Mindworks: A Cebuano Student Festival As Social Critic And Incubator Of Performance Art

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Abstract

This paper explores MindWorks, a long-running student performance art festival at the University of the Philippines Cebu, as both a social critique and incubator of performance art within a state institution. Framed through a hybrid interpretative-critical lens, the study addresses three central questions: How does MindWorks function as a form of pedagogy within academic institutions? In what ways does it subvert dominant ideologies, particularly those of the state? And how does the Cebuano local context shape its artistic forms and institutional significance?

Drawing on performance studies, critical pedagogy, and the sociology of art, the paper situates MindWorks within broader discourses of cultural democracy, regional autonomy, and institutional critique. It argues that MindWorks enacts Paulo Freire's (1970) vision of dialogic, consciousness-raising education and embodies Pierre Bourdieu's (1993) notion of contesting dominant "regimes of taste." Through case studies such as "R-18," "Sakop, Sikop, Sagop," and "Boang-boangon ang Boang," the paper illustrates how MindWorks addresses themes like censorship, surveillance, disinformation, and postcolonial identity.

As a former student participant and now faculty and festival adviser, the author reflects on the festival's generative contradictions: it is rebellious yet institutionalized, ephemeral yet archival, grounded in the local yet globally conversant. These tensions, far from undermining its impact, constitute its critical power. Ultimately, MindWorks is not just an event—it is a methodology, a pedagogy, and a sustained cultural practice of resistance, performance, and public learning.

Keywords: MindWorks, performance art, pedagogy, state, UP Cebu, FASO

Introduction

Performance art in the Fine Arts Program of the University of the Philippines Cebu (UP Cebu) has emerged as a potent site where creativity, politics, and pedagogy intersect. Within the local context, it functions not merely as a mode of artistic expression but as a dynamic instrument of social commentary, political resistance, and educational transformation. When framed within institutional contexts such as universities, performance art allows for a deeper examination of how the state-sanctioned educational structures can simultaneously constrain and inadvertently foster radical artistic practices. At the center of this dynamic lies MindWorks, a student-led performance art festival that embodies a compelling paradox: it is both radical and institutionalized.

Originally conceived as a form of rebellion against academic conservatism, MindWorks has evolved into the longest-running student performance art event of its kind in the Philippines. Organized by the Fine Arts Students Organization (FASO), it features an annual show of installations and performance art grounded in conceptual and experimental approach. It

promotes non-object-based art production centered on the human body as its space of interaction. The festival began as a class project in the late 1970s, with its full staging in 1980. It was institutionalized in 1986 as an annual student performance festival held every Human Rights Day in December. In the 1990s, it became a component of the Humanities Festival, and from the late 2010s until the present, it has been held every February in celebration of the National Arts Month in the Philippines.

Situated within a state-funded university in a postcolonial context, MindWorks exemplifies how artistic dissent can emerge not despite but because of institutional structures. This paper explores the complexities of MindWorks as a site of pedagogy, protest, and cultural production, emphasizing its critical potential and embedded contradictions.

This essay pursues three interlinked questions that guide this inquiry: (1) How does performance art in MindWorks function as a form of pedagogy within academic institutions in the Philippines? (2) In what ways does it critique and subvert dominant ideologies, particularly those of the state? (3) How does the Cebuano local context shape its forms, meanings, and institutional position? Addressing these questions enables a critical examination of the productive tensions between the state, institutions, and artistic agency.

Employing a hybrid interpretative-critical methodology, this paper interrogates the pedagogical role of performance art and the dialectical relationship between student activism, the university, and the state. Drawing on literature in performance studies, critical pedagogy, and sociology of the art, it situates MindWorks within broader discourses of cultural democracy, postcolonial critique, and artistic agency. Through this lens, the paper argues that MindWorks enacts a uniquely situated form of public pedagogy and dissent, foregrounding local epistemologies while navigating institutional constraints.

