Documenta," focusing on what difference a consideration of gender have on *documenta* in

view of its practice of hegemonic masculinity made evident by the simple presentation of statistics on the male to female ratio of artist representation through the years. Although d12 touted it had the largest number of women artists participation (forty-six percent) in the history of *documenta*, historically it had done nothing to challenge the norm of twenty percent representation on the average amongst all the other major international, perennial exhibitions (26). Our conversation was published in this postmortem issue in full.

Due to the curators' abdication of their responsibility to theoretically frame the biennale themselves⁷ (they wrote a measly five-paragraph preface to the catalogue and three paragraphs on the leitmotifs in the d12 website), the theorizing was left to the magazines collective and the writers of the three volumes published by d12. Conceived and directed by Georg Schöllhammer, the *d12 magazines*, according to artist and independent curator Yong Soon Min, "was likewise riddled with controversy":

On the one hand, it was a clever gambit to "deterritorialize" the project, seemingly a logical variation of Enwezor's "platforms" or conferences held in a number of far-flung sites in advance of the exhibition. While it was gratifying and edifying to see the many lesser-known journals given visibility, the projected gloss of democratizing openness and the possibility of exchange and interaction belied the scant evidence of the realization of these ideals. European critics such as Beat Weber and Kati Morawek make the point that this project can be likened to a corporate model in its "outsourcing of idea scouting," in which the project attains street 'cred' or in this case, global, cosmopolitan viability by cheaply procuring original ideas and research efforts of others" (17).

Parodying the hegemonic biennale

Carlos Basualdo called the biennale a "fundamentally unstable institution" whose identity the editors of *The Biennale Reader* consider as "best defined, *ex negativo*, in contrast with the more established, self-possessed, and permanently fixed, and symbolically weighty institution of the museum," (Filipovic et al. 19). Following their modus, in calling *Ctrl+P Journal/Biennale of Contemporary Art* an "instituent biennale," I can also best define it, *ex negativo*, in contrast with the hegemonic biennale by summarizing the series of parodic inversions Ctrl+P J/B1 critically performed on this hegemonic institution.

1) A many-curators-led biennale completely curated online, it is not a heavily-directed biennale due mostly to the absence of an overarching theme. The biennale is simply an exploration of how an

online PDF art journal can be made into a critical site for biennale-making and is also a proposal for a sustainable future-pandemics biennale model. The Ctrl+P J/B was conceived in 2021, the second year of Covid.

2) A biennale of resistance that is not defined as being geographically located in the Global South or peripheral to the West, it is defined as resistive based on its location in cyberspace and its format as being hypermedial. As a hypermedia, it is a de-centered/de-centering biennale but not a biennale about “centers and peripheries.”

3) A biennale with zero-financial capitalization, it relies completely on the social and cultural capital of all involved. Operating within the gift economy of friendships, it has no ties to national or to international funding agencies or corporations. It is not oriented to feed the global art market. Its ecological footprint is a fraction of that of the hegemonic biennale. It operates outside the structures of economic power. Therefore, it is also a biennale of resistance in its non-alignment with dominant values of neoliberalism.

4) A biennale of friendships, it is not about art production on the scale of the local and the global but on the scale of personal digital networks and communities contributing to the production of counter-geographies of globalization.

5) Not a brick and mortar, city/nation-based monolithic public space of spectacle, the Ctrl+P J/B biennale is sited in the ether. Viewed mostly in private spaces of everyday life in front of the screen, it is not a biennale on the scale of the spectacular. And its public is everyone who has the hyperlink to the biennale.

6) Self-instituted, self-organized, and self-governed, it is not a state-commissioned/authorized biennale. It exists outside cultural power structures. It is a self-determining biennale-making and thus agentive in terms of its relationship to structures of power.

7). Self-organized and self-governed, it was “staffed” only by its curators and by me as artistic director. However, a graphic designer was hired for a token fee to help execute my design ideas during the last days of the project’s development.

