



CONTEMPORARY ART
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I would like to clarify, first of all, that I speak from a US perspective and will be focusing primarily in the practices of mainstream public institutions in the US: general art museums that include contemporary art and institutes devoted to it; this does not include culturally specific museums that maintain a more holistic position between their institutions and their communities.

The Audience, The Other

I am speaking, too, as I cling to the American ideal of democracy that today is at odds with our political reality, one that is striving to disenfranchise and constrict the rights of many residing in the US. For art, this points to a return to a classical museum approach, a focus on traditional values, less representation of the practices of other peoples and less access for others to the public institutions of art.

Finally, I hope to learn over the course of these meetings how the audience for contemporary art is defined in your part of the world; what are your primary institutions of art and how do they define and draw their audiences; and what is the audience's relationship to the work of art?

1. The Gap Between Art and Life Mary Jane Jacob

For the US public, experiencing the visual arts is synonymous with going to museums. Likewise, museums seek to maintain a prominent position as keepers of the culture. In the US, art is divorced from daily life; it is an entertainment or educational activity. It is a less than serious and not socially useful profession (particularly in the case of artists who are viewed as engaged in a self-indulgent activity). Those individuals making big money in art are exempt. Art's presence in other venues (schools, commercial galleries) and though publications is seen as an exclusive activity for an academic or economic elite, while, in reverse, its appearance at such broadly public, high attendance events like outdoor arts festivals, is viewed by art professionals and museumgoers as unsophisticated, unimportant, and low class. [These two viewpoints come to together in the arena of public art where the art world exercises its prerogative to educate and elevate the masses by placing art in a dominant position in public space. Public art, announced and without explanation, public education, a vehicle that once transcended boundaries of geography and class and brought art and creativity into the everyday, is absent from most schools. Community programs that reinsert art into the lives of people are deemed therapeutic or social service but not art. Art is not a part of the fabric of life itself, but rather a function of marketing or commerce. Thus, art remains something for the art world, not only to those on the outside, but I would argue, to many inside who prefer art to a popular domain which they associate with inferior quality. Most art or high art

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Preface

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I am speaking, too, as I cling to the American ideal of democracy that today is at odds with our political reality, one that is striving to disenfranchise and compromise the rights of many residing in the US. For art, this points to a return to a classical museum approach, a focus on traditional venues, less representation of the concerns of other peoples and less access for others to the public institutions of art.

Finally, I hope to learn over the course of these meetings how the audience for contemporary art is defined in your part of the world; what are your primary institutions of art and how do they define and draw their audiences: and what is the audience's relationship to the work of art?

I. The Gap Between Art and Its Potential Audience

For the US public, experiencing the visual arts is synonymous with going to museums. Likewise museums seek to maintain a preeminent position as keepers of the culture. In the US, art is divorced from daily life; it is an entertainment or educational activity. It is a less than serious and not socially useful profession (particularly in the case of artists who are viewed as engaged in a self-indulgent activity). Those individuals making big money in art are exempt. Art's presence in other venues (schools, commercial galleries) and through publications is seen as an exclusive activity for an academic or economic elite, while, in reverse, its appearance at such broadly public, high attendance events like outdoor arts festivals, is viewed by arts professionals and museum-goers as unsophisticated, unimportant, and low class. (These two viewpoints come to loggerheads in the arena of public art where the art world exercises its prerogative to educate and elevate the masses by placing art it deems significant in public spaces, usually unannounced and without explanation). Public education, a vehicle that once transcended boundaries of geography and class and brought art and creativity into the everyday, is absent from most schools. Community programs that reinsert art into the lives of people are deemed therapeutic or social service but not art. Art is not a part of the fabric of life itself, but rather a function or marketing or commerce. Thus, art remains something for the art world, not only to those on the outside, but I would argue, to many inside who protect art from popular domain which they associate with inferior quality. Real art or high art



is reserved for an elite constituency, an elevated, if albeit non-democratic concept.

In general, it is the conjuncture between those responsible for the production of art (artists) and the means of distribution (museums, commercial galleries, and publications) with its processors of art (curators, dealers, critics, and collectors) that comprise the art world system. The public audience stands outside this chain of production/consumption. In museums, efforts toward mediation between the work of art and the audience is left to the education department. The inability to comprehend and to appreciate the work of art is believed to be due to a deficiency on the part of the viewer, such as lack of sufficient art knowledge. Reception to the art is measured by means of attendance numbers, that is, how well it does at the box office.

The gap between art and audience in the United States leads to an alienation on the part of the larger public from art and its institutions. This results in a loss of potential audience that, at least for purposes of funding initiatives and admission-revenue projections, museums claim to want to enfranchise. To understand why US contemporary art museums incorporate only a narrow specter of persons into the area of contemporary art, is to reexamine the solitary role which these institutions play as arbiters of taste and validators of art experiences.

II. Who Defines Important Contemporary Art?

While art existed long before museums, the relatively recent phenomenon by which museums and critics determine what is art - that is, important art - has a powerful stranglehold on the art system. The curator of the current biennial at The Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, Klaus Kertess, was described recently in The New York Times as holding "a position of overwhelming power" and that "no other major museum show in the United States can give such a boost to a young artist or, on occasion, lead to an older artist' rebirth.... museum-goers look to it for direction ..." (Paul Goldberger, "The Art of His Choosing," February 16, 1995)

This power is predicated on the distinction between high art and low art which denies or demeans the value of the other forms of cultural expression outside that which can be found within the sanctioned space of the institution. This system of division and classification permeates the institution's class-oriented structure of patrons, trustees, membership, special events, collections, facilities, and exhibitions and programs. Thus, an exhibition like the 1993 Whitney Biennial, which focused on the multicultural movement, met with fierce objections because it threatened the existing power structure not only of society, but of the institutions itself. Here American puritanical legacy, denouncing art as unproductive and morally destructive for the society, came face-to-face with a multicultural agenda that promoted art as an expression of self identity, potentially restorative, and necessary to the creation of a new, more inclusive society. But we are told by The New York Times that the 1993 Biennial, in emphasizing "political art over all else" and including "considerably less painting than previous years" left critics to "shriek that the Whitney had abandoned

the very idea of art as a visual medium...."

Without changing how art is shown in the museum and how the museum conducts business, contemporary art of a post colonial critique falls victim to being cast as a clever, postmodern trick in US museums. One such example is Fred Wilson's reinstallation of the collections of the Maryland Historical Society. Revealing a deep-seated premise of racial prejudice against African-Americans through collecting patterns, traditional modes of display, art and artifacts, he aimed to reshape our notion of the museum itself. But his alteration of the practices of the museum were momentary — for as long as the duration of the exhibition — and its lessons confined to the gallery floor. It was not a fundamental change, but limited to being an interesting and thought-provoking art exhibition that remained, nonetheless, in the rarified realm of art and not the life of the museum. That this exhibition happened in a history and not an art museum is significant. To reveal such premises as they exist at the core of all American museums, including contemporary art museums, would bring these issues too close to home; it is better to colonize and poke holes in the structure of other types of museums in the form of cultural play. But art of a post-colonial critique demands a self-examination of our own institutional practices. Otherwise, its display, too, remains a hollow one and only a stylistic and one-dimensional reading is possible.

Museums and magazine in the US and Western Europe and periodic exhibitions in the West, like the Venice Biennale and Documenta, function like the Whitney Biennial, but on an international level, to tell us what art is important now. However, such exhibitions outside this Western frame — Saulo Paulo, Sydney, and beyond — are viewed from the US as remedial, catch-up exhibitions for cultural outposts; a show to inform "them", but not a barometer or of consequence to "us". These shows are considered to be of little significance to the mainstream because it is felt they are geared for a local Third World venue of considerably lesser stature in the eyes of the New York centered, art world establishment. Instead the incorporation of work by foreigners into the US mainstream began in the late 1970s with German and Italian artists, then French, Spanish, British, then Dutch, Japanese, Brazilian —the list goes on— as other countries sought to demonstrate their cultural and economic power in this arena. The assessments of critics writing in US magazines are cast in economic terms. They take the form of travelogues to far off places, ending up with the great buy. Here are just a few from Art in America:

April 1989, "Soviet contemporary art has surfaced as exotic new esthetic terrain — and one of the last virgin markets left in the art world" (Amei Wallach, "Marketing Perestorika");

In July 1993 Korean artist Choong Sup Lim reported: "When I used to go into galleries in New York, they were very cool. Now they welcome me. They visibly threat Oriental people well because lots of Oriental people buy art. My hope is that they want to build another bridge, but I fear that they just want to make money. Now the Koreans are rich and America accepts the art of rich countries" (Eleanor Heartney, "Report from Korea: the New players"); and

February 1994, "As their rising economies integrate countries like Japan, Korea, Taiwan more fully in the world's economic mainstream, these nations seek to join the westernized cultural mainstream as well, even if that means sacrificing certain elements of their unique identities...it seems clear that like Japan and Korea before it, Taiwan is poised for a major push for International recognition". Thus the status of the art of disenfranchised nations moves from disregard—a position of disbelief in its very existence—to promotion, as it is offered as the latest thing, the new avant-garde. Survey exhibitions of this art outside the Western mainstream is first met with criticism and suspicion; then some stars are identified and propelled as a demonstration of yet another nation incorporated into the international art scene. But it is unclear whether the power relationships that for so long favored white, male Euro-American painters can be said to have truly changed.

III. The Need for New Forums for International Art

The first Johannesburg Biennale, now in its closing days, marks a significant change over other biennials in its multi-layered approach, however logistically taxed, aimed to set up a true cultural dialogue. This was not just accomplished by "discovering" in colonial fashion some strong African artists whose work could make it in New York; it was not an act of the West colonizing South Africa by importing to the biennial "important" (read: Western) contemporary art to educate and ultimately influence (read: upgrade) local production. But, unfortunately, what the respect of place, of the exhibition location, evidenced by this approach and the layering of points of access to the exhibition and dialogue with it, was viewed by some as being condescending to local issues, as ancillary activities for them not us. They saw the exhibition's relation to place as something other and not central to an international aspect of such a forum.

Rather, I would say that, the very operational structure — the rethinking of the institution of biennale — was its most significant contribution and one which offered multiple viewpoints on how to read and think about contemporary African art and world art. This included:

1. The insertion of South African artists into the individually curated sections of other nations. The foreign curator was invited to consider including the work of a South African artist. The opportunity was best handled by Bart DeBaere who brought Flemish and South African artists together to work; jointly they created an intertwined display of new and existing work. It worked least well in the case of the United States, where one sculpture by a single South African was shown in a much inferior room off to the side of major displays of two African-American artists.

2. A trainee-program by which young South Africans worked with foreign curators as liaisons and travelled to the curator's country to observe the mechanisms of art institutions abroad.

3. A wide range of citywide, township, and countryside exhibitions and exchanges that extended not only the dialogue about art, but the frame through which

it was perceived.

4. A public education program. (Goldberger)

Just begin to compare the Johannesburg show to the structure of the more powerful (read: more important) Venice Biennale and the criticism seem misplaced. Comparison to Venice, too, reveals this Western leader's obvious status as an art market or art fair divorced from the life of the host community, from any community, but, more importantly, from any informed rethinking of contemporary art of a global scope today. In each, Johannesburg and Venice, the institutional structure drives the definition of what is important contemporary art, even what is art, to far different results. But for now the status of "important contemporary art" in the West remains an economic concept in ways that permeate an entire psychological, philosophical, and operational system.

IV. The public Museum as an Economic Entity

This mode of conception of contemporary art is perpetuated and promoted through the art museum. Even though demands have been placed on US museums since the last decade to be audience responsive, increase accessibility, provide educational materials, and expand their roles beyond that of keeper and presenter into the community, the museum has not changed in essential ways and the demographics potential of its audience is constricted by the institution's own conventions. The museum's audience is discussed in self-reflexive terms: The audience for art is that which comes to museums, and issues of audience primarily revolve around the need for museum attendance.

