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# Ctrl+P

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In this second and the coming third issues of Ctrl+P, we focus on the practice of curatorship with regard to the production, circulation and reception of contemporary art. Based on the systems model of creativity, what is critically considered as Art results from the complex interrelations of the art system made up of three parts: the field (the gatekeepers – critics, theorists, curators, historians, art dealers, museum directors etc.), the domain (in this case the domain of contemporary art, its set of rules and procedures), and third, the individual artist. We focus on the practice of curators primarily because as gatekeepers, their authority, thus their power to necessarily intervene for and represent artists have become more and more critical today. In fact as agents of culture who have first pickings to circulate the next best artist, the next best art, compared to critics, they have become more crucial to the project of canon-formation; and in the process of inadvertently becoming value producers and tastemakers, have become handmaidens of the art market. More important, curators write and thus construct history. They engage in critical practices, thus rendering their work discursive.

Current practitioners are not necessarily trained formally within the domain of curatorship. Many arrive at the practice by being autodidacts and become self-appointed curators. Taking on the role of curating, they must be asked by what authority they legitimate one set of objects, one group of artists over another, one historical or theoretical line, and by what authority they claim to speak for the artist; or for that matter by what authority they can claim who is worthy of leaving a trace in the historico-cultural matrix. It is imperative that we continually put under scrutiny the means by which art is presented and represented in contemporary times. We need to ask: Do curatorial praxes meet the demands of contemporary art praxes?

Independent curator of sixteen years and recently appointed Curator of International Projects and Head of the New York Curatorial Office for the Museum of Contemporary Art in Beijing, Kóan Jeff Baysa gives us a glimpse of an integrated practice as healer and curator in his essay *The Commingled Careers of Curing and Curating*. Indeed, the word “curate” has been linked to other terms within the perspective of an ethics of curatorship, an ethics of caring: “one charged with the care of other selves, those imaginary citizens populating the mandates of public culture... cure...the critical intervention of a curator can function like those of healers...a surgeon acting on inert, (anaesthetised) bodies for various effects, a homeopath which provides

for awareness, a therapist through intersubjective encounters which might resemble a talking cure...securus... to render safe and secure...accurae, to be careful about...curiosity...curio...impelling interest”<sup>1</sup>

Co-founder of Ctrl+P Flaudette May V. Datuin, writing on a fairly recent international curatorial project, narrates how she became a curator by accident through her research of ten years as a self-taught art historian on women artists of Asia. In *REMAP Asia: Curating Single Channel Video by Women Artists of Asia*, she points to some complex concerns and aspects of curation and its interrelationship with other disciplines related to art studies.

As to the future of young curators, we publish here Mizuki Endo’s winning exhibition proposal *Aesthetics/Dietetics* presented in the third *Premio Lorenzo Bonaldi per l’Arte - Enter Prize*, an international competition for young curators. Endo, nominated by Yuko Hasegawa, Chief Curator of the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art in Kanazawa, won over four other young curators nominated by the likes of Joseph Kosuth. When asked how he became a curator, Endo wrote Ctrl+P, “I’ve never recognized myself as a curator until I was nominated for this prize. I was nominated for the curator’s prize, so I must be a curator. However, I think my work has a potential to be recognized as a curator’s job. My work is basically to initiate and organize different kinds of events that encourage cultural involvement amongst a local population. My interest is always directed towards creating and analyzing unique forms of culture and how they are linked to specific socio-political structures.”

The prize, the mounting of the winning exhibition at the Galleria d’Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Bergamo, supports the work of young curators under the age of 30, an award that recognizes the significance international curators play in the development of contemporary art. GAMEC claims “*Qui Enter Atlas – International Symposium of Young Curators* became the meeting point for an entire generation of international young curators...It is GAMEC’s intention that the competition is also a time for young curators to meet, get to know one another and take the bearings of the profession’s development.”<sup>2</sup>

Finally, in the absence of a curator or in cases where self-curation is itself the project, artists represent themselves quite competently. We hear from two artists, Yumi Roth Janairo in *Small Acts of Public Service* and Reg Yuson in *Site+Works* on their self-curated exhibitions. Both deeply interested in site-specific works, they took full control of curating their own works. Yuson’s essay is based on his notes on his exhibition.

We end again by asking our readers who, thanks to the efficiency of email, have grown in numbers exponentially within the last two months to continue helping us circulate this journal by forwarding this PDF file to as many friends and e-groups as possible. And if you wish to contact us or be part of our mailing list, please email us at [ctrl\\_p\\_artjournal@yahoo.com](mailto:ctrl_p_artjournal@yahoo.com).