Methodology and Sources

This study draws on a combination of primary and secondary sources, informed by my positionality as both a former student-performer and the current faculty adviser of MindWorks. The primary data were generated through qualitative, semi-structured interviews with MindWorks founding members—who are also my professors and colleagues—conducted in the course of my research and production of Episode 3 Antithesis to theater: Examining Performance Art in the Visayas of the ArtCurrents Video Lecture Series and Seminars of the Fine Arts Program, University of the Philippines Cebu, undertaken under the auspices of the National Committee on Visual Arts of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts. These conversations provided first-hand accounts of the festival's inception, pedagogical intentions, and evolving institutional dynamics, enriching the historical and critical dimensions of this paper. In addition, I referenced published essays authored by Prof. Raymund Fernandez, one of the founding members, my professor and interviewee which offer valuable insights into the cultural history and artistic milieu that shaped the development of MindWorks.

Archival research complemented these interviews. Festival ephemera, including posters, programs, and photographs were sourced from UP FASO archives, personal collections of alumni, and my own personal archive built over years of participation and observation. Visual documentation of performances, both my own and those shared by collaborators, was reviewed to analyze staging choices, audience interaction, spatial occupation, and thematic shifts across the festival's history.

Secondary materials including scholarly texts in performance studies, critical pedagogy, and sociology of the arts provided the theoretical scaffolding through which the data were interpreted. The integration of oral histories, archival documentation, and theoretical literature allowed for a layered analysis that is at once historically grounded, critically informed, and reflexively situated. This triangulation of sources ensures that the paper's arguments are

supported by both lived experience and scholarly discourse, offering a perspective that is deeply embedded in the local context while conversant with broader critical debates.

Contextualizing the Paradox: Local Rebellion, Institutional Nesting

The foundation of MindWorks was laid with the opening of the Fine Arts program at UP Cebu in 1975, the first fine arts program outside of Manila established to address the need for formal art education in the Visayas. The initial curriculum was shaped by figures like National Artist Jose Joya, who was the Dean of Fine Arts of UP Diliman, Maestro Martino Abellana, considered "dean of Cebuano paintings" and the "Amorsolo of the South," and Prof. Julian Jumalon. The introduction of art history exposed students to art forms beyond traditional post-war Cebu landscapes and realism, sparking enthusiasm for modern art movements.

The late 1970s saw the arrival of the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA) in Cebu, conducting workshops advocating for a "people's theater" that advanced community-based, socially engaged art. These encounters exposed Fine Arts students at UP Cebu to the potential of theater and performance as tools for political education. The event was a conception of pedagogy as a dialogic consciousness-raising process wherein education is not the passive transmission of knowledge but a co-creative practice of critical reflection and action, in what Freire (1970) calls praxis. In this view, learners are not empty vessels to be filled, but active agents in uncovering and transforming oppressive realities through dialogue, collective inquiry, and lived experience. In contrast, the official curriculum, under Maestro Martino Abellana, remained grounded in Classical aesthetics and conservative pedagogy, favoring technical mastery and realism over conceptual exploration. This disjuncture created what Fernandez (2023) called an "anxiety among students," reflecting a deeper tension between imposed institutional norms and emergent artistic agency, especially in the light of the political climate.

Despite the generally conservative faculty, Prof. Javy Villacin returned to UP Cebu as a young faculty member and introduced a rupture in the prevailing order. By promoting installation art and conceptual experimentation in his Advanced Visual Studies class, he challenged the dominance of classical and formalist approaches that prioritized technique over critical meaning. He required his students to produce installation and experimental practices in art and featured them in the fine arts studios in the basement of the UP Cebu building. In doing so, Villacin cultivated what Howard Becker (1982) describes as an alternative "art world"—a collective network of artists, ideas, tools, and conventions that operate outside or in resistance to dominant institutional frameworks. This alternative art world not only produced new content; it redefined the processes of art-making, valuing collaboration, process, and experimentation over mastery and product.

Prof. Raymund Fernandez, a student at the time, described the emergence of MindWorks in the 1970s as a "kind of rebellion", one that was not just aesthetic but pedagogical and political. He notes, *"We did not ask our teachers what these movements meant. To ask them would have dispelled the notion of it. We were rebelling against them; against Abellana even, or so we thought"* (Fernandez, 2017). This rebellion was not merely against the conservatism in favor of Classicism, but also against the rising tide of depoliticized Abstractionism, which, while modern, still often prioritized technical processes over message and theory. Dominant institutions often legitimize specific "regimes of taste" (Bourdieu, 1993), privileging certain aesthetic values and artistic practices deemed culturally or intellectually superior. These regimes are not neutral but are embedded in broader systems of power that reproduce social hierarchies. As a result, alternative or politically engaged practices—particularly those emerging from marginalized or subaltern voices—are frequently devalued or excluded from the dominant cultural canon. In this light, MindWorks' challenge to classical and Abstract traditions represents a disruption of these legitimized norms, asserting the validity of

conceptual, participatory, and locally grounded performance as both artistic and critical practice. Students noticed an emphasis on realistic rendering and playful abstraction without deeper conceptual consideration. Furthermore, the critique stemmed from a perceived disconnect between the role of artists and the art produced by schools, which seemed detached from the prevailing political and social conditions during Martial Law.