Since the 1970s audience development has centered on marketing: of membership (leading to an institutional identity of a club) and of its physical amenities (such as museum stores and cafes). This can be seen most recently with the opening of the new San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Designed by Swiss architect Mario Boatta, the new SFMOMA is distinguished by its user-friendly, street-level presence—its appears to be a store to one side and restaurant to the other, each surrounding a funnellike opening that leads to an enclosed granite plaza in which members and nonmembers are divided like the saved and the unrepentant. The art remains contained above, out of view, until both admission and homage are paid. here the visitor is either patron, a stockholder in the museum, or consumer, a role familiar to all Americans.

Attendance alone does not ensure a different relationship. Even when an exhibition is well attended and demonstrates a special significance for the public, possessing the ability to meaningfully engage audiences new to the museum, its effectiveness is still measured according to the American production-consumption system. Hence, although the 1993 Whitney Biennial was an attendance success "with nearly 105,000 admissions", making it "the museum's second most popular show in this decade ..." The current 1995 Whitney Biennial is seen as "more important than ever" because it is "granting a chosen few artists exposure at a time when the mar-

ket for contemporary art still languishes far below its late-80s peak....." and the curator is being "hailed by most of the galleries representing painters, which felt shut out by the 1993 exhibition ..." (Goldberger).

But in fact, the success of the 1993 Whitney Biennial in attracting the public may have actually contributed to its unfavorable critical appraisal. There is disdain for the audience drawn from ranks outside that of the usual art world. Such an audience is seen as an indication of an exhibition's baseness, its appeal to the populace, and being not up to "museum standards". In other words, the same argument is applied to audience as was used to discredit art made by the other. That is, the quality of the audience and of their art experience is not sufficiently high. Rather there remains a devotion to the "academy audience" (the art world and conventional museum-goers). Yet this other audience constitutes the new avant-garde, the disenfranchised audience.

The same can be said of the Whitney's recent 'Black Male' show which attracted a large audience and an astounding and uncommon number of young people and African-Americans. Critics ignored these statistics and what they reflect about the show's subject matter and import for America society today. As pointed out by Homi Bhabha, they attempted to cast "the representation of social difference into the spheres of political theory and therapy...." ("Review", Art in America, February 1995). This "Other Audience" was viewed as the minority in need of redemption, but not capable of an aesthetic and sophisticated (read: high) art experience. And so while the subject of art of a postcolonial critique and cultural identity offers special potential for engaging and expanding the museum's audience, this becomes a threat to the cultural and social establishment rather than a connecting point.

In Fact, one has to question whether it is even a goal of museums and the establishment art world to expand their audience at all. The art world is a closed system that maintains its authority by appointing museums the guardians of culture, perpetuating a belief in Western Europe and New York as the center of the art world, and benefitting ideologically from continued high/low dichotomy that relegates all else other than the so-called mainstream art to secondary status.

Thus, the rhetoric of the era — be it, multicultural, International, postcolonial — ring hollow within US museums. Without a change of class and cultural politics, the artistic agenda stand diametrically opposed to the structure of the museum. In other words, the very core of such art institutions is at odds with the formation of a new social agenda evoked by this art. In spite of the multicultural awareness of the last decade in the US, it appears that US museums are willing to engage audiences only on their terms with the aim to colonize persons and communities, turning them into museum-goers, rather than to establish new relationships and continuing, permanent vehicles of enlightened exchange and mutual respect. The result is that these public institutions are not for all segments of the public. For example, they are not for the poor (unless they are perhaps children); they are not for Blacks (unless middle-class). Thus, we have recognized through the reception for contemporary art that problematizes culture, that museum have a closed, class specific audience. And now with the Republican right legislature in power in Washington D.C., the process

of preserving the art establishment — in all its isolation and elitism — is near complete.

V. The Audience, The Other.

If the internationalization of art remains an issue of gaining access to Western system of power, then the Western elitist concept of audience will prevail. But if art of a postcolonial critique, related to social and political dilemmas of our times, aims to feed back into society and impact on people's lives and not just impact on their buying or viewing habits, then new modes of interaction with the public must be developed.

It is necessary first to put aside the Western position of authority over and distance from the audience that has become a hallmark of modern art. It is necessary to find ways to reconnect art and society into an integrated culture; to put people back in contact with art; it is necessary to value that art is made for audiences and not for institutions of art.

If much of our art is making important statements about our society today, cannot those reflected — pictured — in that art (and who stand outside the usual social, educational, racial/ethnic, and economic profile of the US museum-goer) be a part of that audience, too? But in the US art world, it is believed that the uninitiated audience, non-regular museum goers with no formal art history, cannot be viewers for contemporary art. Instead it is commonly held that special populist (read: condescending) program must be introduced. It is demanded that art be known through art history and criticism, not life experience. If the art is locally appreciated, then it must not be of interest to those situated geographically and socially outside. If appreciated widely, it must be appealing to the lowest common denominator and cannot be great art. It is believed to be audience responsive is to arrive at the most base level of understanding, compromising "quality" and art itself. The very presence of a non-art world receivership, contributes to the devaluation of much art by critics. If that audience is located outside the West (credentialed professional, excepted), or is educationally, economically, or otherwise on the margins of US society, then their perception of the work is deemed inconsequential. Much art today is claimed to be a "voice of the other"; then why do we shut them out from being a vocal audience, too, and confine them to existence of being an abstracted subject only. Perhaps for many in the art world, their own interest in art is dependent on its very refinement and remove from the everyday and everyone, from this "other audience".

Can there be a broader audience for art? I believe there can, but it still lies outside the bounds of most US museums. Outside the academy of audience, this other audience is today's the avant-garde. It is the investigation of this audience that can help to motivate artist's work, give greater to purpose and value to the work of curators and critics, and not only reshape but save our languishing institutions of art in the US.

The Recent Developments of 'Southern'
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in the emerging context



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The Recent Developments of 'Southern' Contemporary Art avant-garde art practice in the emerging context

Summary of paper

The context of Indonesia and the NAM conference is a propitious site for discussion of a new internationalism. The vision of realignment proceeded from the Bandung conference; the concept of the third world developed thereon. That context has had an irreversible effect in understanding the dynamic of the world system.

The Recent Developments of 'Southern' Contemporary Art avant-garde art practice in the emerging context

It is a polemical requirement of some urgency to change categories according to historical need. Third world solidarity in the arts dates from 1968 when radical practice in Latin America cinema designated itself precisely as the third cinema; this was in a sense completed by the inauguration of the third world Havana Biennale in 1985. Meanwhile mainstream discourse changed; everyone was talking of the margins and of the periphery or more recently of the local / global. This new geography has recently frozen to a degree zero from the ideological point of view and here is once again a move to rearticulate a postcolonial position in cultural theory in the hands of the interventionists. It re-emphasizes the political import of cultural production in these regions. It recalls that culture involves, via liberation struggles, a reconstruction of the psyche as of the material means; from the anti colonial theses from Fanon to the subalternist historians of India may still have to be pressed forward. And this pressing forward will give not only a distinct meaning but a caring edge to the postcolonial artist to intervene in the somewhat chaotic transition from the modern to the postmodern — the committed term post going to such an artist a lever to deconstruct the politics of that transition.

Geeta Kapur

The introduction of the term southern is useful in that it recognizes the tragic disappearance of the socialist second world and thereby of the validity of a three world system. It also allows, if we wish to exercise that choice, an emancipation from the perennial state of postcolonialism which we tend to harness our own selves. But the south-south solidarity must be a kind of hemispherical energy — like a torpedo in the Indian ocean apart from the metaphoric possibilities, it has to refigure ideology depending on the kind of interalliances the south makes to convince the north of its, the north's, henceforth delimited destiny. And to demonstrate it with concrete result on the ground of political economy wherein cultural dynamic will be one crucial part.

The south is not a place of difference but of change; we must beware of the

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Summary of paper

The context of Indonesia and the NAM conference is a propitious site for discussion of a new internationalism. The vision of non-alignment proceeded from the Bandung conference; the concept of the third world developed thereon. That concept has had an irreversible effect in understanding the dynamic of the world system; the breaking up of the universalist assumption into a world with sharply nation is a weighty player no matter what warnings might be issue against nationalism. In the circumstance there has to be a continuing discussion on the nation state and on nationalism as determinate categories in the area of culture and indeed of modern civilization.

It is a polemical requirement of some urgency to change categories according to historical need. Third world solidarity in the arts dates from 1968 when radical practice in Latin America cinema designated itself precisely as the third cinema; this was in a sense completed by the inauguration of the third world Havana Biennale in 1985. Meanwhile mainstream discourse changed; everyone was talking of the margins and of the periphery or more recently of the local / global. This new geography has already frozen to a degree zero from the ideological point of view and there is once again a move to rearticulate a postcolonial position in cultural theory. In the hands of the interventionists the matter is hot, it re-emphasizes the political import of cultural production in these regions. It recalls that culture involves, via liberation struggles, a reconstruction of the psyche as of the material means; that the anti colonial theses from Fanon to the subalternist historians of India may still have to be pressed forward. And this pressing forward will give not only a distinct meaning but a cutting edge to the postcolonial artist to intervene in the somewhat chaotic transition from the modern to the postmodern — the common term post giving to such an artist a lever to deconstruct the politics of that transition.

The introduction of the term southern is useful in that it recognizes the tragic disappearance of the socialist second world and thereby of the validity of a three worlds system. It also allows, if we wish to exercise that choice, an emancipation from the perennial state of postcoloniality to which we tend to harness our own solves. But the south-south solidarity must have to be a kind of hemispherical energy — like a torpedo in the Indian ocean apart from the metaphoric possibilities, it has to refigure ideology depending on the kind of inter-alliances the south makes to convince the north of its, the north's, henceforth delimited destiny. And to demonstrate it with concrete result on the ground of political economy wherein cultural dynamic will be one crucial part.

The south is not a place of difference but of change; we must beware of the

flattening of time into space as in the category of the global where in the name of multicultural difference there is, at the lowest common denominator, homogeneity — precisely, ironically, of the global village. In other words we are not seeking some great synchronic order in culturally rich region of the south — or that too. But also a diachronic, that is to say a transformative, disorder that can never be less than dialectic. This is to take the local and global as theses and antithesis and to make of it an avant-garde that is both an act of intervention as it is a transcendent phenomenon in the utopian sense of the world. The utopian is now perhaps no more no less than a good, or better, civil society.

If one of the most lucrative export of the US is the products of its culture industry, then it requires to be met by alternative national metropolitan regional local vernacular tribal cultural formations which add up in a differential equation to a more inclusive globalism. Thus one may be able to withstand US cultural products or one may not; but it will at least build up alterity as a massive material phenomenon so that what is beamed at us has to get through layers of mediation before it hits the target.

The act of making is ordered by an act of breaking in the luddite imaginary. The third world artist will continue to engage with dreams of upheaval. The streamlining of art and market in the post-industrial era of capitalism requires that we continue to open out and re-suture the ragged edge of the 20th century

The possibilities in the area of the imagination as of work proper may in fact exceed what seems theoretically possible. The sign of the time are active as much in Havana, Johannesburg, Brisbane, Dacca, Jakarta, in Baguio in the Philippines as in Venice, China and India continue their civilization self-aggrandizement but there too alternative practice proves that any historical avant-garde comes precisely from a head on with institutional conservatism at home as from imperialist hangovers. Even as there are fly by night visits by international critics and curators to our Biennales and a squeamish pick and choose of the southern artist in avant-garde shows such as document ; it is important to persist with contextualizing the work and the debate in our own regions. That signals an intrepid stand in the midst of the very circumstance of underdevelopment so that the work will appear to be in some degree untranslatable. It is not a bad thing when a northern critic says, I do not quite understand. The point is to hold produce a theatrics of our own wherein the national allegory is played out as much as the global is pinned down for what it is; a runaway force hyped on electronic media and international finance.