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<sup>1</sup>Fisher, Jennifer, Trick or treat: naming curatorial ethics. In Sunil Gupta (ed.), *Africus the 1st Johannesburg Biennale*, London: OVA, 1995, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.e-flux.com/displayshow.php?file=message\\_1118155856.txt](http://www.e-flux.com/displayshow.php?file=message_1118155856.txt)

# Commingled Careers of Curing and Curating

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KÓAN JEFF BAYSA

The woman seated in 39G on the American Airlines flight from Honolulu to Chicago was experiencing increasing difficulty seeing clearly, her vision collapsing to a tunnel-like view, with complaints that she was losing sensation in her extremities. She also complained of a headache and abdominal pain. Her husband was concerned that she was becoming progressively weak and unresponsive. The flight attendant put out a call over the speakers for doctors on board, and I rose to examine the patient. Another physician, in Bermuda shorts and a bright blue Margaritaville t-shirt and I, in camouflage pants, flip-flops, and a Triple 5 Soul black hoodie, appeared unlikely attendants to this woman symptomatic from dehydration and electrolyte imbalance secondary to gastroenteritis with diarrhea, symptoms that afflicted several other passengers on board their holiday cruise in Hawaiian waters. Although her initial low blood pressure and confusional state improved after oral rehydration, after appropriate history-taking and a limited physical exam, our joint medical decision was to divert the flight to San Francisco to deplane and stabilize the patient with more definitive care in health facilities on the ground. She was expected to fully respond to intravenous rehydration and electrolyte replacement.

Approximately twenty-four hours prior to this medical emergency in the air, I was opening an exhibition entitled *d'Asie d'Afrique* at Museum 63 in Hong Kong. This curated show of 6 DVD works addressed the links between Asia and Africa in contemporary visual art, and the concept that these two continents rarely coexisted in the same mental space, although there are historical and economic links between the two continents. Brilliantly installed by Gum at the facility, the reception was attended by Para/Site director, Tobias Berger, Adams Bodomu, a professor of linguistics from Africa teaching at Hong Kong University, Josette Balsa of MoCA Beijing, as well as Szewan Leung and Jeffrey Aranita of MoCA China. Interracial marriages between blacks and Asians, mixed racial backgrounds, Asian blackface and hip hop were among the issues addressed.

Roughly a week earlier to this show's vernissage, I was opening another exhibition that I curated, entitled *Alimatuan: The Emerging Artist as American Filipino* at The Contemporary Museum, in a posh residential neighborhood above Honolulu, Hawaii. Twenty six artists, with equal numbers of men and women of Filipino ancestry from across the U.S. exhibited their works in an event that was coincident with the 100th anniversary of Filipino immigration to America. Hawaii was a major gateway for the wave of laborers, primarily from the Ilocos region of northern Luzon, the island on which the republic's capital, Manila, is located. My paternal grandfather, Santiago Baysa was among this group of men, called sakadas; I dedicated the

exhibition catalog to my parents, Danny and Pacita Baysa, for their steadfast love and support in my commingled careers as physician and curator.

The words “curing” and “curating” have the same root word, *curare*, that means, in Latin, “to help” and there are parallels between the seemingly disparate careers. Although I’ve been mistaken for a dilettante and someone who has abandoned the noble field of medicine, I actively maintain both a clinical allergy and asthma practice and a curatorial practice. I dedicated nearly a decade and a half of my adult life to medical education, and during this process, became a father to five sons, two daughters, and raised two nephews. In parallel I forged a trajectory as an artist, collector, curator, and writer. I quip that my right brain attends to my current position as the Curator of International Projects and Head of the New York Curatorial Office for the Museum of Contemporary Art in Beijing and member of AICA, the international art critics association; the left brain handles Medical Arts Enhanced Care, a professional corporation that I’ve established as a consultative medical practice in the TriBeCa neighborhood of New York City. Pro bono and lowered fees for medical services are offered to uninsured artists and their family members. The high cost of medications has resulted in my turning to alternative, complementary, and traditional medicine methods of treating specific conditions.

Curatorially, my interests center around issues of the sensate body, the way that the physical self “knows” the world through the senses, and the concepts of hybridity and permutations, and the dynamics of subcultures nestling within larger cultures. Recently curated exhibitions include *Stereognost/Propriocept* at The Lab Gallery at the Roger Smith Hotel in Manhattan, run brilliantly by Matt Semler. The show title refers to tests performed by physicians to check neurological function. *Chimaera* at the Tenri Cultural Institute in New York, whose show schedule is managed by the lovely Thalia Vrachopoulos, included artists of mixed cultural and genetic heritages whose work reflected the richness of those backgrounds. The show title is simultaneously derived from medical and mythological terminology.

What’s next? The goals are to reach wider audiences in both arenas. Writing, curating on an international scale, and time with family are of paramount importance. A medical fiction thriller is in the works, as well as a nonfiction book on surviving life in the fast lane. Clinical research continues on the links between olfaction and satiety, as well as between Chinese medicine and asthma. The exhibition plans in China include a series based on the Five Chinese Elements (earth, wood, water, fire, metal) bringing artists from around the globe together to address these subjects within an environmental impact context. In summary, it’s more of the same, kicked up a notch or two, deploying both halves of the brain in commingled careers.

*Dedicated to all of my kids and their spouses who have wholeheartedly supported and encouraged me in pursuing my dual careers: Leah, Colter and Juliet, Kanoa and Emma, Dylan, Elan, Nohea, Aiyana, Ian and Nguyet, Joshua; grandson Ikaika and sister Beverly.*

# REMAP Asia: Curating Single Channel Video by Women Artists in Asia

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FLAUDETTE MAY V. DATUIN

When I received the invitation to choose ten (10) single channel videos by women artists of Asia for the Asian section (the other sections being Europe and America) of the 5th Ewha Womens University Media Art Presentation (EMAP) held in Seoul last June 2005, I accepted with both reluctance and anticipation. Reluctance because aside from the concerns I will discuss below, video is a very new field for me and this will be made clearer when I outline my personal and professional history; anticipation because, aside from being a learning process, I felt that the Seoul event will also give me a chance to reflect on my practice and to ask myself certain questions that implicate the fascinating range of challenges surrounding, not just the 5th EMAP, but also all other exhibition practices, in general and the field of media curation, in particular.