8) Unlike the conventional biennales that are scheduled to exist only for a few months, the length of time this first edition and the future editions of Ctrl+P J/B will exist is based on how long the e-journal website will exist. It exists as long as I am alive to fund the website.

Or perhaps longer if someone else takes over the journal/biennale upon my demise. However, many links will no longer be active the longer the biennale exhibitions exist.

9) The PDF biennale is also the exhibition catalogue. It is also the one and only issue of the 2024 volume of the online Ctrl+P journal. The journal, the biennale exhibition, the exhibition catalogue are all conflated into one making it a hyper-discursive critical site of biennale-making.

As a hypermedia exhibition, *Ctrl+P Journal/Biennale of Contemporary Art* deterritorializes the hegemonic biennale away from institutionalizing, structuralizing and hegemonizing institutions and reterritorializes it as an exit toward instituent praxes.

The exhibitions of the first Ctrl+P Journal/Biennale of Contemporary Art

Let's talk about the weather

Organized by artists Varsha and Lena Eriksson, *Let's talk about the weather, the weather as collective condition* is an exhibition of short videos by most of the women artists who meet on Zoom every last Sunday each month (*lasuemo* for short) as part of the Womanifesto 2020: Gatherings project. I am a member of *lasuemo*. The “space,” created in 2021 by Varsha, Lena and *durbahn, proved crucial during the Covid-19 pandemic when many of us were in lockdown and isolation. It brought us to gather as a collective from many parts of the world to find ways to think and make things together both online and in real life. *lasuemo* invites a “core group of participants from previous Womanifesto projects...to each meeting and they are joined by new people with no previous direct connection, but who become part of the ever-growing circle of different generations.” a practice very much in keeping with Womanifesto’s modality as an artist-initiated international art exchange of working with and founding friendships amongst a great number of women artists for nearly three decades.

In 2022, Varsha delivered the keynote “[Of Key: Notes on Womanifesto’s Fluidity](#)” at the symposium “In Light of Crisis: The Fraught Significations of Contemporary Biennials.” Here she referred to Womanifesto as “the first feminist collective of its kind to have emerged and developed from Southeast Asia” and in an earlier published paper as a “biennale art exchange,” based on the fact that exhibitions and other projects were mounted biannually by the collective in its first eight years. After the first two biennales, a re-visioning led to a “more-open-ended creative exchange format,

one with *hospitality and care* at its core and with no specific exhibition outcome except in the form of open days according to the project situation” (Nair) – a practice of resisting the traditional biennale format. Womanifesto established a residency and a workshop, and published a book of works submitted to an open call. Important to note that as early as 2005, the collective had already produced an online biennale titled *No Man’s Land*. I took part in this exhibition. In 2007, I invited Varsha to be a member of the editorial board of Ctrl+P J and as expected, she invited contributions from friends; a few were from Womanifesto. The Ctrl+P J/B shares much of Womanifesto’s ethos: artist-initiated, self-organized, self-mandated, mostly self-supported, self-determining, de-centered, resistant and critical, thus instituent.

The Electric Soil

Dominic Zinampan is one of the very few artists who I have “workshopped” to become a MoMO. Co-founder of Idioterne Inc., a loose network of musicians and gig productions, Dominic, curated [*The Electric Soil*](#) an exhibition by representative members of music initiatives all based in the Philippines. Friendship again is crucial in the making of this project. To Dominic “friendship influences a lot of the activity in the independent music scene/s.” So was the growing of a virtual community organically where participants invited other participants. *The Electric Soil* is actually a curatorial project with three components – first, a server (for a virtual community); second, projects that could not be accommodated by the third component, this PDF exhibition for the biennale, considered only secondary to the principal processes of interaction.