The object and its mode of signifying by a southern artist have to be both authentic and strategic; authentic to the historical experience and strategic in terms of the formal codings. That is the first principal of an avant-garde.

The importance of local cultural influences
in "Southern" Contemporary Art and their
contribution to International Contemporary
Art Development



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The importance of local cultural influences in "Southern" Contemporary Art and their contribution to International Contemporary Art Development

As a beginning, I would like to briefly problematize the title of my paper and some terms in it. The first has to do with the relation between the two parts of the title, "local cultural influences in 'southern' contemporary art," and "international contemporary art development". The relation is here defined as one of contribution, that is, the first contributes to the second, but not vice versa. The problem then

The importance of local cultural influences in "Southern" Contemporary Art and their contribution to International Contemporary Art Development

Alice G Guilermo

There is likewise a hazard that the concept "international contemporary art" may be construed as the "mainstream" squashed by the giant combats of the West, to which the Southern countries are but tributaries. Such would fall back to the dependent relationship of the center and periphery and, along this line, make a tacit reference to the artistic canons and system of reward and recognition laid down by the North. This, I understand, would essentially go against the purloined politics which is one of independence and self-assertion. As the national economies are being strengthened against foreign pressures, so should the art of Southeast Asia become distinct and capable of engaging in a dialogue on the international level.

As for the term "local cultural influences" I would take these to primarily refer to the indigenous, national and regional, which constitute the matrix of the Southeast Asian cultures. It is worth noting that these are living traditions; they are not remains of past eras that must inevitably disappear with industrialization and advanced technology. In them are embedded the seeds of cultural identity. We are sometimes only concerned with the preservation of the traditions, but more importantly with their revitalization to convey contemporary meanings.

In revitalizing the traditions and bringing them into the context of contemporary art, it is not less necessary that the indigenous arts be viewed in their specific

The importance of local cultural influences in "Southern" Contemporary Art and their contribution to International Contemporary Art Development

As a beginning, I would like to briefly problematize the title of my paper and some terms in it. The first has to do with the relation between the two parts of the title, "local cultural influences in 'southern' contemporary art" and "international contemporary art development". The relation is here defined as one of contribution—that is, the first contributes to the second but not vice versa. The problem then is this: What is "international contemporary art" to which "local cultural influences in 'southern' contemporary art" expected to contribute ?

There are several possible answers to this. One is that it is a universal forum consisting of the art of the different countries. It is possible to say that such a forum of world contemporary art does exist and has always existed whether or not the artists of the different countries are aware of contribution to it. One may be satisfied with this simple definition. However, such an answer overlooks the fact that surveys of world art are not neutral catalogues in which the different countries of the world are given equitable space, but are structured according to power relations on the international level. Indeed, the art centers of the North in which are also found the financial hubs of the world have always sought, since the colonial era, to uphold their cultural and artistic dominance on the countries of the South and to jealously preserve their privileged role of laying down the canons in art.

There is likewise a hazard that the concept "international contemporary art" may be construed as the "mainstream" nourished by the giant conurbation of the North to which the Southern countries are but tributaries. Such would fall back to the dependent relationship of the center and periphery and, along this line, make a tacit obeisance to the artistic canons and system of reward and recognition laid down by the North. This, I understand, would essentially go against the non-aligned position which is one of independence and self-assertion. As the national economies are being strengthened against foreign pressures, so should the art of Southeast Asia be more distinct and capable of engaging in a dialogue on the international level.

As for the term "local cultural influences" I would take these to primarily refer to the traditions, national and regional, which constitute the matrix of the Southeast Asian cultures. It is worth noting that most of these are living traditions; they are not residues of past eras that must inevitably disappear with industrialization and advances in technology. In them are embedded the seeds of cultural identity. We are now not only concerned with the preservation of the traditions, but more importantly, with their revitalization to convey contemporary meanings.

In revitalizing the traditions and bringing them into the context of contemporary art, it is first of all necessary that the indigenous arts be viewed in their specific

social contexts, in their conditions of production in which the artists / craftsmen of the indigenous communities work. In the Philippines, their populations have long suffered neglect, deprivation and colonial prejudice. Thus, before one can truly appreciate their splendid productions, it is necessary to explore means to ameliorate their situation and ensure them security of life.

Intensive studies have shown that the indigenous arts contain world views in their symbols and motifs. The ideational framework of the textiles, embroidery, basketry, and woodcarving is that of the epics with their cosmologies and social values associated with gods and heroes. An important values to be derived in the basic principle of harmony with nature through which humans regain their primary relationship with the natural world at a time when ecosystems are endangered.

Cultural symbols can be revitalized and given a new semantic energy as they are brought into contemporary field, thereby contributing significantly to the contemporary art discourse. The artist may overlay the contemporary framework on the traditional so as to bring out tensions and reverberations on several levels, the traditional and the contemporary, which are not only temporal levels but also involve highly complex modes of perceiving the world. By such a device, the artistic experience becomes multi-layered and multi-textured in density because of the coexisting, converging and intersecting of different cultural space within the work. The artist may trigger a subtle semantic shift in traditional symbols, designs, and figurative elements so that they acquire new temporal connotations relative to the present with its issues, concerns, and struggles. Likewise, the artist may effect striking transgressions by introducing traditional forms and elements into the contemporary visual text so as to generate tension, interrogation, as well as synthesis. Clearly, these cultural symbols and motifs cannot be used as purely decorative elements devoid of signification. It is likewise important that these symbols when recuperated for contemporary art are not divorced from the interests of the indigenous communities, especially since these symbols have a powerful potential. Being originally invested with a community's aspirations and sense of identity, they are the subject of a tug-war between ruling interests and the people themselves.

A number of contemporary artists have created outstanding works of contemporary art with traditional symbols. These symbols may be drawn from precolonial and indigenous art, such as cosmic and nature symbols, including plants and animals of ritualistic value. A rich source of symbols has been Islamic art and calligraphy from the Koranic texts. The Indonesian artist A.D. Pirous is one of the foremost exponents of this trend in his paintings in which Islamic symbols create reverberations on many levels and radiate a precious and mystical effusion.

Traditional Malay design have also been central to the issue of cultural identity, and these have been the principal elements in the work of the Malaysian artist Ruzaiqa Omar Basree. His Window Series makes use of woodcarvings for windows found throughout Southeast Asia, thereby identifying and using Malay cultural codes in art.

The recent trend in the use of indigenous materials situates art-making in a

definite geographical and social context, particularly the Southeast Asian region and country, precisely because of the use of vernacular resources culled from the tropical organic life of the common environment. This trend promotes the democratization of art-making and art-viewing because the use of familiar and accessible materials breaks down the alienation of the ordinary viewer when faced with elitist materials that simply specialization along Western lines.

Corollary to this, the use of indigenous materials makes use of the corresponding skills and technologies that are part of the art-making traditions, such as wood-carving and weaving. It brings out the particular Asian sensitivity and feeling for materials, the intuitive insight into their creative potential, as well as the natural reverence for organic materials within nature, an influence of traditional Asian world views, animist, Taoist, Buddhist, or Shinto, that stress the importance of harmony with the natural universe.

Now that the use of indigenous materials from the natural and social environment in art has become an attractive alternative to many artists, it becomes important to develop a semiology of these materials. In a later development, indigenous materials do not only consist of organic and plant resource, such as leaves, twigs, seeds and seed pods, driftwood, but also include popular cultural artifacts and ornaments, such as folk paper mache figures, crocheted curtains, printed oil cloth, religious icons, and folk amulets. These natural and cultural materials are signs in semiotic system: natural objects used in art easily point to ecological significations, as well as to the cycles of birth, growth, and decay. They are at the level of basic physical experiences and body narratives. Cultural objects, on the other hand, are rich in human and social associations and memories; they can be charged with a wide range of emotions and ideas, personal and political. They also evoke different contexts, social classes and domestic settings, and from these they implicitly convey the ideologies or different classes and sectors, worker, peasant, and petit bourgeois, urban or rural. An ironic note may ensue from the juxtapositions of these various signs in collages or assemblages as they bring out the tensions and contradictions in their referents in the real world. When the semiotic significations of these materials are fully explored, art-making will not fall into a purely mediumistic or formalist exercise. These materials are used by themselves in collages and assemblages, integrated into paintings or used in installations where the depositions of elements in space becomes meaningful.

Among the contemporary artists who have done significant work in this trend are Imelda Cajjipe-Endaya who combines indigenous materials with painting in her Windows Series, Zulkifli Yusoff in his complex, highly semiotic work, "The power I", Santiago Bose in his metaphorical "Trade Wars". Likewise, Alwin Reamillo combines Philippine and other Asian folk artifacts to bring out the cultural affinities of the region. Norberto Roldan uses folk artifacts to evoke a grassroots setting, as well as to allude to particular social conditions, such as militarization in the large plantations of the Visayas and Mindanao. With his trend, the academic barriers are broken down between "high art" and "applied arts" with their connotation of lowness and inferiority. This is parallel to the eclecticism of postmodern art of the late capitalist countries which drawn equally from all forms, media, and categories, the

classical and the popular.

Many recent contemporary productions have also foregrounded bodily expression in performance art. The artist's body becomes the subject of the work, as it takes on the roles of god, hero, or victim, even multiple identities suggested by the use of masks or body paint. Physical eloquence comes from the rich Asian traditions of the martial arts, dance, and folk theater, such as the Javanese wayang. These have valorized a natural Asian sensuousness and fluidity of movement which does not suffer from the Western dichotomy of body and spirit. Some Asian art performances are drawn from indigenous rituals or are, in fact, invented rituals by the artist to invoke a noumenal world.

An important trend in the arts of the South today is the use of figures and subjects in traditional figurative styles in a contemporary art context. Thailand and Indonesia have strong traditional figurative styles as exemplified in temple narratives from the life of Buddha or the Hindu epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata, that stand as primary visual texts. As the wayang traditional shadow play can become a vessel for contemporary contents, for satire and political commentary, the traditional figures of Asian myth and legend have been translated into a new context where their original qualities and values are made to reverberate in relation to contemporary figures and situations. They shed their static character and become dynamic with the infusion of contemporary contents. When the Buddha figure is inserted into a contemporary social setting of political corruption and exploitation, a powerful tension is created between the values of peace and serenity emanating from the semiotics of his figure and the contrasting scenes of human degradation. Likewise, the comic characters of the wayang, as well as mythological monsters, have been strikingly used in ferocious satires of political figures, at the same time that the work may allude to specific public events, usually turning points in a people's struggle or in the country's history.

This trend is exemplified in the work of such artists as Vasan Sitthiket in "Buddha returns to Bangkok '92", Montien Boonma in "Lotus Sound", Heri Dono in "Campaign of the Three Parties", Nyoman Erawan in "Kekunoan", and Prasong Leumuang in "Animal Intercourse". In the Philippines, this has also been done by Imelda Cajipe-Endaya who assembled a Philippine iconographic repertoire from various and sources.

New concerns reflected in art have emerged in the past years in response to local and global development. With the increasing production by women artists, one hopes for the growth of a gender-sensitive art that will help gain empowerment from women. Also of significance is an art that will reflect pressing environment concerns centering around the survival of the ecosystem and the human race. With the strong contextualist trend today, it will also be a vital art inspired by a vision of a truly human order—an art that can convey the realities of the countries of the South, its commonalities and contradictions, on the national, regional, and international levels, an art that is likewise sensitive to the emancipatory impulses in social struggles. In women and gender issues, in ecological environment concerns. The role of the traditional arts and local influences in international contemporary art is

towards the objective of creating a dynamic art thriving on mutual exchange and understanding and engaging in a contemporary art discourse that will promote human survival and fulfillment.