Let me state at the outset that I am an ‘accidental’ curator, and that curation in my case, is very much tied up with my research on women artists of Asia, which spans ten years and includes Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines and Thailand from 1995-1997, South Korea and China from 2002-2003 and Japan and Malaysia, with short revisits to Thailand and Indonesia from 2004-2005.

The idea of curating exhibitions was first broached to me by my colleague, artist, art educator and then curator of the UP Vargas Museum Brenda Fajardo, who suggested that I show the Indonesian and Vietnamese artists’ work to the Philippine art world after I returned from those areas in the late 90s. Under Fajardo’s guidance, I installed a show of Filipina artists at the Vargas Museum in 1998. Featuring Karen Flores, Cristina Taniguchi, Francesca Enriquez and Yasmin Almonte, the show was the first of a series of *Women Imaging Women* exhibition-conferences, the second being in 1999, when eleven artists from Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand and the Philippines and around fifty scholars and cultural workers from the four countries gathered at the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) for another exhibition and conference. I then proceeded to curate more shows, including a major one in 2004 that put together around 50 Filipina artists at the CCP, to celebrate the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kasibulan, a group of women artists in the arts. And again, as a result of my recent visits to Japan and Malaysia, I am organizing and curating an exhibit-conference called *trauma, interrupted*, which hopes to gather artists, scholars and cultural workers from Japan, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, the US and Ireland, among others in June 2007 in multiple venues: the CCP, Metropolitan Museum, the National Museum and the Liongoren Gallery. (For an account of some artists and their works, please refer to the first issue of Ctrl+P).

Thus it can be said that my practice of curation is very much a by-product of my research, and follows an itinerary that happens to coincide at certain points with those of more mainstream curators: visiting studios, talking

to artists, looking at their portfolios, identifying thematic and iconographic strategies (which I identified as home, body and memory), and contextualizing the works and lives within a specific art-historical and geographic context. It is just that instead of ‘parachuting’ like the jet-setting curators of blockbuster triennials and biennials, I had the advantage of staying in an area for a month to six months at a time. In short, by researching, I was curating – an activity which I conducted by following all the standard operating procedures intrinsic to the practice and discipline of art history – a field which I entered also by accident and which I learned on-the-job as faculty member of the University of the Philippines Department of Art Studies. I am, in other words, a self-taught art historian aside from being an ‘accidental’ curator, who learned through teaching, and through supervised and unsupervised readings, largely through my graduate studies, and long-term exposure through research.

It is within this auto-didactic art-historical and curatorial background that I took on the challenge of curating in the 5<sup>th</sup> EMAP. The first of the many challenges I mulled over was how to fulfill the ten-artist quota. Perhaps, instead of asking for works from Asia, Europe and the Americas (which excludes Africa and the Pacific), the organizers could have asked us to curate along themes, instead of regions, thus giving us enough wiggle room to choose from all parts of the globe, and not just be limited to one geographic area.

However, it was my understanding that the geographic division was a first step aimed at presenting a modest survey of what was going on in the three regions, which they hope to expand in future EMAPs. Based on my research however, there are, to my knowledge, very few artists working on single channel video in Asia, and the few who do work on this medium always do so in tandem with installation, performance art and the more traditional mediums of painting, sculpture, etc.

These women are also working in a context where domestic venues and support system for single channel video are practically non-existent, if at all. Artists have almost no chance to show their works and this is particularly true for Southeast Asia, and until very recently, for Japan and China. Especially in the Philippines, and to a certain extent, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam, artists have little or no access to professional equipment and facilities.

Drawing from this small number of prospects, I had to trim down the list further, and narrow it down to those works that cohere with the theme *media in 'f'*, the letter “f” signifying, according to the project brief, “feminine, feminism and their non-fixed characteristics of flux, flowing, fleeting and fluctuating,” which imply that the terms feminine, feminist and female can be redefined and remapped to suggest, not only alternative ways of constructing identity but also alternative visions to male-centric and Eurocentric technological art.

Thirdly, over and above the theme, I had to consider works that will be appropriate to the backdrop and setting of the screens, the beautiful forests of the Ewha campus against which the videos will be beamed for three nights in late spring, so much like the blossoming of cherry blossoms, fleeting, transitory beautiful. I have learned that these evening outdoor screenings have

become a tradition for the past EMAPs, but I also wondered: Has EMAP locked horns with the question of audience demographics, and audience feedback? What kind of experience, for instance, is being offered by video in a forest setting, at night? Quick-fire game pleasure? Information pleasure? Sculpture pleasure? Sit-on-the-grass-and-move-around-watch-a-video-pleasure? Is it possible to absorb the intricacies of “F” as they are expounded by the artists and as they are framed and presented by the curator in such a setting?