Originally invited to produce an exhibition of music and sounds, Dominic opted instead to approach the directive from a paracuratorial position, where not unlike *Womanifesto*, “social process rather than [the production of] objects” was paramount. Although a critique of the exhibitionary institution, he considers his work as having “more resonance and affinity” with Paul O’Neill’s ideas on the “function of the curatorial proposition” as the creation of “situations of potential agency for the co-productive processes initiated by the artist or curator, as post-autonomous producer.” Such agentive situations employ collaborative, participatory and dialogical modes of production where, as O’Neill puts forward, “the discursive aspect of curatorial work should be given parity with – rather than being perceived as contingent upon – the main event of staging exhibitions” (qtd. in Zinampan).

With *The Electric Soil* PDF, the archival and the discursive are conflated into an exhibition that to Dominic “may resemble a punk zine,” a format consistent with the attitude of the artists who are, according to him, “mostly having stable jobs, some are freelancers, and many are still students. They take music and art seriously but they approach them more as a serious hobby given the near-impossibility of surviving on them as their livelihood. This allows them to be more playful and to experiment. We can certainly celebrate this approach in this biennale as Ctrl+P J/B1 has opened itself to such alternative practices.”⁸ Art production for an international biennale approached as a serious hobby is certainly a ludic inversion of, and thus a parody of the hegemonic biennale.

This Way West

One of the earliest contributors to Ctrl+P J, academic and artist Yumi Roth wrote on her work “Small Acts of Public Service,” a site-specific installation inside the jeepneys she rode in her daily commute to and from the university museum where she had her residency. *This Way West*, the exhibition she curated for this biennale is also a site-specific project. Based in Boulder, Colorado and the daughter of a forest service historian whose research centered on the American West, Yumi has often “thought about how complicated the image of the American West is.” She comments, “Public land is both a touchstone for the construction of that image as well as a fuse for its destabilization. At one end is John Muir’s exaltation of the grandeur of nature (and the omission of Indigenous peoples from that land) and at the other end are the Bundy family standoffs on BLM land in Nevada and the National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon” (Property Rights).

In *This Way West*, no new works were created for the biennale. Instead, the exhibition is an index to each of the artists’ past works represented online. With the use of hyperlinks, we are brought to their personal websites, to a podcast, a blog, a feature essay in a contemporary art journal, to both public and private radio websites, videos of performances uploaded to Vimeo and YouTube. As might be expected, within these hypermedia sites there are more and more hyperlinks to data specifically about the artists or to data that leads us farther away from them inadvertently defining the shape and scale of the world where their art exists. The hope of course is for a nuanced and complex reading of their works exploring “various ideas of what it means to live and work in the American West.”

This Way West is a site-responsive exhibition consistent with Yumi’s nearly two-decade practice of producing site-responsive sculptures,

installations and performances. To state the obvious, Yumi's curatorial intention to focus specifically on the hypermedialized condition of the artists befits a hypermedialized biennale.

Lagoumiphobia

In 2012, artist and independent curator Michael Eddy invited me to take part in the exhibition "World Portable Gallery Convention," which he co-curated and where I specifically created *DIY MoMO*. In turn, I invited Michael to be guest editor of Ctrl+P J's issue on portable galleries. [Michael has worked](#) as a coordinator for a gallery's international projects at the Venice Biennale, as assistant in a triennale and has exhibited in a couple of satellite projects of biennales.

Michael curated [Lagoumiphobia](#), (loosely translated as the fear of rabbit holes) an exhibition focusing on the mediatization of society. On what makes a strong mediatization theory, he quotes Silvan Tomkins: as media "orders more and more remote phenomena to a single formulation, its power grows." But he also cites Gregory Sholette in one instance where the weak theory is applicable—the case of artists resisting media's power:

[the] twin expansion of neoliberal demand and creative 'mining' technology has inevitably led to a kind of rupture within a vast surplus archive 'from below,' a vault of pent-up ideas and desires, hopes and frustrations...and structured...by narrative gaps and lacunas...it is to this shadow or surplus archive that artistic dissidents and rebels now look for inspiration on 'how to fight.'