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Neo-traditional Art
in the new North-South Context,
with examples from Japan and Thailand

I. The end of 'traditional'

The use of the word 'traditional' has often confused cultural objects with the processes which produced them, as if some socially naturalized and legitimate set of values was in one-to-one correspondence with the objects which brought those values into being. The word 'traditional' contained a formal content with a social meaning, but it was not a very simple notion. It was a complex of ideas, and it was not a neutral one. It was a word which carried a heavy burden of ideological connotation. It was a word which was used to describe a difference in expression between art and propaganda.

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The use of 'traditional' to characterize art works often involves the ideological re-definition of works by, or on behalf of, a social group who are instrumentally bound to legitimize their own stereotyping of the past. They systematically exclude the actual historical variation in the past by their present reconstruction of it. 'Traditional' are those objects, rituals, or more abstractly, values in the past which such a re-defining group wishes to claim community with or domain over. Whatever was passed down from the past, it is always an ideological process to categorize any of these as traditional. However noble the intention it thought, such categorization as invariant was never historically true of such objects, rituals, or values in controlled societies, where customs themselves changed and custom itself could also serve as precedent for change.

John Clark

There are many communities who have made such claims about invariant 'tradition' in recent times, particularly state-elites seeking to legitimize the topology of their own control around a 'fictitiously created set of national values'. Often, one might say nearly always, this claim about tradition has come at times of crisis, when the control has been challenged from without or below. Or, the crisis occurs when the attempt to topologically extend to distant regions or former tributary states a set of values conceived as 'tradition', has been met by the resistance of those regions. It can also be seen in the crisis of nations, or met by an existing regime's crisis to restructure both practical administration and formal ideology in order to make that topological extension possible. At these moments of crisis there is a conjuncture of claims for the unity of common experience and for the direction and significance of contemporary history, usually termed by Geertz 'essentialist' and 'epochalist', although it has been the essentialist mode which has most typically idealized claims about tradition.

These preliminary and general excursions into the problem of 'tradition' suggest

Neo-traditional Art in the new North-South Context, with examples from Japan and Thailand

1. The end of 'traditional'

The use of the word 'traditional' has often confused cultural objects with the processes which produced them, as if some socially naturalized and legitimate set of values was in one-to-one correspondence with the structures which brought those values into being. The use of 'traditional' has, in other words, confused a formal content with a social modality, and this confusion was also based on a very simplistic notion of their inter-relation. In fact there is no determinate or unidirectional correlation between formal content and a social modality, especially and also most inductively in art. If there was, imagination would be dead, and there would be no difference in expression between art and propaganda.

The use of 'traditional' to characterize art works often involves the ideological self-definition of works by, or on behalf of, a social group who are instrumentally bound to legitimize their own stereotyping of the past. They systematically exclude the actual historical variation in the past by their present reconstruction of it. 'Traditional' are those objects, rituals, or more abstractly, values in the past which such a self-defining group wishes to claim community with or domain over. Whatever was passed down from the past, it is always an ideological process to categorize any of these as traditional. However motivated a construction in thought, such categorization as invariant was never historically true of such objects, rituals, or values in custom-ruled societies, where customs themselves changed and custom itself could also serve as precedent for change¹.

There are many communities who have made such claims about invariant 'tradition' in recent times, particularly state-entities seeking to legitimize the topology of their own control around a fictitiously arrayed set of national values². Often, one might say nearly always, this claim about tradition has come at times of crisis when that control has been challenged from without³ or below. Or, the crisis occurs when the attempt to topologically extend to distant regions or former tributary states a set of values conceived as 'tradition', has been met by the resistance of those regions, it can also be seen in the crises of incapacity met by an existing regime unable to re-structure both practical administration and formal ideology in order to make that topological extension possible⁴. At these moments of crisis there is a conjuncture of claims for the unity of common experience and for the direction and significance of contemporary history, usefully termed by Geertz 'essentialism' and 'epochalism'⁵, although it has been the essentialist mode which has most typically mobilized claims about tradition.

These preliminary and general excursions into the problem of 'tradition' indicate

that in art one cannot very easily use any more the term 'traditional' to describe certain types of work and the ideas which support them, perhaps they could have been called customary in an art world without an interventionist state, an economy of cultural consumption, mass media, or without that peculiar historical product of cultural inter-action between the West and the 'Asian' societies one sees in the burgeoning need for national expression found in 'modernity'. The state has rigorously intervened in educational procedures, set the curriculum, invested national wealth (or not) for its perception of national goals. It has generally subjected whatever might have been values held in common in a society to conceptualization, standardization, and techniques of effective dissemination. In art this has meant since, say, 1876 in Japan and 1932 in Thailand, that anything in the domain of artistic work and ideas which was not 'Western' has been codified as 'Japanese', 'Siamese' or later 'Thai', when even the simplest understanding of pre-modern art indicates these can never have been singular entities.

There were what can be called in recent theory a wide range of 'art discourses', a plural set of relations between forms and the codes used to interpret them. Such relations between, for example, types of art works and aesthetic ideas seen to underlie them, are relatively flexible and broad, but do also present a set of structures with specific regularities, rigidities, and limitations of development. 'Tradition' is generally what a community of viewers, or a 'people' value in such a set of structures, or are told to think they should value. When we say 'traditional' these days, it means little more than what 'we' like, when we think of we as a culture, people, or nation. But since the 'we' who think this is very different for any 'we' for whom it might have been said even one hundred years ago, let alone before any process of colonialization or reaction against it, there can be no assumed continuity to tradition. This is, as I have indicated, more a term for a mapping procedure of taste than any actual historical flow of common values so mapped.

In addition to state intervention, even in the simplest society, cultural goods of which we now count art object as one type are subject to an economy of production, storage and exchange. In most societies, including the former state-socialist ones from 1917-1989, art works are a special cultural good produced to meet a kind of market-expectation which continuously intervenes in any natural production of values one might consider to have been 'traditional', even in a tradition of the revolution. Art works are similarly subject to exchange of information about them which reinforces those values with which the subjects are supposedly endowed. In a society with a strong art criticism these values are put to the test of their supposed authenticity. Both reinforcement and critical test make any notion on an unseen and ascribed set of values producing or being produced in the art work quite untenable.

Finally, art objects and their production are subject in far greater frequency to a more intensive situation of inter-cultural contact than hitherto. The pressure of 'Western' imperialism in the 19th century removed large parts of those countries like the then Siam which were able in the end to survive as a cultural unit centered on its own state. Other cultures had to survive under partial or complete 'Western' territorial domination. But from this historical clash, the cultural consequences of which can only be referred here, a society now called modern developed where all values and

forms including specifically artistic ones, were relativised. They were made subject to many kinds of displacement, a process which often became a reference in the art work itself : Relativization or displacement overturned what was the single unifying element in 'traditional' art the unspoken legitimacy of its forms and the ideas these associated⁶.

2. Towards a definition of the neo-traditional

Hobsbawm classified by function what he called invented traditions into three overlapping types: those which established social cohesion: those legitimizing institutions, status or relations of authority; and those whose purpose was socialization, inculcation of beliefs, values systems and conventions of behavior⁷.

What, in this perspective, could a neo-traditional art be ? It is a rough compromise between accepting the legitimacy of past forms and techniques and an attempt to re-invent the context from which that legitimacy is drawn. As will be seen the definition of neo-traditional art involves a reinterpretation of the formal value system which govern art, ones usually denoted by a set of style markers, by technique or content. But it also involves the legitimizing of a claim to authority over the future by those who interpret the values or the past. This compromise is both on the level of the work and on the level of the code used to interpret it. At the level of the work the 'traditional' art forms could be interrogated to produce new variation, and new workings out of formal relationships and problems earlier artists had been content to leave under-develop. On the level of ideas, the underlying aesthetic or religious viewpoint was often made explicit in ways untaught previously. Legitimation could now be displaced through attempted references to ideas of training procedures or to artistic metaphysics drawn from Europe or China, and an intellectual space development in which to legitimize these, often this space was to be extended by reference to social aspiration focused on religion, politics, or more broadly on nationalist ideologies.

It possible to characterize 'neo-traditional' art fairly richly by mapping its products on the axes of Essentialism-Epochalism and Modernity⁸, particularly if one wishes to integrate understanding of it with that of modernism outside Euramerica. But there can be no singular analytical model for grasping what the 'neo-traditional' might mean across all cultures. Perhaps I should characterize part of the range of such possible differences by reference to Japan, China, and Thailand.

Although there are problems in the minutiae of application and the understanding of historical dynamics, we may usefully conceptualize Japanese culture as a bifurcated one which maps its own products by reference to those of other cultures, chiefly what it knew as 'Kara' or China before the 1850s and what it knew as Seiyō or the West thereafter⁹ in art this meant that in the nineteenth century Japan developed a vigorously antithetical dialogue between Seiyōga and Nihonga, Western-Style and Japanese style painting respectively. This complex relativization or double authoring where the products of the primary discourse relativized by contact with the tradition to which they are transferred are relativized once more by

their relatively autonomous development away from that 'tradition' from which they have been transferred. Thus Western-style is not 'Japanese', but neither is it any longer Western from the inception of transfer¹⁰.

In twentieth century China there has been a fairly long period until recently when following on from Japan one could identify both 'Xiyanghua' and 'Guohua', Western-style and Chinese-style painting respectively (with slightly variant terminology at different periods)¹¹. However, with the advent of a more full-blown modernism in the 1980s and 1990s together with more direct academy realism from the late 1970s, I have recently observed the increased isolation between the trajectories of oil painting and Chinese-style brush painting and prints. I begin to surmise that in this context in China we face a hierarchy of styles with a cold center and 'hot', loose edges. Certainly, both 'Western' realism and recently modernism have had their impact on the technique, formal subject matter; and art theoretical conceptualization of art practice in the neo-traditional area, and many artists are notoriously reluctant to acknowledge their stylistic debts when pointed out to them by art historians and critics. Perhaps what we now face in China is a return to the post-Song historical situation with regard to representational landscape or the mid-Qing situation with regard to experiments in realism and perspective spatial systems brought by the Jesuits. That is one of partial assimilation, imperfectly acknowledge, where the central art discourse is seen as integral with its own values and assimilation from outside given a precarious status for types of art practice, or at best acknowledge as a parallel discourse for the expression of culturally ephemeral but now socially constant 'modern' values.

The Thai case is in some respects the most complex, but also one which, with qualifications and variations, can be found elsewhere in Southeast Asia. There does not seem now to be a set of discourse reflexively inter-related or relativized, nor a privileged center now engaged in occluding its own assimilations. For Thai art discourses, even as early as seventeenth century Ayutthaya, seem only to have been culturally characterizable as syncretic, since they tend to absorb parallel discourse under one nominal but 'loose' unity. Thus in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries one can see assimilation from Sri Lanka and Burmese, European, and Chinese conventions for figures and landscape in mural painting. In Thai temple murals the very brief span of about forty years from the 1820s to 1860s one can also see the assimilation of pictorial composition from Chinese temple narrative murals, which are very shortly followed by European perspective. These differing conventions seem to be mobilized with no fear as to their potential incongruity or incompatibility, or to any visual hierarchies such as point of view or brushwork status with which they may have been encoded in the discourse from which they were transferred.