The influence of PETA and the works of Villacin set the stage for performance as a relational practice, engaging viewers and performers in co-creation. As such, these early MindWorks pieces anticipate Nicolas Bourriaud's (2002) concept of relational aesthetics, where the work's meaning is created through human interaction rather than fixed representation. The first run of MindWorks in the late 1970s included installation and interactive pieces and featured a playful interpretation of "The Persecution and Assassination of John-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton Under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade," inspired by a long-play album of the piece that Fernandez encountered by chance. The performances that emerged from this pedagogical shift—often improvised, participatory, or open-ended—also embodied Erika Fischer-Lichte's (2008) "transformative power of performance." According to Fischer-Lichte, performance is not a fixed representation but a liminal event that transforms both performer and spectator through embodied presence, affective resonance, and co-presence in time and space. These works were not merely symbolic statements; they were lived experiences that invited reflection, discomfort, and even transformation. In this context, performance art functioned not only as aesthetic expression but as a site of real-time learning, critique, and becoming, instantiating a new pedagogical paradigm grounded in embodied knowledge and social interaction.

Around the early 1980s, amid the re-establishment of Supreme Student Councils in Philippine universities and a resurgence of student activism, the first MindWorks event—titled "There's Something Going On in the Basement"—was staged in 1980. This moment marked a decisive turning point: a conceptual and political intervention by students who sought to challenge the prevailing academic orthodoxy within the Fine Arts Program. That this event was organized not as an official school activity but as a student-led initiative is crucial. The students demonstrate their capacity to contest the dominant field of cultural production (Bourdieu, 1993) by creating alternative spaces that redefine artistic legitimacy and value.

The paradox of institutional response was made visible when Maestro Martino Abellana, who had long discouraged student participation in off-campus demonstrations, attended the first MindWorks. Unaware that it was a direct challenge to his pedagogical orientation, he staged a performative response of his own: locking the basement studio, placing a formal flower arrangement outside, and posting a sign that read, "Art is not happening here." While intended perhaps as irony or dismissal, this gesture was reappropriated by students as affirmation according to Villacin and Lumagbas, in an interview featured in *Antithesis to Theater* (Compuesto, 2023). In the eyes of the student-artists, Abellana's act ironically reinforced the urgent need to redefine what art is, where it happens, and who gets to declare its validity.

This moment may be read through Diana Taylor's (2003) framework of the repertoire versus the archive. Abellana, representing the institutional archive—codified, canonical, static—encountered a living repertoire of insurgent artistic practice that resisted capture. The students, in their improvisational installations and performances, embodied a repertoire of embodied knowledge and political critique that stood outside traditional validation. In doing so, MindWorks positioned itself not only as an aesthetic intervention but as an epistemological rupture. This episode also affirms Jeffrey Alexander and Margaret Rueschemeyer's (2005) notion that cultural institutions can serve as contradictory spaces, simultaneously enabling and constraining dissent. That this radical artistic gesture emerged within a state university underscores a key insight from cultural policy literature (Miller & Yúdice, 2002; Pick, 1988):

institutions are not monolithic but porous, capable of incubating critique from within. What began as a student protest against Classicism and abstractionism catalyzed the recognition of UP Cebu as a key site for modern and conceptual art in the Visayas, marking the inception of what could be considered the university's first art movement.

Roy Lumagbas, is credited with coining the term "MindWorks" to signal a departure from technical aspects towards the "unbounded possibilities of conceptual art" in an interview featured in *Antithesis to Theater* (Compuesto, 2023). Lumagbas noted that they were not expecting it to be an annual event; he added, "If it happens, it happens". By privileging experimentation over technical precision, the students were not simply making new art—they were enacting a new kind of pedagogy: one that rejected hierarchy, embraced unpredictability, and opened space for critique. In this way, MindWorks can be understood as both an artistic and pedagogical rebellion—a performance of resistance emerging from within the very institution it sought to challenge.