Indeed, as Michael points out, artists are mostly not afraid of rabbit holes. As self-reflexive actors, the artists in *Lagoumiphobia*, redeployed, appropriated and reworked the logic behind the paranoia-inducing fall down into the shadowy surplus archive toward the creation of illuminating works.

Archive Lives

Senior Curator of Photography at The Huntington, Linde Lehtinen understandably focused the artists in [Archive Lives](#) to consider the matter of the photograph and/or the archive. Except for one artist who partially mined the surplus archive for "materials" for his work, everyone else did not respond to the biennale as primarily sited in the internet – the archive of all archives. Instead they engaged in a range of approaches and practices activating materials found in institutional physical archives, in their self-archives and their own collection of works. These approaches were: decolonizing the institutional colonial archive; sharing the plenitude of one's

collection of photographs to make a point about art, object and context or to essay a collective's acts of devotion to a religious object photographed through the years; exhibiting photographs of one's sculptural work as themselves works of art; composing a self-narrative with words and images to reconcile one's past and present; and documenting artists talking about their unrealized projects. Ironically, the one artist who mined the internet by using AI points out that with this technology "there is a kind of hoarding or careful archiving of images or data sets. It's aggregation and hoarding and then making a mediocre result."

The Last Frame of the Day

Light and media artist James Clar curated *The Last Frame of the Day*, an exhibition of works to be viewed on our mobile phones right before we sleep at the end the day. James trusts that in our hypnagogic state (the transition between wakefulness and sleep), there is a great possibility the artists in this exhibition have control over the last images we see right before we sleep to follow us into our dreams.

As every minute of our waking hours has now become a scarce resource and thus an increasingly valuable commodity for corporations in the digital/attention economy, sleep is "the only remaining barrier, the only enduring 'natural condition' that capitalism cannot eliminate" (Crary 74). Sleep is "an affront to the voraciousness of global capitalism. When we are asleep we are on strike, as it were, against the capitalist system" (Ringmar 5).

Nevertheless, what saves us from the clutches of capitalism while viewing *The Last Frame of the Day* is its ludicrous ask to *not* focus on the artworks, to literally turn off the lights and go to sleep – a wonderful ludic parody of how to look at art properly and how to best escape the commodification of art.

Engage, Speculate, Embed

Edson Cabalfin, curator of the Philippine Pavilion at the 16th Venice Architecture Biennale, curated *Engage, Speculate, Embed* for Ctrl+P J/B. His exhibition for the Venice Biennale sought to "interrogate architecture and urbanism's ability to empower and transform people's lives." Not unlike this exhibition, in showcasing the works of architects, planners, designers, educators, scholars, students and a university community design center, *Engage, Speculate, Embed* revolves around the question how architecture empowers and transforms community life. Edson grouped the projects and programs under three themes: "Speculative Futures" – the centering of communities through the exploration of potentialities in the making of the

built environment. “Spatializing Justice” – architecture as an emancipating apparatus “must aim to uplift people.” And “Dynamic Spatiality” – architecture as process and not merely a product “needs to be reconsidered from that of a static object to that of lived experience.” All three themes read like manifestos for a truly social architecture.

Sociality at the End of Art

Rather than curating an exhibition for this PDF biennale, contributors to Ctrl+P J and critical theorists Neferti Tadiar and Jonathan Beller, chose instead to propose a PDF “pavilion” titled *Sociality at the End of Art*. They start with a call: “Take art media out of the world of capital! Such could be the battle cry for those with one foot in the Art world and the other stepping quickly away from it and towards any of the non-, ante-, anti- or post-capitalist futures intimated and, indeed, necessitated by the multiple bankruptcies of the contemporary.” Such could be the manifesto of *Ctrl+P Journal/ Biennale of Contemporary Art* as I contemplate its future.