3. Articulation of a new North-South Perspective

This is not the place for extended discussion about the collapse of Soviet state communism, or of the newly emerging economic and military-strategic environment

caused by capital transfers to SE Asia which together with other, often forced, domestic saving have funded extensive infrastructural investment and the transfer of secondary manufacturing sectors from the North. Perhaps we face not cold war convergence on the lines of a Schumpeterian model¹², but a more rapid and flexible post-cold war distribution of the same central system of corporate units into multiple modal sites, the new economic system has already to some extent made the transfer of cultural goods including art works more rapid and flexible, and more likely to circumvent the preference due to either particularly rigid sets of traditional values - with their state - funded defenders - or the gross cross - national distribution of economic values. Despite the present economic growth rates of Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia apart from Japan, there is no prospect of an end to a North-South inverted pyramidal distribution of economic wealth, one in which Japan belongs to the North, but the recent Southeast Asian and Northeast Asian experience points to flattening of the bottom point of the pyramid which is significant for most of the populations in the South despite the gross inequality of distribution within their countries as such important differences with earlier material system of inequality now mean that the present and developing form of this economic system depends on rapid information flows, the circulation of professionals and other elites, and the transfer of an increasingly broad range of cultural goods from TV soaps to installation sculpture, it is increasingly possible for art objects, their artist producers, and their usually corporate patrons to circulate as well. The problem remains of what circulates and on whose terms?

It is now probably not too useful to go on worrying about universal culture and whether this is a Euramerica construct which therefore necessarily tends to dominate the South. Small nation states with a separation of church and state, civic society, and some collective notion of a commonwealth, however inadequately achieved in practice, are I think likely to project outwards their own values as if there were a subset of the values all cultures which they will suppose to be held in common. Because of their specific historical type of development and interaction it is quite possible to argue that the culture of such nation states did in practice discover values held across cultural distribution, as of course did the very differently constituted Hindu, Islamic, Buddhist, and Confucian continua mapped in history over very different polities. We should not be too censorious because one or other cultural continua actually discovered what they did, but, if 'we' wish and there 'our' need, borrow and re-deploy on our own terms. The problem now is no longer to question universality or whether Euramerica and its artist discovered any part of it, Universality, if inclusive, should allow every culture its own preferred selection of values. The question should more be of the terms for the flows and sites of communication and exchange between different sub-sets of the universal, whether on the abstract level of values materialized in art works or the concrete one of exchange and circulation of those art works and their artist producers.

One should not expect a single model to explain all aspects of such flows. To cut a lot of argument short, and avoid somewhat misleadingly grounding this in the real issue of continued economic dominance by an implacably ethnocentric Euramerica¹³, one may posit the following types of North-South interaction in art exchanges, by flow and site.

Northern the flow of art objects is from South to North (pyramidal)

- the sites where art objects are seen are set by Northern criteria
- the discourse of which the art object itself is a site are conceived in Northern terms
- the selectors of art objects and the material beneficiaries of values added during the flow are Northern.

Southern the flow of objects is from South to South (egalitarian)

or from North to South (counter-pyramidal)

- sites are set by Southern criteria
- art discourses are conceived in Southern terms
- selectors and beneficiaries are Southern

Many features of this opposition are purely analytical, but several are not. For example the North and the South may be re-defined, where in regard to the flow of objects and values Southern Indonesia and Australia may stand in a very similar relationship to a Northern Japan, despite bifurcation of the world into Asian, which the Indonesians are and non-Asians¹⁴, which Australians are, according to the dominant view of many Japanese. The radical re-conceptualization of South-South relations could upset such previous world-views and, incidentally, bring neighbors together.

But perhaps we should also err on the side of caution about whether South-South relations are bound to be harmonious. The loss of perpetual bi-polar super power armed hostility has no meant the end of all emnities. A real potential for widespread armed conflict has been retained and even increased by more highly armed smaller state units. This means that the boundaries of state units are increasingly capable of being maintained destructively, or at the very least of being closed in much more effective ways than before. Modern technology makes the direction and content of information flows less culture-depend, but also more easily subject to very effective kinds of state intervention.

The increasing narrowness of the top professional elite which the current international economic system appears to generate has hardened the impermeability to domestic constraints on their exercise of taste even as they have more wealth and a greater share of local information about art and it types of art objects in very varied cultural contexts, the elite may now actually constitute a smaller number of masters of taste than in the pre-modern period, and a structure of taste which is less subject to variation. This can result in their industrious pursuit of commodity values instead of art as an expression of local or even international values, and to an indolence about demanding work which does more than flatter their social position.

All of these actual and possible changes have great consequence for neo-traditional art which can become merely a style-marker for acceptable local representation. This functions in a double mediation between the elite, inwards to its local power base, and outwards to corporate culture and its segmented international flows. Neo-traditionally is also positioned as a style-marker which provides some cultural legitimacy to its bearers in a situation of reduced or lost political sovereignty and permeable economic borders. In other words it can be a discourse which whilst

manipulated by and sited in the economic system allows its bearers the claim of relative autonomy from it whose fiction is perhaps that of historical succession.

It is highly problematic whether history as events consciously understood and shaped by particular humans or their groups can be reintroduced into such a position for neo-traditional art discourse. This is particularly so for artists who refer current political events or surviving folk customs and ceremonies and consciously claim their work as representative of some broad, popular culture. Their stance as neo-traditional is already a style discriminator in a market for cultural goods. The patrons on whom neo-traditional artists depend on enable them to live among the people are largely drawn from the elite. And neo-traditionally hides its debts to the academy and to modernism, in a way which is incompatible with historical being. The position of neo-traditionality also can both cut off a certain kind of Northern essentializing taste - be in Beaubourg modernism or British Museum archaism - which seeks to rediscover and thereby appropriate what it constructs as culturally authentic.

4. Provisional mapping of the historical experience of Japan and Thailand

Neo-traditional art has seen several positions develop from which to assert its quest for legitimacy. One is that of nationalism, the claim to represent in a modern form the aesthetic values of a past but in a way suited to modern conditions. This can develop as a sometimes aggressive self-assertion against 'Western' art as practiced already within the culture, and against 'modern' art in particular.

It was associated in early 20th century India with a middle-class nationalism¹⁵. In Japan before 1945 it had many trajectories; the invention of neo-traditional subjects and techniques cognate with Euramerica academy painting on religious and historical subjects by the late 1880s, the appropriation of compositional methods and pictorial techniques from oil painting by the late 1890s, the development of a new secular, quietly exploratory lyrical realism by the 1910s, towards a new type of broad decoration by the 1920s, to intimate and lyrical manifestation of the pathos of modern life by the 1920s, and towards a boastful ultranationalism in the 1930s.

In Thailand neo-traditionalism has been associated with the post Second World War copying and restoration of temple murals by the 1960s¹⁶, with re-invention of mural technique and its application to religious and secular schemes in the 1970s, to the exploration of folk motifs in the 1970s, to the incorporation of post-modernist sensibility in temple mural compositions or smaller works in the 1980s, and from the mid-1980s through to today to quite a larger number of painting projects for new temples in which the patron specifically asks for the traditional manner¹⁷. One also finds occasional exhibitions of smaller, easel - sized works on modified traditional subjects for domestic decoration.

One might see neo-traditionalism in Thailand today as characterized by three broad fields of practice. There are academic borrowings from 'traditional' forms

with these being set in 'modern' frames and distanced by a sentimental nostalgia for loss. The metaphor of the shadow or of the archeological seems to distance the viewer from historical involvement whilst still enjoining a culturally secure play with recognizable form.

The second type has been visible in Bangkok over a number years. These are cultural charlatans who were once good-enough artists in their own right who now turn run factories to turn out work under their own signature. They strut around as ring-masters to the circus ceremonies of the rich and powerful.

This characterization is no mere hyperbole, and a concrete description may show why. I saw the Bangkok Bank Exhibition opened by the Prime Minister Chuan leak-pai in January 1994. This was held at a building titled in English the Thai Cultural Center, but whose Thai title translates as the Japan-Thailand Cultural Center since the building was built with Japanese funds and includes several architectural sub-units of Japanese inspiration. A world rock star concert-quality sound mixing deck was in evidence beyond which some dancers performed that pastiche of folk dancing which approaches 'traditional' cultural expression for some TV spectacular directors. Then two artists entered with company dressed in what appeared to be Northern or North-Eastern costumes and carrying a log which was festooned with food-offerings. All this processing was carried out to the sound of what I can only describe as 'Hollywood-tribal' music. The(re-?) creates ritual presumably had reference to some spirit of place being called down to bless the opening ceremony. The most curious element was reaction of the largely upper class businessman and their wives, together with art world personalities. It was of rapt approval and the indication in this case at least was that certain simplistic audience reactions can be manufactured by mere reference to 'traditional' ritual or neo-traditional appropriation.

One famous neo-traditionalist painter in Bangkok is reliably reputed to inquire of stockbroking friends how the stock market is likely to shift and who is buying stocks in order to discriminate potential clients and set prices. In terms of the stylistics now displayed as 'traditional' in Thailand by such painters one might ask how many priapic bulls, iridescent serpents, and talismanic paradises do their audience require, and should artists be the ones to provide them? Sometimes such 'traditional' work looks like an up-market cinema hoarding for a fantasy film performance by the patron as Rambo. In 'Thai' gear, of course.

There is a final category which on the one hand can involve artists who have returned from formal art school education to work in the Thai countryside and re-establish their roots in farmland lifestyle. From this they can draw the subject matter of their work as well as a new position to serve as 'folkway' purveyors or an essentially anti-metropolitan attitude to life, but which is consumed by metropolitan purchasers. On the other hand there are the many more humble and sometimes more different artists, who work with forms and subjects which are immediately identified by their audience as 'Thai' in a craft or workshop manner. Their works carry the touch of compositional displacement or color intensification that comes from contact with academic notions of art objects, with realism or modernism. It also comes from those wishing without bombast to bring forward from the past what they think is

genuinely theirs now, aware of loss, aware of new plenitude's, I think we have to allow for this sub-type as ground of a virtually nameless and necessarily revisionist practice within neo-traditional art which does art articulate the principles of its differences in style even though its practitioners may on an empirical level be very well aware of stylistic difference.

5. References to Euramerica as historical model

It is more and more clear that the reason why the grand canons of Euramerica art history do not include reference to the earlier forms of the problems we encounter today, which in the nineteenth century were largely in the context set by colonialism, is due to the motivation of their art historical tasks. These were largely to privilege and explain origination of forms and its development sequence since the Renaissance, or to account for its systemic absence in pre-Renaissance European art. It will be noted that although this motivation has correlation with Euramerica racism, especially in the colonies, at base it is a correlative application of a model derived from technological development to explain art practice.

Could it be that Euramerica art historical and art critical tools are essentially flawed by their cultural provenance and by ethnocentric ignorance of the discourse which produced them? or, are they at least flawed because they did not during their nineteenth and early twentieth century development include the problems we examine now in North-South relations in art? The answer might be yes to both question if were to ignore the types of development in social analysis and structural analysis via reference to a wide range of critical theory which have completely changed Euramerica art history and theory since the 1960s¹⁸. Perhaps what we should examine now is what types of art historical models are relevant to understanding North-South relations in art, even if the context in which those models were developed was quite different.

In fact whilst the informing paradigm of technological development may only have relevance as an art historical model in those societies now undergoing the equivalent of the Euramerica industrial revolution, on the level of tools, and with suitable modification, much of the technical apparatus of Euramerica art history can be used in our area without difficult, I am thinking of style analysis, studies of art as the visual ideology of an age or regime, patronage studies, questions of gender representation, the relation of artistic expression to social change and so on.