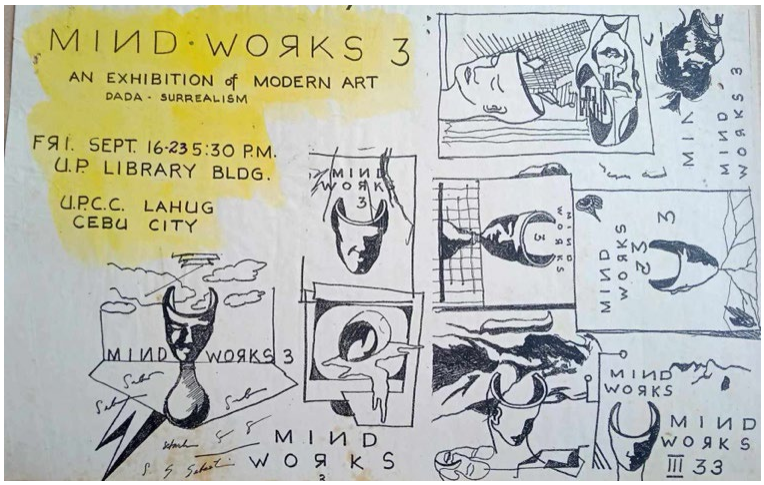

Figure 1. MindWorks archival poster 1988, photo courtesy of Jojo Sagayno

A central manifestation of Cebuano artistic resistance is the concept of 'patakâ', described by Fernandez in an interview featured in *Antithesis to Theater* (Compuesto, 2023) as both a method and philosophy of randomness, spontaneity, and chance. More than an aesthetic style, it reflects an indigenous epistemology that embraces improvisation, unpredictability, and even error as integral to the artistic process. In contrast to choreographed, highly controlled Western avant-garde models, *patakâ* subverts dominant standards of technique and authorship, encouraging a kind of creation that resists order and embraces play. This local aesthetic sensibility challenges imported models of artistic legitimacy and provides a foundation for an art practice deeply embedded in place and community.

Cultural historian Dr. Resil Mojares (1997) emphasizes how Cebuano theatrical forms historically resisted Manila-centric cultural hegemony by cultivating distinct local idioms and political engagements. Cebuano performances claim space for regional knowledge and critique. MindWorks continues this lineage, demonstrating that artistic dissent does not seek validation from national centers of power. Instead, it emerges from situated local experiences—both geographic and affective—that are often excluded from dominant discourses of art history and criticism. The emergence of MindWorks during the turbulent Martial Law period underscores this political urgency. Students who initiated the event did so amid censorship, violence, and ideological repression under the Marcos regime. Drawing on precedents such as protest theater and PETA's pedagogical model, MindWorks artists used the body as a site of resistance. It

challenged the boundaries between art, education, and activism, not from the cultural center but from the margins: locally, regionally, and institutionally.

This localization politicizes MindWorks not only through its themes but through its form. By asserting the epistemic authority of Cebuano artistic sensibilities, it participates in regional knowledge production, echoing Goldbard's (2006) vision of cultural democracy where art is rooted in community, responsive to context, and resistant to commodification. In doing so, MindWorks becomes not merely a regional counterpart to the Manila art scene but a vital locus of decolonial critique and pedagogical innovation in its own right. What emerges from this convergence is a 'vernacular avant-garde'—a critical practice that is regionally grounded yet globally legible in its refusal of domination. MindWorks politicizes art not simply through content, but through its commitment to a processual, community-based aesthetic that redefines both what art can be and where it can happen.



Figure 2. MindWorks c. 1989-1990, Photo courtesy of Jojo Sagayno

In 1986, MindWorks was institutionalized as an annual student performance festival, initially scheduled every Human Rights Day in December. By the 1990s, it became a component of UP Cebu Humanities Festival, and since the late 2010s, it has been held every February in celebration of the National Arts Month. Eventually, MindWorks evolved into a full-fledged festival featuring exhibitions, competitions in installation and mural, workshops, and culminating with a performance art night with "pocket performances" distributed across campus.