These immediate aesthetic and curatorial concerns were further compounded by the fact that I was mapping my curatorial and mental game plan aided only by my memory and that of my computer’s hard drive. When I received the emailed invitation from the 5<sup>th</sup> EMAP Director, Kim Hong Hee, I was then out in the ‘field’ somewhere in Hiroshima as part of my research on women artists of Japan, under the Nippon Foundation Senior Asian Public Intellectuals Fellowship Program. That was March 2005, only three months before the Seoul event itself, and I was caught between destinations, having just visited Kyoto and Osaka southwest of Tokyo, Fukuoka and Kitakyushu further south, and was on my way to Kanazawa, northwest of Tokyo. After a brief stopover in Tokyo where I was based from January to June 2005, my next stop was Hokkaido, in the north, which was then still heavily cloaked in snow, while the rest of Japan was already gearing itself for spring, and the blooming of cherry blossoms.

Preoccupied with mundane and convoluted travel arrangements and temporarily separated from most of the materials I collected during my previous researches, I was also agonizing over many other questions that emerged from my communications with the artists I have invited for the show. Some questions are very practical: Who is paying for what the artists are doing? Who has ownership, given video’s capability of being endlessly copied? Should institutions like EWHA, pay ‘per screening’ of works on video? Shouldn’t EWHA be funding productions, if new works can be produced, and thus be co-producers?

But over and beyond these pragmatic questions, I asked myself: How does a curator who is limited by budget and time nurture artists in an event supposedly propelled by a feminist vision? How can we be artist-and-women-friendly, given our own logistic and discursive constraints?

This line of self-questioning gave rise to another, but very much related set of questions concerning aesthetics and the nature of video itself. Video’s interactivity, immediacy and reproducibility demand different criteria for aesthetic evaluation of works, as well as documentation and archiving – three very central art-historical and curatorial activities. What are the guidelines, if any, for selecting and submitting videos, first for projection and second for building a database? Should we archive videos in the first place?

Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook write that there is an “ambivalence toward the notion of archiving video – we don’t know what to keep, but we need to be able to refer to it... Showing the work in order to keep it alive, in order to make it part of a canon, is in fact, destroying the work. In the case

of film and video, the work is deteriorating as we watch and learn about it.” How do we address the preservation of ideas in an ephemeral medium as opposed to material objects like painting, sculpture etc.?<sup>1</sup>

It is very difficult to respond to these questions especially since video as a contemporary art form has not yet become a serious subject of exploration in the Asian academe, unlike the more established media like painting, graphic art, installation and performance art, among others. On the other hand, the few existing historical accounts are male-centric and Eurocentric, and therefore highly selective, and this is evident in the almost complete absence of accounts of women pioneers in Asia, both as curators, artists, and other art professionals. And overlaying this dearth of video history and practice in Asia is the non-existence of feminist art history in Asia, much less, feminist video art history.

But despite this bleak feminist art-historical scenario, it is often bandied about that women, especially when compared with past decades, are advancing within the art world, as artists, directors, gallery curators and art critics. But as Ilyana Nedkova observed in her essay on the Bulgarian case, “the advanced status seems to depend on the fact that women have changed their professional attitude to fit the structure of the art world better; *rather than the art world restructuring itself to allow women more presence and visibility.*”<sup>2</sup> (emphasis mine). Having women in the art world does not mean changing its terms, but finding ways to play the game within them.

Given this uneven global playing field, how does one proceed to curate, judge, select, and show works by women artists in Asia, in a situation where the list of practitioners is very small, and where the art-historical, aesthetic and theoretical practices and paradigms have yet to be seriously studied and systematically collated, and written about?

Despite and maybe because of these challenges, I was able to rally nine exemplary women artists: Mako Idemitsu and Ryoko Suzuki from Japan; Cao Fei, Cui Xiuwen and Han Yajuan from China; Nadia Bamadhaj from Malaysia, Arahmaiani from Indonesia, Lawan Jirasuradej from Thailand (with the kind help of Varsha Nair), and Sun Hee Lim from Korea (with help from EMAP chief curator Cho Duck Hyun). These women showed how we can potentially “rEMAP Asia” by presenting ‘Other’ ways of re-telling our diverse and often discrepant locations and geographies as women, as Asians, and as individuals caught in a perpetual state of being home and not being home. If only because such women practice their art in the face of limitations, and also because of the lessons I gained from EMAP, I continue to move on, hoping to continually question and REMAP my practice as a feminist academic and activist, who, by accident of personal history, happens to practice art history and curation.

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<sup>1</sup>Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook, University of Sunderland, UK. “A Curatorial Resource for Upstart Media Bliss.” ([www.newmedia.sunderland.ac.uk](http://www.newmedia.sunderland.ac.uk)) Some of the questions that I raise about aesthetics, audience and reception, archiving and documentation were pointed out by Graham and Cook.

<sup>2</sup>Ilyana Nedkova. “Curating the New Media Culture of Bulgaria” 2001. [www.cfront.org/cf00book/en/ilyana-inside-out-en.html](http://www.cfront.org/cf00book/en/ilyana-inside-out-en.html)

MIZUKI ENDO

*The idea of the bios as a material for an aesthetic piece of art  
is something which fascinates me.*

Michel Foucault

Walking through Bergamo where the historical past still exists as the symbolic center of the town, I thought of an essential difference in the condition of art between Europe and Asia. The existence of transcendental history, which leads and secures the dialectical progress of aesthetical judgment, is a unique characteristic of European art. Lacking the historically confirmed theoretical foundation, Asian artists inevitably relied on Western principles.