There remains a more intractable issue, Euramerica art history which has been quite aware of the problems of relation between metropolitan and provincial art, has always been interested in marking history via the turning points of great art works or 'monuments'. We may live in a world where in practice there is such a large number of metropolises in the provinces that the metropolis and the province may be everywhere and always overlaid. Endless pursuit of what is provincial, and what is central and therefore original may for the near present and future just be a miasmatic procedure. Moreover, if in the course of art relations between North and South or between South and South no such monuments exist or if there exists no

community of critical values to establish what those monuments might be, especially where practice has historically been transferred from North to South, much of the technical art historical apparatus will become unstuck because it will lack its habitual calibration, if those Euramerica scholars who can continue art history by finding new ways to study, say, Cezanne, cannot discover any interest in an Affandi, or a fair-weather for that matter, there is no reason why, in examining South-South practice we should not invent some new tools for our own problems.

Of course one could play the metropolis game against itself and claim some major South works as originally monuments, and this is a direction which has been taken both by some artist from the South as well as by revisionary curatorial practice¹⁹. But it would be more sensible to bracket and sometimes abandon this game, and if necessary root art practice in other kinds of discourse, such as the nationalism of the new national state, or the rise of formerly oppressed class, which we know to have been historically so in both Indonesia and China. Our model for art historical exchange might more be that of exchange exhibition between different land disparate of the same non-governmental organization vertical exchanges between similar land hegemonical states. Tolerate art practices to one another both by social situation and type of discourse seems as valid as to privilege any of their products as monumental.

6. In Conclusion

The end of the Cold War has not changed the pyramidal distribution of wealth between North and South, although it may have improved the changes of the inequality being reduced. Nor has it fundamentally altered the direction and volume of cultural flows, especially in art. Most art worlds remain as they have already been and probably will remain directed to domestic stylistic discourse and institutions, however much these have absorbed from abroad or been produced by interaction with foreign discourses. When they are focused on external matters, the style references and career path foci of most artist are still mapped more on, say, the axes of Beijing - New York than Bangkok - Auckland or Manila - Kuala Lumpur.

There are certain dangers but also some rich possibilities in the current and foreseeable situation. The dangers are certainly many. Let me mention two here. One is that the space of exchange may be filled by a serious of masquerades for symbols of national identity which are convenient and politically unthreatening for the various elite to have produced and consumed as 'ours' at home and abroad. The second is that of increasing exchanges under the guise of giving other cultures art a place in one's own society when this in fact masks a drive for an extension of ideological domination over those cultures, at least in the space where they are received.

But the possibilities are also rich. What the specific kinds of flexibility in the state and economic systems of particularly Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia now allow is a type of horizontal interchange without seeking privilege for the art objects exchanged as monuments. This can be on the level of inter-state exchanges, or that

of cross-linkages between practitioners and exhibiting institutions such as the ARX project (Artists Regional Exchange) in Perth or the Asia-Pacific Triennale in Australia. These are also made feasible because some state and their art cultures have an ambiguous position between North and South, and their very denied membership of the North allows them some links with regional states and art cultures in the South which are not always possible for closer neighbors. Let us hope in both art practice and its understanding we may make these links work.

John Clark teaches the History of Modern Asian Art and Japanese language at the University of Sydney Australia and is Editor of *Modernity in Asian Art*, Wild Peony Press International distribution by the University of Hawaii Press, Sydney, 1993. Part of this paper appeared in the catalog for the exhibition of the Tan Kudt Group in Bangkok during March 1995. The author is grateful to the University of Sydney and to Chulalongkorn University for assisting research visits to Bangkok in early 1993 and 1995 respectively.

Notes

1. Hobsbawn, E., and Ranger T., *The invention of Tradition.*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, 1992, p.7-8, Nineteenth century Europe discovered not only how to invent, but also how to mass - produce traditions. See Hobsbawn and Ranger, *ibid.*, p 263-307.
2. See Anderson P., *Imagined Communities*, London, Verso, 1983, 1991., pp.170-178, for his discussion of the work of Thongchai Winichakul.
3. See Gluck, Carol., *Japanese Modern Myths*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985., pp.21-42. The view is found in the art historian Takashina Shuji's. *Nihon Kindai no Bi-ishiki*, Tokyo: Aodosha, 1986., p.12.
4. It is significant that the late 1930s Thai cultural Mandates were issued by a military regime sometime after the absolute monarchy had been overthrown. Their nationalism represent the advent of new types of consciousness after virtual dynastic collapse. For the European precedents see Anderson, *ibid.*, p.22, and his Chapter Three. See also Terwiel Reynolds, Craig, ed., *National Identity and its Defenders.*, Thailand 1939-1989, Melbourne, Monash Papers on Southeast Asia., No. 25, 1991.
5. Geertz, C, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, in the essay after the Revolution : *The Fate of Nationalism in the New States*, 1971., New York: Basic Books, 1973 and London: Fontana Collins, 1993., p.241.

6. It also overthrew or newly inserted institutions of training and patronage. See my paper *Inter-Asian Criteria of institutional Modernity in Art*, 28th International congress of the History of Art, Berlin, Kunstlerische Austausch/Artistic Exchange, Akademie Verlag, Berlin, 1992, 655-668.
7. Hobsbawn and Ranger, *ibid.*, p.9
8. See my paper *Modernism and Traditional Japanese style Painting.*, SEMIOTICA, No. 1, 1989, pp. 1-18.
9. Complex historical arguments were developed on these issues in Pollack, David., *The Fracture of Meaning.*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986.
10. See my Paper, *Yoga in Japan: Model or Exception? Modernity in Japanese art, 1850s-1940s: an International comparison*, ART HISTORY, vol. 18, no. 2
11. Croizier, R., *Art and Revolution in Modern China.*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
12. In which Schumpeter proposed that, among other elements, the success of the business class in creating a new standard of life for all classes result in the obsolescence of its economic function which is increasingly absorbed by bureaucracy. In fact the reverse tendency seems to have taken place with increasingly large economic units run by a diminishing managerial class absorbing into their own functions those of bureaucratic regulation. See Schumpeter, Joseph, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy.*, London: George, Allen & Unwin, 1963, 1961, pp.417-418.
13. Such an obsession with the North is what seems to mark otherwise highly perceptive discussions of globalization, since the South is always both logically and empirically determined as the periphery. See *inter alia*, King, Anthony D., ed. *Culture, Globalization and the World System.*, Binghamton, State University of New York and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991., where the relatively opposed 'economist' view of Wallerstein and the 'culturalist' views of Robertson may be conveniently found.
14. It is an index of the conventionality of this view in official and some academic circles in Japan that the recent symposium at The Japan Foundation ASEAN Culture Center into the completely unconscious ethnocentrism in this very title in Tokyo was called *The Potential of Asian Thought*, as if Japan or Japanese was in some peculiarly privileged position to evaluate what was Asian and what its potential might be. Only one speaker, Apinan Poshyananda from Thailand, discussed these issue. See *Contemporary Art Symposium 1994: The Potential of Asian Thought.*, Tokyo: The Japan Foundation, ASEAN Culture Center, 1994., pp. 122-123.
15. See Guha-Thakurta, T., *The Making of a New 'Indian Art.*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992 and Kapur G, 'Ravi Varma's Unformed Allegory' in Sharma, R.C. ed., *Raja Ravi Varma: New Perspectives.*, New Delhi: National Museum, 1993.

16. By Fua Haribithak, No Na Paknam, Chalood Nimsamer, the poet painter Angkhan Kanlayanaphong, Paiboon Suwannakudt and others.

17. My own research indicates there are around five to six different centrally - based teams of temple mural painters operating in Thailand. A team of ten painters might complete one temple each per year at about 200 sq. meters. This projects to 60 members of teams of which about 35-40 are active painters. Charges vary with projects and speed of completion but annual turnover in this field is more than 6,000,000 bath (US\$ 250,000). One new project which is scheduled to occupy four teams for a year will be of 800 sq. meters and cost 12,000,000 bath (US\$ 500,000).

18. A very useful student primer is my colleague Michael Carter's, *Framing Art: Introducing Theory and the Visual Images.*, Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1990 and reprints.

19. See for example the discussion of the mixed reception of the exhibition of work of Suriname Maroon Indians in 1979-80 in Price, Sally, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places.*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989., pp. 108-123.



1. Asia as a Frame

To reflect on the ethnicity in contemporary art in general, I would like to start by referring to two aspects of international exhibitions that recently have become familiar to Japanese people: U-Topia of Ethnicity

in Japanese and Asian Contemporary Art

Until 1950s, very few Japanese curators or critics have been licensed to discuss the frame work of international contemporary art. Until 1950s, we could not exhibit Japanese contemporary art in international arenas, of course most of which were Western ones until 1950s. It was only after 1960s that we began to ponder what kind of works were suitable for "international" exhibitions. It did not attract much attention of serious Western curators until the latter half of 1980s through exhibitions such as "Against Nature", *Primal Spirit* and most recently *Scream against the Sky*, etc. This means that we could not participate the so-called "international network of contemporary art", even though the majority of Japanese artists were good students of Western art since Meiji Period. Meanwhile, none of the critics, then *gokujin* (curators) knew what was happening in other countries, nor tried to know it until very recently. Only in 1990s, many of us have recently got interested in contemporary art of mainland China and Southeast Asia and began to organize exhibitions of Asian art. Certainly, in 1979, earlier than any museums in Japan, the Fukuoka Art Museum where I have been working for ten years began to introduce Asian contemporary art in Japan. We held four comprehensive exhibitions of Asian art since then. However, Japanese art world which was so Tokyo-centric as well as West-centric hardly estimated nor knew our activities as something important. Besides, our curators were not so naive as to have our own critical standard, nor our organizing system to invite most outstanding artists of each period, of each country.

Kuroda Raiji



Now the situation has changed. Especially since last year, noticeable exhibitions of Asian contemporary art have been organized by a public museum in Hiroshima with a newspaper company as organizer, and by the Japan Foundation, private museums and galleries. It was also last year that we held the 4th Asian Art Show, which was able to get the first appraisal from the Tokyo-centric

¹ Our definition of Asia is basically geographical. It includes Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, the Philippines, Mongolia, Mainland China, South Korea and Japan. We have not been able to invite a few other countries of the region for political difficulties.

U-Topia of Ethnicity in Japanese and Asian Contemporary Art

1. Asia as a Frame

To reflect on the ethnicity in contemporary art in general, I would like to start by referring to two aspects of international exhibitions that recently have become familiar to Japanese people: exhibitions of Japanese art in American and European cities; and exhibitions of Asian art in Japan.

Even though Japanese culture seems to have frequent exposure in other countries, very few Japanese curators or critics have been licensed to discuss the framework of international contemporary art. Until 1950s, we could not exhibit Japanese contemporary art in international arenas, of course most of which were West-centric until 1950s. It was only after 1960s that we began to ponder what kind of works were suitable for "international" exhibitions. It did not attract much attention of serious Western curators until the latter half of 1980s through exhibitions such as "Against Nature", Primal Spirit and most recently Scream against the Sky, etc. This means that we could not participate the so-called international network of contemporary art, even though the majority of Japanese artists were good students of Western art since Meiji Period. Meanwhile, none of the critics, then *gakuhei-ins* (curators) knew what was happening in Asian countries, nor tried to know it until very recently. Only in 1990s, many of them suddenly got interested in contemporary art of mainland China and Southeast Asia and began to organize exhibitions of Asian art. Certainly, in 1979, earlier than any museums in Japan, the Fukuoka Art Museum where I have been working for ten years began to introduce Asian¹ contemporary art in Japan. We held four comprehensive exhibitions of Asian art since then. However, Japanese art world which was so Tokyo-centric as well as West-centric hardly estimated nor knew our activities as something important. Besides, our curation was not so mature as to have our own critical standard, nor our organizing system to invite most outstanding artists of each period, of each country.

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tered art world. That caused a boom of Asian contemporary art in Japan. The most symbolic event of the boom was a symposium in Tokyo entitled as The Potential of Asian Thought which the Japan Foundation organized, inviting Chinese, Southeast Asian and Japanese speakers. In this 'boom' many young curators and serious audience, I believe began to seek a new framework of international art to replace our conventional framework of contemporary art where artists from only North American and West European countries were allowed to participate.

