

Travelling South, In Theory Projects



Thái Hà, *Did you mishear me misspeak?*

This project for *Travelling South, In Theory* addresses language and translation – and engages the experiential, speculation, dreaming, improvisation and play. The project is a personal formulation of some very messy conversations I have recently been having, aiming to address the fatigue that stems from the lack of new language to situate myself and others across the so-called Global South, personally and politically. I first confronted this lack while writing my post-graduate thesis which explored new imaginaries of Southeast Asian futures. Terminology from the 1950s and 1960s would crop up over and over again: solidarity, internationalism, decolonisation. Decolonisation, in particular, often appears abstract and can, crudely put, be used tritely as part of our current lexicon.

Or, more than half a century later, our struggles have changed but our language has not.

The Other. The subaltern. This limited language tends to only circulate within academic circles and is, for mobilisation purposes, difficult to use. How can we speculate a future outside of the colonial framework (and all of its prefixed forms) if our politicised categories necessarily hinge on our marginalisation? My time with the *12th Berlin Biennale Curator's Workshop* (2022) showed me an alternative: how to speak about and respond to language. From our vastly different contexts at the workshop we found common ground in hijacking the instability of language, then revelling in speaking its reconfigured forms.

The messy conversations were just that: improvised, bootlegged, low-tech. In their way, they overcame the constraints of language, ironically the very tool we used to have the conversations. In engaging with *Circa's* archive – and noting that the function of an archive is at odds with my interest in the experiential and improvised – I will explore artistic practices from Ireland and Southeast Asia that privilege what artist and theorist Hito Steyerl calls “the poor image”: the reproduced and remixed low-quality copy that is unstoppable in its proliferation, and makes meaningless the categories of copy and original, as well as that of margin and centre. The poor image utters a language that seems broken, incomprehensible even, to some, while sounding out a “cuckoo song” to others – that is, when fragments of other songs are, at the moment of singing, added to the singer’s own lyrics, or as poet Sean Bonney writes, “an oppositional collective, spreading backwards and forward through known and unknown time”. In appropriating its own source material, the poor image can generate novel ideas about the language we currently use, or in some cases create a new vernacular altogether. I aim to examine how these practices manifest differently across geopolitical borders, and how the arts of Ireland and Southeast Asia, in “speaking” their respective languages, are interpreted by one another.

Leading up to a final essay, I will engage in three smaller projects that highlight the life of *Circa's* archive in the present, by way of rethinking the archive in the spirit of the poor image, which evolves with every reading and interaction. My initial proposal includes two written projects that rework the contents of the archive using writing techniques that bootleg, remix, and play (across genres), as well as a workshop, to be held in Saigon, that explores the extent to which strategies of the poor image are effective in crafting a new “language”.

References

Bonney, Sean. *Letter Against the Firmament*. London: Enitharmon Press, 2016.
El Khatib, Lama & El Wardany, Haytham. “Second Letter Against the Language (To Sean Bonney)”. *The Derivative*, May 5, 2022. <https://thederivative.org/second-letter-against-the-language-to-sean-bonney1/>
Steyerl, Hito. “In Defense of The Poor Image”. *e-flux*, November 10, 2009. <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/>

Carlos Quijon, Jr., *Errant Affinities: Ireland and Southeast Asia*

This project for *Travelling South, In Theory* aims to expand the citations of the Global South by speculating on art historical affinities between Ireland and Southeast Asia through the lens of *Circa* magazine. Included in this interest is an examination of the limits of Global South discourses in terms of a tendency to imagine the world in strictly hemispheric understandings. As a foil to this reading, my considerations will oscillate between the geopolitical genealogy of Global South discourses and the more tentative geopoetic potentialities of speculative affinities between areas that have largely been painted as passive receivers of hegemonic art traditions, theories, or histories.

The geopoetic, in this particular account, takes interest in inchoate moments that may speak to shared experiences or attitudes between the two places. Through the geopoetic, I am interested in thinking about productive resonances between the recent art histories of Ireland and Southeast Asia, which may become the basis of affinities. I want to propose art historical methodologies that can foreground or flesh out forms of affinities that are much more dilated or disperse than conventional art historical accounts. I am inspired by the theoretical disposition of cultural theorist Nikos Papastergiadis who, taking cue from the work of decolonial theorist Walter D. Mignolo, offers an account of the “the productive force of being at the interstices of the global order, formed not just in acts of resistance, but also through the experience of the as yet not fully recognized responses to hegemonic globality.”