The multiculturalism movement in the 1990s was phenomenal in the sense that it provided Asian artists an alternative foundation by replacing the vertical/hierarchical model of aesthetical judgment with the horizontal/relativistic one. This shift made it possible for Asian artist to create work based on her/his socio-political positionality and cultural identity independent of traditional Western doctrine. However, while opening a door to those who were initially marginalized in the art world, the inevitable tie between multicultural discourse and economic and cultural globalization made it difficult for artists to give theoretical solidity to the multicultural approach that goes beyond mere regionalism.

In response to such concern, I propose to curate an exhibition that takes a slightly different approach using the concept of “diet.” Diet (diaita in Greek) originally meant “way of life,” which points to an ethical practice of giving an aesthetical form to one’s own life. The French philosopher Michel Foucault sees such practices as a process of liberation in which care for the self leads to the reformulation of one’s relationship with external socio-political structures. By rethinking the ordinary yet essential aspects of their lives, four artists in this exhibition developed aesthetic approaches that reformulate the relationships they have with their lives.

Tadasu Takamine’s *God Bless America*, a central piece in the exhibition, is a documentary account that follows his journey to recognize the “America” in its internalized mode. To do so, Takamine and his girlfriend confined themselves in the studio for eighteen days. In the red studio, they ate, slept, made love, read, and grappled with a huge block of clay that stood in the middle of the room. Without using political icons, Takamine proposes that the pursuit of everyday practices can be formulated into aesthetical contemplation about “America.” Similarly, Kikuko Nomi’s *Nedoko (Bed)* seeks to rethink and reformulate our basic activity, sleep, by turning a familiar bedroom into something foreign. Both works focus on internal reformation of life, and a darkened main exhibition space provides a closed environment for the audiences to rethink such possibility.

In contrast, in bright rooms, Tsuyoshi Ozawa’s and Gary Ross Pas-trana’s works address the communicative aspects of aesthetic reformation.

Ozawa does so by using public participation in the process of digesting/dismantling the once-politicized object – vegetables are put together taking on the form of a gun. Pastrana's *Sustaining Symmetry*, which occupies the main room, functions as a public space where people rethink the aesthetic mode of simple living activities through two birds.

The works in *Aesthetics/Dietetics* show that one's way of life – diet, the reformulation of ordinary life and one's relationship with life could be cultivated into an alternative aesthetic practice, which Foucault calls the "aesthetic of existence." Such practice is also a necessary tool to rethink both the difficulty and the potentiality of contemporary art within a globalized world.

*Information on Aesthetics/Dietetics on exhibit May 26 - July 16, 2006 at the Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Bergamo can be found in <http://www.gamec.it/default.asp?lang=Eng>*

## Site+Works

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REG YUSON

*Site+Works* created in 2005 specifically for West Gallery, an exhibition space of two rooms, was the culmination of a phase of my exploration of sculpture as being all about space. The physical characteristics of objects and their placement in a given space redefine the experience of this space. The work also marked the beginning of a new stage of this life-long exploration.

After repeatedly visiting the gallery, I had achieved a comfortable familiarity with its dimensions. My initial concern was to engage the two rooms as essential material in the formation of my work. My first response was to create an interior landscape using what I originally perceived as wooden parquet flooring. But I soon learned the parquet was actually simulated wood strips of vinyl! Because of its illusory aspect being more painterly than sculptural, up until the opening day of the exhibition, I was ambivalent about my decision to have used this synthetic material. However, the final decision to use this unfamiliar material challenged me to conceptualize and construct complex forms in relation to and coupled with sheet-metal, a material I know very well. Sheet-metal has a clear recognizable planar quality. Like a sheet of paper, it manages to be both flexible and rigid, something I found ideal for use as ground/armature in attaching the vinyl strips. Having an affinity for sheet-metal, I was immediately drawn to make circular structures, which to me are the soundest mathematically and geometrically configured structures around.

More important, this very same material, deceptive as to its materiality as wood flooring, became key as to how I was going to engage the gallery space. One simple way of making objects engage directly with their surroundings is to give them a reflective surface. In this installation, two objects polished with black auto paint reflected everything and everyone

around them. But the greater number of objects made of sheet-metal and strips of simulated wood strips of vinyl surface-flooring were to me more interestingly engaging of the space as they took on the likeness of one of the architectural elements of the gallery.

Even my use of this material was ambivalent. In constructing an object with an outer layer of sheet-metal and with vinyl strips as the inner layer, I did not necessarily render visually the sheet-metal as the object's armature. But when sheet metal was used as the not-so-visible inner layer of an object, then perhaps it was easier to dismiss it as mere armature. Eventually this layering of sheet-metal with the same surface material as the gallery floor rendered these objects visually ambivalent: Were they mere objects in space or were they architectural structures that somehow redefined the gallery space? In revisiting the minimalist project of site-specific works, I sought to engage the audience to experience these objects mindful of them as forms/structures in acute relation to the gallery space.



# Small Acts of Public Service

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YUMI JANAIRO ROTH

*We now use the country itself, as its own map,  
and I assure you it does nearly as well.*  
Lewis Carroll in *Sylvie and Bruno*

In February of 2005 I traveled to Manila to work as an artist in residence at the Vargas Museum as the University of the Philippines-Diliman. Monday through Friday, I diligently commuted to the museum. Once there I wandered through the collection, riffled through the archives and sat in the basement ostensibly to “work”—on what, I didn’t have a clue. In reality, I often felt that I was just biding my time, providing myself with a schedule and routine so that I didn’t appear to be an aimless artist. Little did I realize that my work didn’t occur in the basement of that museum, but rather in my daily commute and the concentration that it required for me to learn a new transportation system. The museum ultimately functioned as a destination point while the daily commute turned into my project, *Small Acts of Public Service*.