However this is only a beginning of our exercise to face non-Western contemporary art. Even after the recognition of Japanese artists by Western art systems and the discovery of 'contemporary' Asian art by people in Tokyo, I am quite doubtful if Japanese people can have interest and understanding in contemporary art of African and Latin American countries, which are economically, culturally and historically less familiar to us than Asian countries. I am no less doubtful if we have found the proper strategy or critical point of view to curate Japanese art in foreign countries, either in Western or non-Western world. We are still enjoying Asian art from the Japan-centered view of Asia, dreaming the day when Japan can be another center of international art as a member of Asia, only to get attention from the Western art world.

Taking this situation into account, it would be better for me to limit my subject of 'ethnicity in contemporary art' to my experience of Japanese and Asian art rather than to talk about the still too unrealistic possibility of international contemporary art that should include all non-Western region.

2. Absence of Ethnicity in Japanese Art Criticism

Kitazawa Noriaki, an active art historian who is reconsidering the notion of '*Bijutsu*' (fine art) as well as that of 'Japan' in the process of modernization since the Meiji Period, says that we cannot find the translation of the word ethnicity in Japanese. This fact is worth remembering before I discuss the ethnicity of Japanese art, especially when we keep in mind that Japanese is a language with enormous capacity to transform and/or translate foreign words both from China and the West. We can explain easily the reason for this absence of the notion of 'ethnicity'. It can be ascribed to the relatively stable dominance of a single race and language in an insular country, with very few invasions or dominance by nations of other races, as is understood by ordinary Japanese people.

However, this image of Japan is a fallacy (Kitazawa) to make up a modern nation, to keep independence from the Western capitalist countries and to compete with them on one hand and to oppress the difference of ethnicity of foreign residents in Japan such as Korean, Chinese and minority groups such as the Ainu on the other hand. It was precisely to promote this course of modernization that the Meiji government authorities invented the art peculiar to Japan: *Nihon-ga* (Japanese style painting). *Nihon-ga* was not so much an indigenous genre of fine art as a 'kitsch', an artificial mixture of different styles of traditional paintings in the Edo period, and later, mixed with Western style paintings. In short, *Nihon-ga* as well as 'Japanese'

culture was a product of ideological normalization of cultural diversity which still existed in the Edo Period.

Then, what is the situation in the 1990s? Again, Japanese curators and critics who are working on contemporary art of Japan hardly use the word. To talk about ethnicity in Japanese contemporary art may be a taboo, perhaps. Why?

First, this attitude implies our everyday feeling that we no longer perceive the loss of traditional culture, sensibility and environment something as negative at all. Furthermore, we consider that such an attitude to appreciate contemporary Japanese art for its ethnicity comes from the Westerner's desire who always force non-Western artists to express something exotic such as the excessively decorative composition, traditional motifs and styles. Japanese 'intellectual' artists and their supporters instead want to let Westerners understand the artistic originality that transforms Western modernism. This has led curators and critics to ignore the general Japanese public who enjoys visually acceptable works rather than thinking over the 'concept' behind strange, sometimes dirty appearance of 'contemporary' works.

The result of our twisted feeling toward the expression of Japanese ethnicity can be seen, for example, in the argument on the Japan Section of the next Venezia Biennale. A Japanese curator, Ito Junji first decided on the theme as "Wabi+Sabi=Suki", combining three Japanese words to mean traditional sensibilities. (Later he changed his theme into "Suki: the Sense of Multi Vernacular"). Responding to this, another curator, Motoe Kunio commented on this plan as "anachronistic" and he "absolutely" opposed the commissioners plan. Motoe insisted that "Japanese thing" was nothing more than a demand from outside, and said we cannot feel any reality in something like Wabi or Sabi. Then Motoe selected Japanese artists of modernism both universal and fundamental for another international biennial. At this point, I cannot judge these two attitudes before seeing the exhibitions, but it would be true that the majority of Japanese critics and curators prefer to evaluate Japanese artists for their 'originality' and 'universality' rather than identity or ethnicity.

The word 'ethnicity' reminds Japanese public of restaurants of Southeast Asian, Indian and African food that have sprouted as a fashionable place since the middle of 1980s in Tokyo and elsewhere in Japan. This means that, in the full tide of the economic prosperity of 1980s and expansion of consumerism, we 'discovered' the culture of the Third World, especially that of Asia as a source of commodities for pleasure to consume anything exotic after we fulfilled our longing for the Western culture.

Coincidentally, a few years after the burst of "the bubble economy", we began to introduce contemporary art of mainland China and Southeast Asia in Japan. Works shown then were quite different from those which looked very Chinese, Thai, Indonesian and Asian as once perceived. They were quite contemporary and experimental in their use of daily found objects and industrial materials, their dynamic installation and provocative messages to challenge social systems of their countries. As a result of this emergence of such Asian works and timely showing of them in Japan, Japanese curators, critics and journalists welcomed their develop-

ment of experimental methods and social concern, different from known Asian works like paintings or sculptures with pastoral images or decorative patterns. They fit the Japanese standard of 'contemporary art' which, of course, came from Western art. Consequently very few people criticized the loss of superficial expression of ethnicity seen in works officially recommended by each government. In other words, individuality and originality have become more important than their ethnic (or national) identity.

3. Beyond Aestheticism

I do not expect any works by artists of any race, nationality, gender to be seen on the same standard, such as 'the distinct concept to transgress cultural differences', a cliché often used by Japanese criticism. To get stimuli from other cultures should not be refused but promoted primarily, on the condition that ethnicity, in place of nationality, can properly mediate the individuality to the universality, and that it can give Japanese artists and their audience a critical ground common to Asian and other non-aligned countries.

Besides, the ethnicity as one of the critical viewpoints free from Western art systems can give Japanese an opportunity of crucial 'trial' to reconsider our attitude toward non-Western culture as well as Asian culture, before participating in the new framework of global exchanges in culture. The 'trial' for us is to criticize our own consciousness of superiority over other Asian countries and other Third World countries.

In spite of our unwillingness to have foreigners understand Japanese art as 'Japanese', we are still much inclined to expect for 'ethnic' characteristics in Asian contemporary art, as well as 'contemporary' outlook. This unfair attitude to Asia comes firstly from the unconscious oblivion and/or intentional negligence of our own history of invasion into and colonization of neighboring Asian countries, and discrimination of Korean and other Asian residents in Japan. To conceal this oblivion and/or negligence, we try to praise diverse and rich traditions in Asia, only in terms of the creation of beauty, emphasizing the similarities of Japanese culture to Asian cultures. This is not so far from the opinion of Okakura Tenshin, the most important art critic and art historian in the Meiji Period. Later his view on Asian culture was abused by the military governors to legitimate their invasion into the Asian region. That leads us, firstly, to assimilate relatively close ethnicity (Chinese and Korean) into Japanese, secondly to ignore or exclude the Asian unfamiliar to us. Ironically, this kind of oblivion may be a part of our beautiful ethnic tradition! Now, is it certain that we are not repeating this history, only replacing the 'tradition' with 'contemporary art', 'military strength' with economic power? Can I explain how Japanese people understand Asian art in the others proper social and cultural context neither by expecting exoticism nor by applying the standard of Japanese 'contemporary art'? Can we prevent Japanese museums and galleries from becoming curators = enlighteners = consumers = exploiters = developers of Asian art?

The example of the most typically Japanese attitude toward Asian art can be

observed in our reception of Korean(South Korean) art. A certain kind of minimalistic paintings in South Korea was much appreciated by Japanese viewers as a complete unity of Western modernism and traditional sensibility seen in white porcelain of Li Dynasty and taste for natural texture of handwork. On the other hand, the Minjoong Misul, the Peoples Art born from the upheaval of political protests against the military government of the period was totally ignored by Japanese art world. This is an example of de-politicization of the others ethnicity. Japan has been so narcissistic in respecting 'Korean sensibility' that we did not pay attention to other tendencies of Korean art in 1980s, nor realized how we were seen by them.

To repeat this 'trial' is crucial, because this Japanese 'tradition' to beautify Asian culture and discriminate Asian people remains longer than some of other traditions. We Japanese curators are not yet well aware of this nor capable of dealing with this issue in our activity, under the restrictions of governmental authorities. The weakness inherent in the Japanese museum system was revealed in recent cases of disputes on works which dealt with the Japanese emperor system and sex.

I do not think Asian artists are free from their faults in their innocence in insisting the ethnicity, even though in most of Asian countries, where coexistence of different ethnic groups are so common, the situation are quite different from that of Japan. They are still very likely to be caught in the romantic, often narcissistic, and sometimes oppressive understanding of the ethnicity.

Then to overcome the oppression of the historical and the political by the cultural and the aesthetic under the name of ethnicity, I will try to give a few suggestions of the way how to our reading of ethnicity in contemporary Japanese and other Asian art can be made in a broader context.

4. Separation of Ethnicity from Tradition

As I have discussed in the previous chapter, we must challenge the romanticism inherent in ethnicity. More specifically, to dare oversimplification, we should understand ethnicity as something independent from the tradition of a certain race or a nation, putting ethnicity into diverse aspects of reality in a perpetually fluid society, without isolating the aesthetic from the social and the political. This suggestion is based on the idea that ethnicity is not to be defined only by racial feature but also by social situation and historical process.

a. Re-contextualization of Ethnicity

We must deepen philosophical understanding of 'the ethnic' by reconsidering it in relation to the prevailing technological values in order to make a proposal in the global society. It means to 'transplant' the *ethnos* into other *topos*, to put it into a different social context.

If I take an example from Japanese contemporary art, it would be very easy to recognize ethnicity in the best examples of innovative paintings, sculpture and installation works. It is represented in spatial/temporal/philosophical characteristics

as properly observed by an American curator in the "Primal Spirit" exhibition held in the United States. If I may quickly summarize them in my own way,

1. Use of natural materials, especially wood. Attitude to show the quality, texture, shape of the chosen material itself, rather than to manipulate them to give shapes and textures as the artist wants. Ambiguity of the border between the natural and the cultural.

2. Loose, scattering, open way of construction. Lack of mass, volume, weight and center. Every single elements are loosely related to and dependent on the other element rather than being subordinated to the whole schema.

3. To put material in the transition of time. In other words, space cannot be conceived without relation to time. To love anything which changes easily, rapidly, in natural condition, rather than to keep the work permanently. This explains artists special concern for the temporary installation.

We should not conclude our understanding of these characteristics as the living tradition, as seen in tea ceremony, flower arrangement, gardening, and Zen Buddhism etc. We should continue our effort to understand them more practically and philosophically, by discussing if they have possibilities to contribute to the global issue: for example by proposing a unique Japanese way to live with nature, rather than to manipulate or dominate it, to give a solution to the environmental crisis; by critiquing the Western modernistic notion of time and history as a single liner development; and by comparing them with other non-Western sensibilities and applying them in architectural design and urban planning, so that viewers of any ethnic origin can find a common ground.

This kind of realistic view of ethnicity will soon be expressed especially in the activities of Asian artists in Western metropolis. For artists of Asian ethnicity there after the growth of multiculturalism and struggle against racism, the ethnic can never be a matter of pure aestheticism under the dominant Caucasian culture and within the strives among other ethnic groups.

b. Ethnos free from/of topos

We should broaden the notion of ethnicity from the nationally or ideologically fixed entity, which is very often too romantic or otherwise too exclusive, to the characteristics of contemporary life styles fostered in the process of industrialization and urbanization. Contrary to the pessimistic view that industrialization and urbanization will lead all Asian society to a homogeneous and normalized empire of capitalism and consumerism, it is undeniable that developed metropolises in Asia such as Tokyo, Osaka, Seoul, Hongkong have acquired an accumulation of cultures peculiar to it through decades of modernization. These Asian cities show a striking contrast with European and American cities with the collage of drastically different architectural styles, the extravagance of billboards, the coexistence of the public and the private, etc.

