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VIETNAM & US

BOL 7

This issue attempts to unpack some of the tensions between official memorialization and individual memory; globalization and local realities; sanctioned histories and counter-memories; subjugated knowledge and alternate subjectivities forwarded by cultural practice. The title of the issue is intended to place Vietnam at the center of our consideration and to suggest a rhetorically open-ended "us" in a multiply situated relationship to that center. It should be noted however that BOL's base in the R.O.K. and the guest editors' in the U.S., places these two sites as privileged points of engagement. Nonetheless, our selection of contributions is wide-ranging. For example, Australia is a locus of significant scholarship and cultural production, representing the third largest Vietnamese diasporic population after Southern California and France. We do not mean to highlight binaries or boundaries but rather to foreground international interactions across geo-political, critical, and creative divides.

While it is generally assumed that extensive attention, critical and otherwise, at all levels from high to low culture has been given Vietnam, especially in the U.S., in actuality it is only relatively recently that comparative studies of Korea and Vietnam and their overlapping histories of national division, war and current close cultural and economic ties have begun to receive greater scrutiny. Scholarship about Vietnam as well as the Vietnamese diaspora has not attained, as it should, broader visibility beyond circumscribed ethnic or academic enclaves. This issue also supplements U.S.-centric scholarship on the legacies of the war in Vietnam by shifting the focus on localized subjectivity and agency in both Vietnam and Korea, moving beyond Western narratives of hysterical terror and historical tragedy to encompass both historical and contemporary interactions.

In bringing together original art and scholarship from leading interdisciplinary scholars, writers and cultural producers from various disciplines such as Cultural Studies, History, Asian Studies, Southeast Asian Studies, Asian American Studies, Trauma Studies, American Studies, and Art, we seek to fill some gaps as well as

extend and historicize current understandings of transnational circuits of commerce, culture, politics, and desire that revolve around the nation and the idea of Vietnam.

Our focus here are the linkages between historical trauma, globalization, and contemporary cultural production. Modernity itself is a traumatic process (Kaplan 2005). In Vietnam, rapid urban development and economic growth open up spaces of desire, as well as the policing of those desires. Consumer, national, and sexual desires become legible, highlighted within certain modernizing and moralistic discourses. Emergent discourses on sexuality and consumption creates new subject formations. These desires were not necessarily imported constructs, but the interactions of modernity and historical trauma forced into relief, a different register of classed and sexed subjectivity (Rofel 2007). How are modernity, desire and trauma linked?

Overview

We hope to foster creative and critical connections through examining our multiply inflected relationships with Vietnam. The following is a brief overview of our selections, starting with the art. An international array of artists – Im Heung-Soon, Naeem Mohaiemen, Manuel Ocampo, Susan Silton, and Xiaoze Xie – were commissioned to create art works for the printed page that would coexist and mingle with the writings. As expected, the works are varied in their response to the theme, with some charting unexpected and delightfully incongruent trajectories, both spatial and temporal, of inquiry and provocation.

Textwise, essays by Charles Armstrong and Hyun Sook Kim, in tandem, provide richly detailed and analytic account of Korea's substantial involvement in the American War in Vietnam, and serve to redress the long suppressed (in R.O.K) and generally neglected research and scholarship (elsewhere) pertaining to the triangulated relationship between Vietnam, U.S. and Korea. Tangentially, Yoon Chung Ro's article profiles one of an estimated 24,000 Korean skilled workers who found job opportunities during the war. With a related focus, Yoo Jae Hyun reviews various literature devoted to the war. Vietnamese constructions of modernity inform the research interests of both Lan Duong and Woo Don Sun in considering contemporary filmic representation of gender and sexuality, and colonial architecture in Vietnam, respectively. Articles by Ashley Carruthers and Yen Le Espiritu address the diasporic dimensions of Vietnam - the complex and

shifting negotiations in identifications between constructions of home and exile, and their hybrid, interstitial formations. Lastly, a diverse selection of contemporary Vietnamese poetry enliven and punctuate these pages, culled by Thu-Huong Nguyen-Vo.