When I first arrived to participate in the residency program at the Vargas Museum, I knew that getting to and from the university might present a challenge. In past visits to see my family, I was often shuttled around in cars that belonged to my cousins, aunts, and uncles. Unlike other cities where I had either lived or visited and relied on public transportation, I didn’t use the jeeps, buses or trains to travel between points in Metro Manila. As a passive visitor I luxuriated in air-conditioned cars, arriving sweat-free to malls, restaurants, and my relatives’ homes. This time would be different, as I would have to use public transportation like everyone else.

From my aunt’s house to the museum, I would need to take, at minimum, two jeeps. As any local can tell you, jeepneys were first introduced when the Americans left army jeeps behind after WWII. Modified by Filipinos, the jeepney is now the most common form of semi-public transportation throughout the Philippines. Unlike subway systems that have set stops along a route, passengers riding the jeeps can board and exit anywhere along a jeep’s route.

So that I wouldn’t get lost, my cousin took me on a dry run to and from the Diliman campus. We crossed the street from the house and waved down a jeep marked “Welcome - Project 2-3 – Anonas.” Although many jeeps with different routes traveled along Tomas Morato, a commercial street in Quezon City, only one would take me to my transfer point, “Capitol.” How would I know that we were near “Capitol?” There wasn’t a sign marking a conventional stop. Apparently I would look out the narrow windows of the jeep for small visual clues and markers that would help me identify a place where a movie theater named “Capitol” once stood but had since been demolished. From there we walked around the block to catch a jeep marked “UP Campus-Philcoa,” a direct line to the Vargas Museum. For people who have lived in the city for a long time or whose knowledge of navigating the city was gleaned through family and friends, the idea of navigating by

landmarks (and at times no-longer-existent landmarks) made sense. Without this history or intimacy with the place, I had to learn how to move through a city without the aid of a conventional map. This experience made me more aware of myself as a visitor, and how much I assumed that places would and should be spatially translated in particular ways.

After a few weeks of commuting to and from the museum as well as adding new destinations to my growing sense of space, I jokingly mentioned to my family that I wanted to map all of the jeep routes in Metro Manila. Seeing it as a daunting task, they understandably laughed. I started with the routes that I knew and paid closer attention to the most common stops. Although I once characterized the jeepney system as something akin to a taxicab with a route (the idea that one could get on and off along any point on the route), I realized that there seemed to be a pattern rather than random assortment of stops. Riding the “Pantranco-Philcoa-UP Campus” line, it was almost guaranteed that the driver would stop at HiTop, Hiway, Kalayaan, and Admin. In spite of the possibility of picking up and dropping off passengers every ten feet, the jeep seemed to move at a pretty fast clip as I arrived to the museum everyday in twenty to thirty minutes.

With the help of family and friends, I worked to determine the most common stops along three jeepney routes, “Pantranco-Philcoa-UP Campus,” “Welcome-Project 2-3-Anonas,” and “Cubao-Diamond-Roces.” I created a series of two-color laminated route maps that could be mounted on either the jeep’s ceiling or wall. Additionally, I provided a pocket full of take-away maps with the same information. Before installing any of the maps, however, I, with the help of my cousin, always spoke with the jeepney driver. I wanted to make sure that the maps were mostly accurate to the usual route and also determine where they might be best installed (sometimes on the ceiling, sometimes behind the driver’s seat, sometimes on one of the interior metal poles). All of the drivers seemed to welcome the addition of maps and I was pleasantly surprised to find maps still hanging in jeeps days after the initial installation.