Are we caught by the classic exoticism again? I do not think so. Only if we can be patient and alert enough to interpret or misinterpret the complicated layers of history behind the exotic or chaotic appearance of these cities, we can find the reality, sensibility and even philosophy of their contemporary life, which should be

called the survival of ethnicity. The only thing we ought to be careful of is not to reduce all diversities into a dualism of 'tradition' and 'modern', as seen in introductory brochures published by city governments, but to capture the inner logic among different historical, cultural, and ethnic powers. For example, why do we not try to find a philosophy of the rich variation of street signs, the brilliancy of 24-hour-open grocery stores, the omnipresence of vending machines and the resurrection of Buddhist temples in the consumer society? Even behind the most absurd, kitsch and irrational outlook of every objects, houses and scenes of a city are hidden unexpected lives of residents, their longing for better life, their taste for beauty according to their own logic. As Nakamura Masato, a Japanese artists who made installation works with Korean barber poles for the 4th Asian Art Show stated: 'there is no such thing as chance' in our life, no matter how they may look 'chaotic' for outsiders.

The similar observation is possible again in activities of artists of Asian origin working in Euro-american metropolis, but in a different direction. They are sometimes forced and sometimes choose for themselves to expose their ethnicity, by emphasizing their racial feature, by depicting indigenous subject matter and by referring to their link to traditional culture. But that does not always mean for them to insist their origin as an absolute value, nor to be proud of it, when faced with their suspended, and unstable identity, and isolation from both communities. They often refer to their recognition that their sensibility, language, dream and even bodies have become so uprooted from their original topos. Therefore some of them know that it is too romantic to lament the uprootedness from their home, with longer experience in foreign metropolis and more mixture of culture and blood. Of course, others keep their effort to recognize unchanged links to home. However, in either of these two groups are common understanding that they have to seek realistic images of their existence in a postmodern, industrial, capitalistic, consumeristic urban environment.

c) Healing of Modern Art Complex

Both of the isolation of ethnicity from the social context and its optimistic marriage with tradition are based not only on the dualism of tradition and modernism', 'Eastern spirit and Western materialism but also on the established separation of art and non-art, as seen in their remaining standard of modern art such as framed oil paintings (tableaux) hung on the wall and sculptures on pedestals: products of modernization, mobilization and capitalization in the West

If I retrospect the history of Japanese postwar avant-garde, it is easy to see the undercurrent of dadaistic questioning on the established notion of art, work and production, which sometimes showed extremely minimalistic attitude. It lead Japanese artists naturally to discover the potential of performance, installation and presentation of material itself, freeing themselves from the painting or sculpture. This is a remarkable phenomenon in the context of Asian art because Asian artists were not willing to follow Western tendencies such as dada and minimal art with very few exception, obsessed with experiments in modern media such as cubistic, expressionistic and abstract expressionistic paintings until the middle of 1980s.

After the emergence of Asian art with more contemporary media, some artists of Southeast Asia and China have become more open-minded. They are no longer

captured by the standard of modern art, in their use of diverse materials, especially ready-made objects, in installing materials and images in unconventional ways sometimes outside of museums and galleries, and in their concern on social situations. It is particularly noteworthy that they are often showing performances, referring to the living tradition of performing or theatrical art of each culture, but with criticism on high art. That is a process to abolish the authorized definition of fine art, both in expression and presentation of works. In other words, they were challenging the elitism of modern artists in Asia, who too often dreamed of the romantic dream of uniting 'Eastern spirit and Western Style', an ideal of 'Asian modernism', but never fulfilled their dream, totally isolated from the everyday practice of ordinary people.

Here, I do not mean to deny the historical necessity of Asian artists to depict tableau and sculpture as primary media in the process of modernization, nor can I deny the ideal of Western modernism to seek the universal. Nevertheless, it is worthy of reconsidering why Asian artists did not try borderless experiment to exchange fine art with other art disciplines, either traditional or contemporary. Surely, they knew and were proud of rich tradition of music, dance, theater, architecture, calligraphy and religious art. But I am not sure how they received production of kitsch souvenirs and folk art, and other mundane activities of the people. But very few of them dared to work through direct presentation of these media, just as traditional folk artists did in daily life.

As I pointed out earlier in this essay, any village and city can be a source of inspiration for installation and performance works, the direct presentation of our reality, only when artists' minds are open and alert enough to find beauty and philosophy in people's everyday behavior and their products. Isolation from our reality, the place from where the new ethnicity will be born, does not construct a sanctuary of art, but a prison of art.

5. Voluntary Seclusion

Before closing this essay, I should not miss to point out the importance of 'seclusion' for non-Western artists from any kind of 'international' = outside audience, in order for them to nurture a new ethnicity. We may be able to establish a more efficient network of cultural exchanges among non-Aligned countries. Japanese artists may be able to exhibit their works more often both in Western and non-Western cities. Nevertheless, artists should not seek a hasty acceptance by outside audience, which will make the newly acquired ethnicity only for outside onlookers, not for participants in their art.

Artists have freedom to remain in seclusion, such as in a deep mountain or a local village remote from the information network centered around a capital, so that he can find the inner and deeper relation of his work to a specific environment or a specific local community, preventing works from becoming no more than a quick response to the need of outside audience, just like a producer of 'differences' in 'international' postmodern consumerism.

Therefore, I am not optimistically pleased with the sudden involvement of Asian artists into the 'international' arena, however free from the West- or North-centricism. This is especially so because both Japanese and Asian contemporary artists yet do not have their audience even in their countries. As I have insisted already, ethnicity can be perpetually created from the uprootedness from the topos, as seen in Asian artists in recent urbanization and in Diaspora. However that does not prevent me from hoping for a fundamental reunion of *ethnos* and *topos*, and seeking the alternative system to support and understand artists, even if isolated from any international network system.

March 28, 1995



International Contemporary Art Artistic Movements Within The Framework of International Contemporary Art

As the title of the topic indicates it is wide-ranging and complex. A thorough, detailed discussion of it will also entail stepping outside the more customary boundaries of art history and criticism, i.e. beyond style and iconography, and deal with world views, ideologies and the operations of cultural industries. All these will take enormous amounts of time and space. The main focus of the present study is on the principal

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interests. The two main conceptual frameworks that may well prove to be the most important in the present context are two conceptions propelling the exposition of artistic production and the seminal leading paper. These are, firstly, the Non-Aligned Movement and, secondly, the North-South Alignment. Historically the two are not congruent, nor are they to be understood as being synonymous. Even so, there is considerable overlapping of the two in terms of participating countries and general aims. Indeed, one can stretch the situation and briefly remark that categorizations or grouping as the Third World, Developing Countries and, more recently, Newly Industrialized Countries, have a kinship, a kinship which has to do with being excluded from or being alien to the countries and centers of power in the Western Atlantic seaboard or specifically the Northern Atlantic Ocean.

T.K. Sabapaty

All these are intricately connected. But our twin-interests are The Non-Aligned Movement and the North-South Alignment. I rehearse or go over some of the foundational factors underlining these two conceptions as much to provide adequate grounds to peg my observations to, as to signal possible landmarks that can enable you to determine your orientations.

There is uncertainty regarding the origins of the Non-Aligned Movement, although its antecedents are readily traced to the historic meeting in 1955 at Bandung (Indonesia), when Soekarno, Tito, Nehru, and Zhou Enlai (among others) met to chart ways for newly independent nations / states to develop their standpoints or positions in the world in a relatively unencumbered manner. As a movement it was formalized in 1961 at Belgrade; its primary ideological commitments were anchored in issues and concerns such as decolonization, racial equality, opposition to global war, the right of small countries to be independent of pressures from the larger and the more powerful, and a search for solutions to the fundamental economic problems that confronted the majority of these nations.

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positions which could enable them to maintain relative independence from ideological and military conflicts generated by rivalries between the power blocks, and preserve a sense of autonomy in world politics, thereby becoming "a third force" and playing "a creative role in any conflict between capitalism and socialism" - this last - mentioned projection pointing to a lofty ideological status.

While such were the fertilizing motivations in the 50s and 60s, the seismic events which surfaced in the 70s and 80s altered these schematic perceptions and positioning. The defeat of the United States of America in Vietnam in 1975 and its subsequent withdrawal from the region of Southeast Asia as a theater of military operations and conflict, and the dismantling of the United Soviet Socialist Republics accompanied by the unmooring of its satraps in what was known as Eastern Europe (amongst other events such as the Iranian Revolution in 1979, and the post Mao / post - Tian An-men movements in China) have all unraveled the world as an entity made up of neatly arraigned power blocks. What once were centers demanding / coercing and receiving allegiances to one block or the other, such centres appear no longer to hold with the earlier magnetism and authority. For that matter, the earlier symmetrical compartmentalization of the world has been swiftly replaced by situations which are fragmentary, diffused and fluid; alignments or dispositions are no longer snug and neat, and neither are they underlined by certitude along ideological fronts. Not surprisingly the very conception of Non-Aligned, and as a movement, have altered, and the brief which outlines the intentions for the exhibition and the symposium points to the tenor of some of these changes.

The North-South alignment is by its very cast, oppositional; it as a construct that vividly dramatized the notion and status of difference. It was primarily aimed at dealing with acute problems arising from economic dominance (read North) and subservience or inequality (read South). An outcome of anti-colonial struggles. It came into relief from the realization that the historical forces which spurred movements leading to decolonization and independence in the political sphere, did not change the network of dependency in economic terms, and inequality in the conduct of International relations and their enforcement. North-South dialogue (initiated by France in 1975-77; in 1980 the Brandt Commission report called for North-South cooperation to resolve urgent problems on international inequality and the failure of the world economic system) was instituted in the belief that existing problems can be settled or addressed through negotiation, and that more equitable conditions and relationships can be constructed through negotiation and discussion.

The brief for the exhibition and symposium states that in the discussion of the status and position of the Non-Aligned Movement in the post Cold War era in Jakarta in 1992, the accent has shifted to economic and development cooperation among the countries of the South. In this way, the two conceptions which have moved in tandem have now been dovetailed. More specifically, it is observed that the Non-Aligned Movement has also been a forum for the expression of specific identities of the respective countries / nations, and that such discussions have brought into relief the dual nature of identity, that is to say a nature which one and at the same time reaches into the national and the international spheres. In this

connection, the brief says succinctly :

Within that international sphere there is a problem of dialogue between North and South.

It was in relation to this dialogue that some of the southern cultures were, and presumably still are, regarded as marginal vis-à-vis the dominating northern cultures. This view has its implications in the evaluation of art as well. There has been a dominant view among art critics that the Western art, of north, artistic values and line of development are the universal ones. All the other non-Western forms of art are thus regarded as outside the stream.

I think these are important parameters, and even as they are not new in themselves they continue to be valid; they are in force and we, 'outside the stream', who set out to comment upon and account for practices and productions along the margins have to square up to these situations or circumstances. No doubt the task are complex; they are for all that challenging and unavoidable. I will proceed to deal with aspects of International Contemporary Art that are pertinent to and illuminate the implications in this stated claim. In this sense, my interest in artistic movements that characterize International Contemporary Art will not be in art styles, art isms or art ideas in their customary art historical sense, but in teasing out some of the system of values that I discern to be integral to the very notion of internationalism.

On re-examining Alfred Barr's scheme of 20th century art or, specifically, his scheme for explaining the rise of abstract art in the 20th century his account is largely that of historical movements, Barr's conception of abstract art remains.