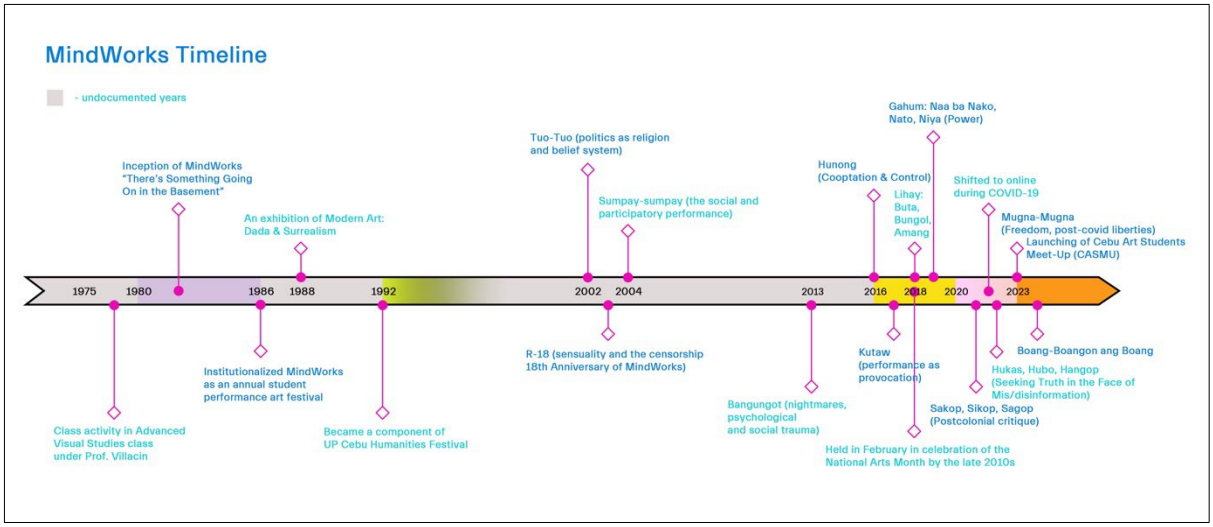

Figure 3: MindWorks Timeline

Pedagogy as Performance: Learning Through Rebellion

MindWorks as Freirean Pedagogy

MindWorks functions as more than an annual art event; it is a living manifestation of Freirean pedagogy—dialogic, transformative, and rooted in praxis. Within the state institution of UP Cebu, MindWorks subverts traditional educational hierarchies by embracing a model of learning that is collaborative, experiential, and often intentionally destabilizing. Education here is not about the passive transmission of technical skill but the active formation of critical consciousness through creation, performance, and public risk.

Organized entirely by students under the Fine Arts Students Organization (FASO), MindWorks blurs the lines between teacher and learner, studio and stage, critique and celebration. In this space, failure is integral to learning, and the process of assembling performances—often improvised, interdisciplinary, or experimental—is as valuable as the product. As such, pedagogy itself is performed: not through lectures, but through affect, disruption, and shared embodiment. The act of organizing—conceptualizing themes, selecting works, managing logistics, and negotiating institutional boundaries—becomes part of the learning experience. The aesthetic process is inseparable from the political and pedagogical processes it animates. Students learn not through instruction but through embodied risk, public experimentation, and shared disruption.

Form, Format, and Space as Pedagogical Acts

The format of MindWorks itself reflects its pedagogical and political ethos. Typically staged over several days, it includes mural and installation competitions, workshops, and public forums, and culminates with a performance art night featuring simultaneous performances across UP Cebu's campus. Participants include Fine Arts students, alumni, UP Cebu student organizations, and occasionally invited collaborators from the broader Cebuano community. Performances occupy non-traditional spaces: stairwells, bathrooms, rooftops, gardens, classrooms, hallways, and outdoor spaces, prompting unscripted encounters and emotional investments from the audience. This de-institutionalized spatial logic dissolves the barrier between audience and performer, art and life, where art's meaning is co-produced through human encounter and shared presence (Bourriaud, 2002). In relational aesthetics, the artwork becomes a "social interstice"—a space in which new forms of human relations are rehearsed, challenged, or reimagined. Whether through participatory rituals, interactive installations, or

improvised sequences, these works blurred the distinction between performer and spectator, and between artistic event and everyday life. In doing so, MindWorks transformed the university itself into a contested site of aesthetic experimentation and political engagement. These performances enacted, rather than merely depicted, social critique, rehearsing alternative ways of being, relating, and learning within and beyond the institution.

