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Fluxus in the Philippines: 'Resonances' and Translations

Recent studies on Fluxus in Eastern Europe, Latin America and East Asia have expanded its historical and geo-political map. However, little attention has been paid to Fluxus activities in Southeast Asia. In contrast to the existence of interpersonal Fluxus networks in East Asia, Fluxus practices and principles reached Southeast Asia primarily through what art historian Reiko Tomii terms 'resonances' (2016). This paper discusses how Fluxus resonated in Southeast Asia through word-of-mouth, fragmented documentation, publications and gift-giving between the 1960s and 1980s. Focusing on such modes of transmission in the Philippines – a nation that had a prolific conceptual and contemporary art scene amidst the dictatorial regime of President Ferdinand Marcos (1968-86) – this paper examines Fluxus resonances via two artists: David Cortez Medalla (1942-2020), who came into contact with Fluxus figures and ideas while resident in France and Britain between the 1960s and 1980s, and Judy Freya Sibayan (1953-), who studied fine art in Manila during the 1970s, where she developed a strong awareness of Fluxus practices from her peers, along with circulating accounts and documentary materials.

Based on examples of their works, this paper argues that the Philippines – and Southeast Asia more broadly – does not represent a belated 'outpost' of Fluxus networks. Rather, it is a site where Fluxus' playful experiments, exchanges, multiple authorship and poetic gestures were actively 'translated' (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018) as part of a postcolonial vision to identify with what artist Robert Filliou described as the 'eternal network' (1967) of experimental art beyond national and institutional structures.