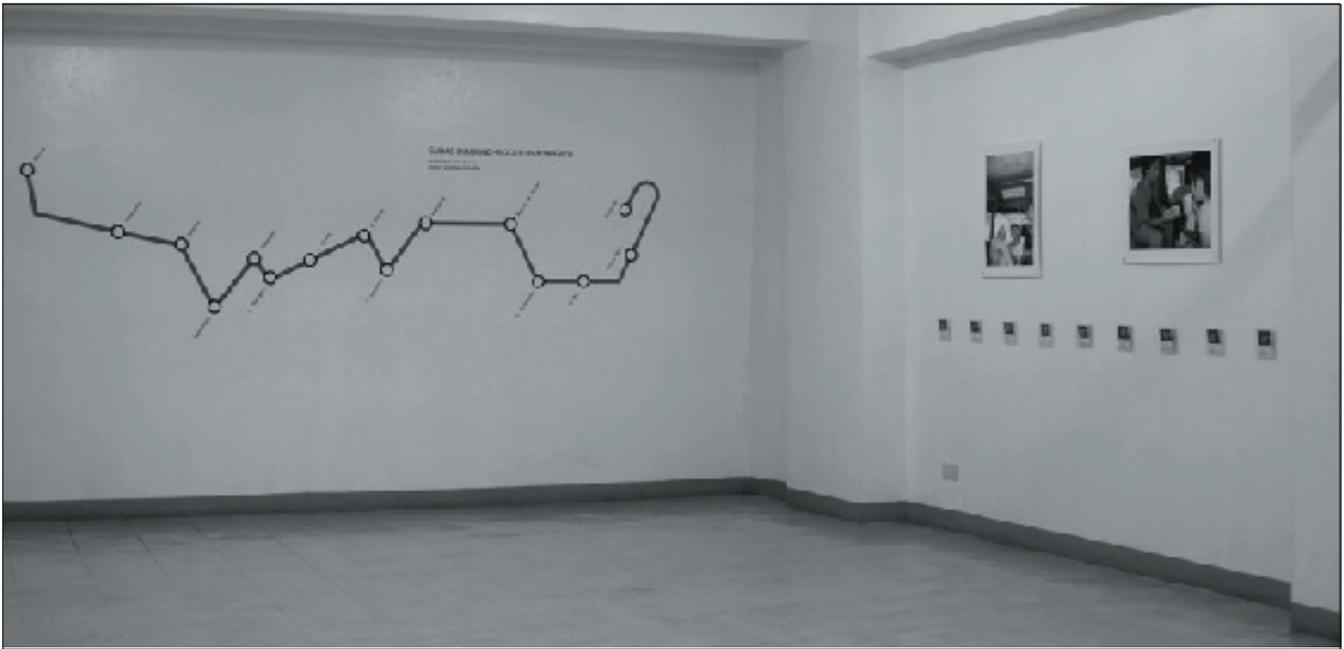


What was most interesting to me was the level of social interaction and reliance that passengers must practice to ride the jeep. From calling out a stop (from what sometimes seemed like a predetermined list of names), to establishing proper fare, to following the appropriate etiquette for passing fare forward and change back, to actually getting the jeep to stop at one's desired point (do I say "para," or merely tap on the roof?), to moving over just a little bit to make room for the sixteenth passenger, riding the jeep was a remarkably social experience. Learning the system required a high degree of socialization and practice, one that I learned my cousin had also undergone. When I rode with my cousin, she coached me at every juncture, showing me how to properly carry money on the jeep (small amounts that were easily retrieved from a coin purse), where to sit (preferably near the exit, but if the jeep was crowded, scooting in the direction of the door as people exited the jeep), the proper way to pass my money as well as others' money to the jeep driver, and how to ask the jeep driver to stop (women say "para" and men tap on the roof, although depending on where I was sitting I would use either method).

While I was still in the Philippines, I installed *Small Acts of Public Service* in two types of locations, the jeepneys and the Vargas Museum. While in the jeeps, I hoped that the maps might blend in with the other signage found inside (posters, fare sheets, and other instructions) and that passengers might regard them as yet another piece of information that they could use or ignore. To the everyday passenger, the maps' status as art was irrelevant.



In the museum, I installed oversized vinyl maps of the different routes, take-away maps, and photo documentation of jeep passengers interacting with the maps. I used the museum space to suggest the vestibule in a subway station where oversized maps help would-be passengers locate their destinations. Visitors to the museum often initially mistook the maps as subway routes, probably wondering why they were installed in an art space. Upon closer inspection they were surprised to realize that the maps charted jeepney routes.



Although *Small Acts of Public Service* was initially conceived for the jeepneys, by also installing the project in the Vargas Museum, I hoped to create a dialogue between two types of spaces, one art and one non-art space. Where jeep passengers might only quickly consider the implications of finding a map where none had previously existed, the museum created a more contemplative situation where visitors could reflect back on their expectations of maps, functionality, public transportation as well as art. By placing the maps as well as the documentation of the project in the museum, some viewers might start to question the boundaries of art, what constitutes art, and where it might exist.

*Small Acts of Public Service* isn't so much an attempt to create an accurate map of jeepney routes as to raise questions about what it means to have or lack such a map, or to want or dismiss this method of orientation. By installing maps in the jeeps, I hoped to point to a contrasting system whereby other modes of knowledge and learning are prioritized, modes which seem to prefer intimate connection with a place, flexibility in getting to and from a destination, and reliance on a broad and diverse social network to learn the intricacies of a complex public transportation system. By installing maps in the jeeps I seek to pose many questions: What does a map connote? Whom does the map serve, and how? How do maps change our perception of a place, a route or a destination? What does a map enable or destroy? And, if there is a map, will someone actually use it?

## ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS

**Kóan Jeff Baysa** curated his first independent exhibition in 1989 and is a 1998 Whitney Independent Study Program Curatorial alumnus. A contributing writer for New York Arts Magazine and the online publication Flavorpill, he has written for Art Asia Pacific and is the Pacific editor for dART INTERNATIONAL. He has curated shows for the London Biennale, the LA International Biennial, and has organized art events in Beijing, Dublin, London, Hong Kong, Manila and for the United Nations. He is on the boards of The Vera List Center for Art and Politics at The New School University, Art Omi International Artist Colony, the Asian American Art Centre, The Center for Photography at Woodstock, The CoCo Institute, and the Media Forum for Global Health. He was recently appointed Head of the New York Curatorial Office and the Director and Curator of International Projects for MoCA Beijing. Dr. Baysa is based in New York and Los Angeles.