The admonition that Vietnam is a country not a war is lost on those for whom Vietnam's enduring contemporary significance, particularly to those positioned outside the country, rests largely with the specific history of the American War in Vietnam. This war and its vestiges have cast Vietnam as a cipher and symbolic screen of innumerable projections, a screen (Freud, Sturken) that appears to be as potent and vivid today as it was forty years ago. What is constructed, remembered, and represented by a given society as a traumatic event depends on many shifting political, cultural, and economic variables. Memory and forgetting are complementary processes linked to mass media. What is remembered and forgotten in individual, political, and mass media narratives? Trauma is simultaneously an individualized and social process – or perhaps a circuit – of willed remembering and forgetting, selective fragments. Individual, social, and cultural forces interact in feedback relays – synaptic responses – to negotiate pain and nostalgia, desire and despair, harm and hope.

Vietnam has been memorialized in North American popular consciousness as a war, a wound, a mistake, a lesson to be learned. Waste and want, refuse and refuge, refusal and refugees. *Apocalypse Now*. But Saigon *now* is unrecognizable, a metropolis. The constant high rise construction – dreams of magnificent miles – willfully obliterates recent memories of halting poverty and dirt, powerlessness and desperation.

Present Pasts

During the nineteen sixties and seventies, particularly in some parts of the West, the widespread opposition to the war in Vietnam was transformed into a broader counter-cultural touchstone for a new generation that questioned and challenged, among a litany of grievances, the military industrial complex and wanted, in street parlance, to "stick it to the man." The struggle waged by the Viet Cong against the U.S. represented a concrete model for third world liberation and anti-imperialist movements world-wide, and for radical formations such as the Black Panther movement in the U.S. Similarly, in France, the anti-war platform was a key issue alongside domestic agendas in the revolutionary fervor

of the May 68 movement. Among the countless cultural contributions imprinted with the anti-war agenda, Godard's 1965 film, *Pierrot LeFou* stands out with its caustic and comic references to the war, as well as Godard's participation with other film luminaries in the omnibus film, *Loin du Vietnam*.

The specter of Vietnam has regrettably been re-activated in the uncanny comparisons between the quagmires present and past. Current events related to the disastrous debacle in Iraq assume greater legibility and comprehension when linked to the war in Vietnam. To wit, the November 3, 2006 self-immolation of Malachi Ritscher (an electrician at University of Chicago), in Chicago's downtown, rather than being seen as an act of mental instability, is read as an act of protest in comparison to the 1963, iconic act of self-immolation by Thich Quang Duc, on a busy intersection in Saigon across the street from the U.S. embassy. This Buddhist monk's ultimate act was a protest against the South Vietnamese government's religious intolerance but it was considered not only an indictment of the U.S.-backed South Vietnamese regime but of the war in general.

Just as Norman R. Morrison's 1965 act of self immolation in front of Defense Secretary Robert McNamara's Pentagon office became emblematic to the Vietnamese as a self sacrificing act of protest and heroism for which he has been memorialized as Mo Ri Xon in stamps, poetry and street names by the Vietnamese, Malachi's act is likewise given similar meaning in relation to the Vietnam War. Although anti-Iraq War mobilizations were international with record-breaking in turnout in the lead up to the war and its early phase, Malachi's act has no easy linkage to the current anti-war efforts as no current protest image has come to match or replace any of the indelibly lodged images from the anti-war protests of decades past. While the difference between the Korean War as a black and white war of newsprint journalism and the 'living (room) technocolor' experience of the Vietnam War has been noted to account for the former being forgotten and the latter being remembered within the United States. The curious lack of traction for images related to the current war gives pause for speculation. Is it that the Bush regime's control of media war reportage has effectively blunted the advantages of current advanced technology of greater access and speed, or is it some sort of collective numbness or battle-fatigue in comprehending the full horror of the current situation? Whatever the reasons, there has been a notable lack of iconic images from this war (aside from the Abu Ghraib images – which interestingly originated from the soldiers themselves)

that has captured the public's hearts and minds to the same extent as during the War in Vietnam.