In this project the geopoetic becomes a way to open up the fixations of geopolitical imaginations and to account for loose, tangential, serendipitous modes of affinities between two spatial imaginations that do not immediately suggest straightforward or self-evident narrations of affinity. Connections between the two places are not as evident or entrenched compared to the usual suspects of comparative or relational scholarship, therefore, this project plans to explore congruent vectors or errant trajectories between the two. Some topics that can be explored include postmodernism (issue 48 [1989]), the politics of landscape (issue 43 [1988/1989]), or art criticism (issue 35 [1987]), notions of internationalism and local contexts, or even archipelagic modes of thinking about Ireland’s and Southeast Asia’s art historical contexts.

Pragmatically, the project will initially involve a series of smaller, initial, essays that propose possible tropes or keywords for looking at Irish and Southeast Asian art historical affinities. The initial sample list is: *Coordinates* (the place of Ireland and Southeast Asia within larger geographic or geopolitical groupings, i.e., Europe or Asia); *Congruences* (possible meetings, interactions, or interrelations of people or thought or practices from Ireland and Southeast Asia); *Contingencies* (possible speculative relationships between the two).

Reference

Papastergiadis, Nikos. “The Global, the South, the Cosmos”. *Interlaced Journeys: Diaspora and the Contemporary in Southeast Asian Art*, edited by Patrick D. Flores and Loredana Pazzini-Paracciani. Hong Kong: Osage Publications, 2020, 170.

Biographies

Thái Hà is a curator and translator based in Vietnam. An alumna of the 12th *Berlin Biennale Curator’s Workshop*, directed by Reem Shadid, Hà’s work centres on speculation, dreaming, play, and improvisation. She was previously an Assistant Curator at Galerie Quynh, Ho Chi Minh City, where she produced its exhibitions and delivered education and public programmes, notably *CÁRÔ*, a project supported by the Goethe-Institut. In 2018 she co-

founded *Indigo Magazine*, a print platform for new voices within and beyond Southeast Asian arts. Hà received her MA in Contemporary Art and Art Theory from London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), with a dissertation examining the portrayals of Asia-futurism through the moving image. Before her official foray into the arts, she received a BSc in Psychology and Language Sciences from University College London (UCL). Her translations can be found in publications by the Tate St Ives, Carnegie Museum of Art, *ArtReview* and NUSASONIC.

Carlos Quijon, Jr. is an art historian, critic, and curator based in the Philippines. He was a fellow of the research platform Modern Art Histories in and across Africa, South and Southeast Asia (MAHASSA), convened by the Getty Foundation's *Connecting Art Histories* project. He writes exhibition reviews for *Artforum* and CNN Philippines. His essays are part of the books *SEA: Contemporary Art in Southeast Asia* (Berlin: Weiss Publications, 2022), *Writing Presently* (Manila: Philippine Contemporary Art Network, 2019), and *From a History of Exhibitions Towards a Future of Exhibition-Making: China and Southeast Asia* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2019). Some of his essays have been published or are forthcoming in *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art*, *Frieze*, *Afro-Asian Visions*, *MoMA's post*, *Queer Southeast Asia*, *Financial Times Weekend*, *ArtReview Asia*, *Art Monthly*, *Asia Art Archive's Ideas*, and *Trans Asia Photography Review*, among others. He curated *Courses of Action in Hong Kong* (Para Site and Goethe-Institut Hong Kong, 2019); co-curated *Minor Infelicities* (Post Territory Ujeongguk, Seoul, 2020); *In Our Best Interests* (NTU ADM Gallery, Singapore, 2021); *Cast But One Shadow* (UP Vargas Museum, Manila, 2021-2022); *A Global South Cosmology of Capitalism* (El Espacio 23, Miami, 2022); *Synthetic Condition* (UP Vargas Museum, Manila, 2022); and *To A Faraway Friend* (ASEAN Cultural House, Busan, 2022).