**Mizuki Endo** earned his MA degree in Social and Cultural Studies from Kyushu University. In 2005 he co-founded Future Prospects Art Space in Quezon City, Philippines. He is Director of Art Space Tetra (<http://www.as-tetra.info>) located in Fukuoka, Japan and Publisher and Editor-in-Chief of Fukuoka-based independent art magazine *Rhythm* (<http://www.mhtyhr.com>). He curated his first exhibition in 2001 entitled *Book of Love* held in Hojo-Shorin, Fukuoka.

**Reg Yuson** is the recipient of the 2003 Cultural Center of the Philippines Thirteen Artists Award, an award given to young artists who show potential in contributing to the development of Philippine visual arts. Although primarily a sculptor now doing a lot of functional and commissioned public art, Yuson also draws, a discipline he considers fundamental to his art production. As a cultural worker, he served with the National Commission for Culture and the Arts Committee on Visual Arts from 1995 to 2001 and with the Society of Philippine Sculptors from 1993 to 2000 to help revitalize the local community of sculptors. He lives and works in Manila.

**Yumi Roth Janairo** is a Filipino-American artist who lives in the US and teaches sculpture at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Two of her major exhibitions were *Detoured* held at the Lawndale Art Center, Houston in 2005, a solo exhibition featuring work that recontextualized how we view and interact with objects associated with authority, namely traffic barriers, cones, and concrete barricades. All of the objects created for the show were also temporarily installed throughout Houston; and *RG ReSolution Presents: thinking small* held at the Map Room, Portland in 2005. Collaborating with Adriane Herman, she created a problem-resolving clinic for visitors. Her work as well as the project *Small Acts of Public Service* can be viewed at [www.yumijroth.com](http://www.yumijroth.com)

## ABOUT CTRLR+P'S PUBLISHERS/EDITORIAL BOARD

**Flaudette May V. Datuin** is an Associate Professor of the Department of Art Studies, University of the Philippines. She is the author of *Home Body Memory: Filipina Artists in the Visual Arts, 19th Century to the Present* (University of the Philippines Press, 2002). The book is based on her dissertation for her PhD in Philippines Studies degree.

Datuin is the recipient of the Asian Scholarship Foundation and Asian Public Intellectual Fellowships, which enabled her to conduct research on contemporary women artists of China and Korea in 2002-2003, and Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and Japan in 2004-2005. On her way back from Japan, she curated the Asian section of a video exhibition at EWHA University, Seoul, which she writes about in this issue. She is currently curating and organizing an international and interdisciplinary exhibit-conference-workshop called *trauma, interrupted* to be held in multiple venues in 2007: the Metropolitan Museum of the Philippines, Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP), National Museum of the Philippines and Liongoren Gallery. The first major exhibition she curated in 1999 at the CCP *Women Imaging Women* featured women artists from Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand and the Philippines a result of her initial research in these countries from 1994-1997. Before she left for her Nippon Fellowship in 2004, she curated *balaybay@kasibulan.net* held at the CCP to celebrate the 15th anniversary of KASIBULAN, a group of Filipina artists in the visual arts.

Datuin currently teaches graduate and undergraduate courses on the contemporary arts of Asia, art theory and aesthetics, gender issues in the arts, and special topics on hyper-media and art, among others.

**Judy Freya Sibayan** a performance and conceptual artist, received her Master of Fine Arts from the Otis Art Institute of Parsons School of Design. She is the recipient of the Cultural Center of the Philippines 1976 Thirteen Artists Award and is former director of the erstwhile Contemporary Art Museum of the Philippines. The City of Manila where she lives and works, recently awarded her the *Patnubay ng Sining at Kalinagnan sa Bagong Pamamaraan Award*.

She performed and curated *Scapular Gallery Nomad*, ([http://a-r-c.gold.ac.uk/a-r-c\\_Three/texts/3\\_judy01.html](http://a-r-c.gold.ac.uk/a-r-c_Three/texts/3_judy01.html)) a gallery she wore daily for five years and is currently curator and the *Museum of Mental Objects* (MoMO), a work proposing that her body be the museum itself. Although Sibayan's major body of work is a materialist and institutional critique of art, she has also exhibited and performed in museums, galleries and performance venues such as the The Tramway, Glasgow; the Vienna Secession; the Hayward Gallery, London; PS 1 Institute of Contemporary Art, New York; The Farm, San Francisco; Sternersensemuseet, Oslo; The Photographers' Gallery, London; Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney; The Kiasma Contemporary Art Center, Helsinki; The Mori Art Museum, Tokyo; The Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm; Nikolaj Contemporary Art Center, Copenhagen; X-Ray Art Center, Beijing; Fukuoka Art Museum; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen; Hong Kong Art Centre; and at the capcMusée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux. She has participated in two international art biennales, the 1986 3<sup>rd</sup> *Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh* and the 2002 *Gwangju Biennale* in South Korea.

Also an independent curator, she conceived and was lead-curator of *xs→ XL Expanding Art* held at Sculpture Square, Singapore in 2002 and *600 Images/60 Artists/6 Curators/6 Cities: Bangkok/Berlin/London/Los Angeles/Manila/Saigon* (curated entirely through the internet and held in all 6 cities in 2005). Both projects investigated the possibilities of developing large scale international exhibitions mounted with very modest resources. She currently teaches as an Assistant Professor of the Department of Communication, De La Salle University ([www.dlsu.edu.ph](http://www.dlsu.edu.ph)) where she has taught for twenty years.