The current poverty of new images related to the Iraq war brings to mind Susan Silton's adaptation of a recent work, *The 5 W's* in these pages. This work offers a fitting visual paradigm (particularly in its optically painful, even assaultive effect) to our present predicament regarding representations commensurate with the current war. The brute black stripes, like prison bars, prevent easy access beyond the surface plane. In comparison to this visual straight jacket, even the austere series of thirteen paintings of 1988 entitled, *October 18, 1977*, by German artist Gerhard Ritcher seem positively rife with visual play. These monochromatic paintings based on black and white photographs of the dead militant Red Army Faction (aka Baader-Meinhof) members in prison (cause of death undetermined, whether by suicide or by the hand of prison authorities), were painted in Richter's signature style of blurred effects that has been interpreted as a distancing device – in terms of temporal distance (the past is not the present) and aesthetic, self reflexive distance (a la Brecht). Silton's work can also be said to have a distancing effect but at its core, unlike Ritcher's works, there is no photographic image or a glimmer of an indexical or forensic dimension that is mediated. The image behind the insistent pattern of black stripes is the letter 'W.' This letter may stand for war or the middle initial of Bush, but more to the point, poetry and imagery seems to be purposefully stunted here if not evacuated, even the poetics of horror, trauma and tragedy. Adorno's early pronouncement, "to still write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric," (which he later retracted) may be resonant here, in some measure.

It was argued, and with passion, that the good guys won in the war in Vietnam, although the persecution and displacement of the Vietnamese in the diaspora complicated this anti-imperialist stance of victory. In Iraq, our past political and moral passions and compass rest on shifting sands. Those of us who know that U.S. is unquestionably in the wrong there find ourselves imprisoned by the past and bereft of vision about what should prevail. We are familiar with the political quandary we find ourselves in, but less so with the related quagmire about representation. How do we, in all parts of the world (including Vietnam), wrestle with the continued, contingent legacies of Vietnam? What are the relationships between Vietnam and us?

Viet Le and Yong Soon Min

Editorial Note

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Editorial Note

For the sake of expediency, the guest editors have globally used "Korea" to refer to the Republic of Korea and "Vietnam" to refer to the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam. We also acknowledge the attendant complexities of the politics of naming and self-representation for both of these countries and have retained the individual contributors' chosen usage within their texts.

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*Phrase from Li-Young Lee's Poem, *The City In Which I Love You*

Contributors and Artists

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Hyun Sook Kim is Professor of Sociology and Associate Provost at Wheaton College in Massachusetts, USA. She received her doctorate and master's degrees in Sociology from the New School for Social Research in New York City. As a historical sociologist, she has probed questions pertaining to modernity and state violence, nation-state formation, gender and ethnic conflicts, and social memory. Postcolonial and transnational feminist sociology frames her research, writing and teaching.

Naeem Mohaiemen

Born in London. Works in Dhaka and New York. Naeem uses video, archive and text in interdisciplinary art projects. Obsessions include failed revolutionary movements, national security panic, and the slippage between utopia and dystopia. The work blends autobiographical marginalia with micro flights of fancy. Naeem co-founded 'Visible Collective', a multiyear investigation of post 9/11 hysteria. shobak.org

Lan Duong

Lan Duong's research focuses on youth culture, gender, and sexuality in the films and literature of the Vietnamese and Vietnamese diaspora. Her book manuscript looks at these works through the thematic of betrayal and the politics of collaboration. Lan's second book project examines Vietnamese cinema from its inception to the present-day. She has written on the Vietnamese American karaoke bar and café, Tony Bui, Linda Le, and Vietnamese films like *Long-Legged Girls* and *When the Tenth Month Comes*. Her articles can be found in *Amerasia, Hop Luu: A Vietnamese Literary Journal, Asian Cinema*, and *Transnational Feminism in Film and Media*.

Manuel Ocampo

A native Filipino born in 1965, Manuel Ocampo moved to the United States in 1986 and quickly won attention for his work in the early nineties. He was part of the landmark exhibition "Helter Skelter: L.A. Art in the 1990s" curated by Paul Schimmel at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, Documenta IX in Kassel, Germany, and a Saatchi Collection exhibition in London in 1992.

Michikazu Matsune

Born in Kobe. Lives in Vienna. After one year of study in art history, Matsune switched to study contemporary dance at the Steiner collage in Sweden. He has worked as dancer and performer over several years, developing various projects with live-performance as well as video and photography. As 'Matsune & Subal', in collaboration with David Subal, he has been creating interactive projects with audience.

Yong Soon MIN

Yong Soon MIN is an artist and independent curator. Her artistic practice, inclusive of curatorial projects, incorporates diverse media and processes that engage issues of representation and cultural identity, the intersection of history and memory, and the role of the artist and the arts as agents of social change. Her artwork has been exhibited and reviewed widely since the early 1980s. Recent curatorial projects include *humor us* at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, *Exquisite Crisis and Encounters* at the Asian/Pacific/American Studies Institute of New York University, Fallayavada: Bahc Yiso Project and Tribute, and an international exhibition about the Korean diaspora for the Fourth Gwangju Biennial in Korea. She is Professor in the School of the Arts at University of California, Irvine.