It took three years to produce this biennale. For the time it took to get it done, it might easily be a triennale in the next edition. Not beholden to any support from a city, a state, a corporation, or to any other sources of sponsorship, but committed to stay the course, the participants very generously collaborated with me no matter the absence of any remuneration. For this, they have my deepest gratitude. At the very start, I understood and accepted that work on this biennale was going to be done outside of everyone’s priorities and that this was to be the reality of such an undertaking. Three curators bowed out. The original format of the exhibition morphed as the curators designed their own exhibitions. Deadlines were constantly adjusted. Original parameters were changed. The necessity to accommodate and to pivot was paramount. Even I lost momentum the second year after the Christmas holidays. Resuming work proved difficult. I could sense it was the same with the curators who had yet to finalize their exhibitions.

How will Ctrl+P J/B continue its line of flight, its process of instituting and transforming – its being instituent, a praxis Raunig elegantly summarized as the “the actualization of the future in a present becoming” (*Instituting 1*)? Here, parody again showed me the way. The future of this biennale lies in its modality of critique. If it is truly an instituent biennale with parody as its mode of critique, then Ctrl+P J/B1 must parody itself; it must allow for a critique of itself in order to keep transforming into the future.

This early, I can already launch into this auto-critique. In this first edition, since the curators worked on their own, I saw no reason for them to ever meet online. Does this void the practice of a curatorium? Is the creation of social relationships in the virtual and hopefully a community an assumed outcome of value issuing from this kind of project? With regard to the art works which are mostly not net art, should they have been more site-specific – more hypermedial? Or more crucial, should they have been critical works themselves as, for example, Neferti and Jonathan have proposed: works that “entail a movement away from the value form, what capital abstracts as Value.”

With regard to it being zero-funded, is this biennale sustainable in its total reliance on non-remunerated work? The question of the economic precarity of cultural workers is at the heart of this concern. Will it have to look for funding eventually? Will this compromise its ethos as a project operating within the gift economy; it’s precious autonomy for example? Is working within the economy of giving and receiving exploitative? Or does it encourage generosity and mutual support? Are practices of self-reliance, self-organizing and self-governing forms of self-care? Is helping to establish/institute this biennale considered significant work? Will it increase one’s “*potentia agendi*, [...one’s] vital capacities,” (Condorelli *Reprint 222*) a matter artist Celine Condorelli focused on in writing about friendships? Are all these enough recompense?

In 2019, Condorelli’s installation “Spatial Compositions 13” gave support to my work at the Singapore Biennale, the kind of support she wrote about in her manual on support structures – a manual “for what bears, sustains, props, and holds up...for those things that encourage, give comfort, approval, and solace; that care for and provide consolation and the necessities of life...or that which assists, corroborates, advocates, articulates, substantiates, champions, and endorses; for what stands behind, underpins, frames, presents, maintains, and strengthens” (*Support 6*). I believe many of these acts of support not only apply to things, but also to people who work and collaborate to realize an idea, a projection, an untested praxis; who believe in a cause, and who believe in themselves as having agency to support oneself and others to create an other biennale, another art world or even another world. These acts of support apply to all who contributed to this venture. As a collective, the participants in Ctrl+P J/B1 are the kind of structural support fundamental to an art production that is outside the institutions/structures of culture and capital.

Hence, for it to be a truly permanent process of self-instituting, *Ctrl+P Journal/Biennale of Contemporary Art* must be repeated albeit with a difference: it must be produced from a more critical distance; it must be more transversal, thus more instituent. It must keep developing a different public to reach a critical mass of engagement. It must keep articulating its position and its politics. It must continue to deepen an imaginary of an emancipating praxis and an artworld outside the values of capital. It must continue to capitalize on the biennale as an unstable institution. It must allow for a continuous auto-critique to ensure that the institution it is revising will keep transforming into a praxis beyond itself.