Viet LE

Viet LE is an artist, creative writer, and curator. His artwork has been exhibited internationally at The Banff Centre, Canada, and in the US at Laguna Art Museum, CA; Cape Museum of Art, MA; Ethan Cohen Fine Arts Gallery, NY; Hudson D. Walker Gallery, MA; Shoshin Performance Space, NYU, NY; Korean Cultural Center, CA, among other venues. He has received fellowships from the Civitella Ranieri Foundation, Italy; Fulbright Foundation, US-Vietnam; William Joiner Center, US; Banff Centre, Canada; the Fine Arts Work Center, US; and PEN Center USA, US. He has recently curated include the performance event "Miss Saigon with the Wind" at Highways Performance Space, Santa Monica, and the visual art show *Charlie Don't Surf!* at Centre A in Vancouver, Canada. Le co-curated *humor us* at Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, Los Angeles CA and the performance event "me so funny" at the Barnsdall Gallery Theatre. Le obtained his MFA from the University of California, Irvine, and is currently writing his doctoral dissertation, "Trauma and Desire: Contemporary Art, Representation and AIDS in Indochina" at the University of Southern California. He is residing in Vietnam in 2007-08.

Xiaoze Xie

Born 1966 in P. R. China, Xiaoze Xie received his Master of Fine Art degrees from the Central Academy of Arts & Design in Beijing and the University of North Texas. He has had solo exhibitions at the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, AZ; Dallas Visual Art Center, TX; Modern Chinese Art Foundation, Gent, Belgium; Charles Cowles Gallery, New York; Nicholas Metivier Gallery, Toronto; China Art Archives and Warehouse, Beijing; Gaain Gallery, Seoul; Devin Borden Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston, TX; among others. His 2004 solo at Charles Cowles was reviewed in *The New York Times, Art in America*, and *Art Asia Pacific*. His work is in the permanent collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art. Xie received the Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant (2003) and artist awards from Phoenix Art Museum (1999) and Dallas Museum of Art (1996). Xie is on the faculty of Bucknell University, PA.

Susan Silton

Susan Silton resides in Los Angeles. Her work is supported through diverse media, including photographic-based processes, video, installation, and offset lithography, and has been exhibited nationally and internationally at Feigen Contemporary, NY; SolwayJones, Los Angeles; Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, Los Angeles; SITE Santa Fe, NM; Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne; Pasadena Museum of California Art; Angles Gallery, Santa Monica; New Orleans Contemporary Art Museum; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; and Allianz Zeigniederlassung, Berlin, Germany, among others. More recently Silton's work has been exhibited in Los Angeles at the Natural History Museum and bank gallery, as well as in exhibitions at Vassar College, NY; and ICA/Philadelphia. Her work was included in *Picturing Modernity: The Photography Collection, SFMOMA* (2006) and *Selections from the Permanent Collection II: American Art on Paper from the 1960s to the Present*, Washington University Art Gallery, St. Louis (2004). Silton has received fellowships from The MacDowell Colony and Banff Centre for the Arts, Canada, as well as awards and commissions from the Durfee Foundation and Clockshop Foundation. She is a recipient of a Getty/California Community Foundation Fellowship in 2005, as well as a C.O.L.A. Individual Artist Fellowship in 2003. Her work has been featured in *Artforum, X-TRA, Cabinet magazine, n. paradoxa, Lesbian Art in America* (Rizzoli), and in noted art historian Amelia Jones' most recent book, Self/Image (Routledge).

Ashley Carruthers

Dr. Ashley Carruthers is an anthropologist based at the Australian National University. His main research interest to date has been in the Vietnamese diaspora and its changing relationship with the homeland in the post Cold War era. Discourses of exile and anticommunism remain powerful in this diaspora, but transnational relationships and practices (including kinship, remittances, religion and media texts) are on the rise. This produces a tension between an exilic-diasporic urge to reject contact with Vietnam, and a transnational one to be synchronised with it, a phenomenon he calls "mobile exile". He is currently completing a book manuscript on these issues. He also has a keen interest in contemporary art, and has published a number of catalogue and review essays on Vietnamese and other Asian art.