Judy Freya Sibayan
Founding Artistic Director
Ctrl+P Journal/Biennale of Contemporary Art

For the past three decades, conceptual artist Judy Freya Sibayan has produced self-instituted parodic (auto-critical) works as her modality of Institutional Critique. Former director of the erstwhile Contemporary Art Museum of the Philippines, she curated, performed and wore daily the *Scapular Gallery Nomad* from 1994, 1997 to 2002. Since 2002, she has been the curator of and is the *Museum of Mental Objects* (MoMO), a performance art museum for life. In 2012, she started franchising the museum for free with the use of the DIY MoMO Manual, accessed online by anyone who wishes to become a MoMO.

Her autobiography, *The Hypertext of HerMe(s)*, an e-book, was published by KT Press in 2014 with a grant from the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. She is co-founding editor and publisher of the online *Ctrl+P Journal of Contemporary Art* (<https://www.ctrlp--artjournal.org>), which took part in the Documenta 12 Magazines Project. In her five decades of art practice, Sibayan has exhibited in museums and galleries worldwide and has been an independent curator since 2002. She participated in three international biennales: 1986 Third Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh, 2002 Gwangju Biennale and 2019 Singapore Biennale. She holds a Doctor of Fine Arts degree from De La Salle University where she taught for 30 years.

Notes

¹ See *Study, Not Critique* on three case studies of journals (*The Fox*, A.N.Y.P., *e-flux journal*) as paradigmatic sites of “dematerialized” art production. Kolb, Lucy. *Study, Not Critique*. transversal texts, 2018. <https://transversal.at/books/study-not-critique>

² See the following: (1) “A Permanent Process of Self-Instituting Performative of a Critical Practice.” *Southeast of Now Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia*, Vol. 6, No. 1, March 2022: 259-272.

(2) "Boredom and Institutional Critique." *The Culture of Boredom*, edited by Josefa Velasco. Brill, 2020.

(3) "Institutional Critique, The Work of the Ex-centric." *Active Withdrawal, Life and Death of Institutional Critique*, edited by Biljana Ciric and Nikita Yingquian, Guangdong Times Museum and Black Dog Publishing, 2016, pp. 275-293.

(4) *The Hypertext of HerMe(s)*. KT Press, 2014.

(5) "Institutional Critique and Beyond." *Paths of Practice: Selected Papers from The Second Philippine Art Studies Conference*, edited by Patrick Flores, Cecilia de la Paz and Tessa Maria Guazon, Art Studies Foundation, Inc., 2011.

(6) "Curating Upon My Body." *Pananaw, Journal of Visual Arts*, No. 6, 2007, pp. 24-29.

(7) "Scapular Gallery Nomad: Beyond the Limits of the Center and Into One's Own." *(In)disciplinas del arte en el cruce de los discursos*, edited by Rita Eder, UNAM-Instituto de Investigaciones Esteticas, 1999.

³ Autotheory "combines autobiography with theoretical reflection and the author's insistence on situating themselves within histories of oppression and resistance" (Fournier).

⁴ The only existing critical art publication in 2006 was *Pananaw, Philippine Journal of Visual Arts*. It costs a little over a million pesos to publish one issue of this journal.

⁵ In 2018, I installed and performed my archive of 48 years at Calle Wright, an art space located in my neighborhood. I was there three days a week for three months.

⁶ A discourse structure, multimodal hyper-discourse is "discourse realised through several semiotic systems and through different, co-present levels of text" (Maiorani 208).

⁷ Oliver Marchart comments on Buergel in relation to the two previous documenta artistic directors Catherine David and Okwui Enwezor who engaged in theoretical production in full force: "In spite of the anti-intellectualism of an artistic director who sought 'aesthetic experience,' prized immediacy, wished to rehabilitate 'beauty,' and published a 'picture book' with no text at all, it was impossible for any curator who came after Documenta 10 and Documenta 11 to curate a Documenta without a certain minimum of intellectual and theoretical ambition" (Documenta 487).

⁸ Conversation with Dominic Zinampan, April 13, 2024.

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