Woo Don Sun

Woo Don Sun received his BA and MA and completed PhD coursework in Architecture at the Seoul National University. He received his PhD in Engineering Research in Tokyo University, Japan. He is currently an associate professor in Architecture at the School of Visual Arts, Korea National University of Arts. Starting from this year, he is a visiting scholar at the Institute of East Asian Studies at University of California-Berkeley. His main interests is the history of cities and architecture in modern Asia, and he is also the founding member of 'Vietnam Urban Architecture Research Association'. His publication includes *Research on 20th century Architecture* (co-authored), *Twelve Cultural Treasures of Korea Selected by UNESCO* (co-authored), *Note on Korean Architectural Survey* (co-authored), et al. He has also edited Architectural History and History of Modern Western Architecture.

Yoo Jae Hyun

Yoo Jae Hyun was born in Seoul in 1962. He has worked in many social activist organizations after studying electronic engineering at Ajou University. He began his artist career by publishing "Rolling Stone", a mid-length novel, in the Spring issue of *Changjakgwa Bipyoung* (1992). His publication includes Indochina, *the Sad Shadow of Mekong* which is a collection of travelogues in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos; Slow Hope which hinted at the possibility and hope of a humanist society while traveling Cuba; *Cigarette, Sugar, and Revolution; Shihanookville Story; Did I come Too Early or Too Late*, etc.

Yoon Chung Ro

Yoon Chung Ro received his MA
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Im Heung-soon

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Yoon Chung Ro

Yoon Chung Ro received his MA and PhD from the School of General Studies at Dongguk University. He is currently a research professor at War and Peace Institute at Hansung University. His publication includes *The history of the formation of anti-communist dictatorial nation in Vietnam and Korea* (2005) as well as PhD dissertations such as "The War Experience and the Changes of Their Life World of the Korean Workers for the Vinnell Firm in Vietnam" (2006) and "Making Korean Identity in Relationship with the United States and Vietnam during the Period of Vietnam War: Between Colonial Unconsciousness and Aspiration toward Colonialism" (2007), among many others.

Im Heung-soon

Im Heung soon received her undergraduate and graduate degree in painting from the School of Arts Kyongwon Univeristy. He had a solo exhibition at Ilju Art House and participated in exhibitions such as *2002 Gwangju Biennale* and *2004 Gwangju Biennale*. He explores the issue of family as well as the problems found in modern Korean history through diverse type of work. His projects include *Sungnam Project* (1999), *mixrice* (2002-2004) and *Seong-san SH Apartment Public Art Project*.

Jon Bywater

Jon Bywater is a writer based in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. He lectures at Elam School of Fine Arts, The University of Auckland, where he is Programme Leader Critical Studies. He is a member of 'the collectives Cuckoo' (q.v. http://www.cuckoo.org.nz) and 'Local Time' (q.v. http://local-time.net), and is widely published on art and music. He was a co-organizer of the international symposia for practitioners and theorists, *Cultural Provocation: Art, Activism and Social Change* (Auckland, August 2003) and *Cultural Futures: Place, Ground and Practice in Asia Pacific New Media Arts* (Auckland, December 2005).

Charles Armstrong

Charles K. Armstrong is Associate Professor of History and Director of the Center for Korean Research at Columbia University. He was educated at Yale University, the London School of Economics, and the University of Chicago, where he received his Ph.D. in 1994. His publications include *The Koreas* (Routledge, 2007), *The North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950* (Cornell, 2003) and, as editor, *Korean Society: Civil Society, Democracy, and the State* (Routledge, second edition 2006), as well as numerous journal articles and book chapters. His current book projects include a study of North Korean foreign relations in the Cold War era and a history of modern East Asia.

Nguyễn-võ Thu-hương

Nguyễn-võ Thu-hương teaches globalization and Vietnamese Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her book, *The Ironies of Freedom: Sex, Culture, and Neoliberal Governance in Vietnam*, is forthcoming from the University of Washington Press. Her current research examines labor, consumption, public protest, commemoration, and literature in Vietnam and the diasporas to explore ways of knowing that cross through the material and non-material, life and death as Vietnamese and diasporics imagine themselves in relation to their violent history in an increasingly spectral global economy. Her fiction and other writings in Vietnamese, under Nguyễn Hương, have appeared in Hợp Lưu, Diễn Đàn, on Talawas.org, and Tienve.org among other places

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