Performance Case Studies and Critical Theories

MindWorks' thematic directions are usually responsive to current sociopolitical contexts, addressing issues such as authoritarianism, censorship, religion, mis/disinformation, trauma, and memory, among others. Crucially, these themes are not imposed top-down but emerge from the artists themselves. This fosters an environment of critical autonomy where learning is inseparable from resistance.

In "R-18", staged during MindWorks' 18th anniversary, student-artists explored censorship, sensuality, and social control, engaging with the literal and symbolic connotations of "R-18." Bodies were foregrounded, naked, concealed, or restrained, provoking discomfort and confrontation, highlighting how identity and meaning are constructed and constrained by moral and institutional boundaries. The performance blurred boundaries between eroticism and critique, interrogating who gets to police visibility and desire. The performers' identities are not fixed but produced through repetition and resistance (Butler, 1990). "R-18" did not merely represent censorship—it performed it, exposing how control operates on and through the body.



Figure 4. MindWorks 2003, R-18, photo courtesy of Ronyel Compra

"Túo-túo", a work from the early 2000s, artists critiqued the complex entanglements of mythology, folklore, religion, and political power in Philippine society. Performers created a quasi-liturgical space, invoking ritualistic Catholic forms while undermining its authority through injecting satirical irreverence and fragmented texts, prompting the audience to reflect on the theatricality of belief and the authoritarianism embedded in moral dogma. Here, belief (túo) is both performed and questioned. Performance art's ability to collapse ritual and spectacle becomes relevant: the sacred and the profane, the devotional and the critical, shared the same liturgical space (Goldberg, 2011).

In "Bangungut" (Nightmare) 2013, performers physically endured acts of suffocation, repetition, and trembling to embody themes of psychological and social trauma, repression, anxieties tied to national violence, and intergenerational pain. It was a durational and affectively charged performance in which the audience became witnesses to breakdown, catharsis, and release. The performance within the expanded field, where the body becomes

not just the medium but the critical object of art (Krauss, 1979). The piece also invited relational intimacy with its viewers, implicating them in the discomfort—another enactment of Bourriaud's ethics of co-presence. These performances do not teach by illustrating theories; they teach by making viewers and participants feel, stumble, question, and interact. They are performative critiques that resist containment by academic language, offering instead an embodied and ephemeral kind of knowing.

Learning as Process

Interpretatively, *patakâ*—the Cebuano concept of randomness, spontaneity, and chance—is central to the ethos in every iteration of MindWorks. From the inside, *patakâ* is not undisciplined; it is a strategy for claiming freedom and embracing error as a creative method. It reflects indigenous epistemologies that value process, chance, and improvisation over codified technique. Critically, what appears as "chaotic" or "non-rigorous" through institutional lenses is a rejection of hegemonic aesthetic standards rooted in colonial and formalist values. Here, the interpretative mode allows us to understand the logic of resistance from within, while the critical mode reveals how these practices challenge broader systems of valuation and legitimacy. This dual lens enables an analysis that is both grounded in practice and politically attuned.

Ultimately, pedagogy and protest are not opposites in MindWorks—they are fused. To protest is to teach. To learn is to unlearn. To perform is to question. Through MindWorks, students do not merely learn about resistance; they perform it, shape it, and stage it. The festival functions as a living curriculum—one that trains artists not only in form but in freedom.

Performing the State: Critique from Within

MindWorks is deeply embedded in the institutional machinery of the University of the Philippines Cebu—a state university—and thus exists in a paradoxical condition: it critiques the state from within the very structure it inhabits. Its performances both resist and depend on state infrastructures, resources, and logics. This paradox is not a weakness but a site of generative tension. As Pierre Bourdieu (1993) argues, cultural practices are embedded within fields of power where actors compete over legitimacy, taste, and value. MindWorks contests the dominant "regimes of taste" sanctioned by the state, particularly those that privilege classical realism, technocratic formality, and depoliticized abstraction. In contrast, MindWorks advances a practice of performance that is conceptual, embodied, and politically insurgent. Operating within a university shaped by bureaucratic norms, academic rubrics, and state protocols, MindWorks performs institutional critique while exploiting the affordances of the very systems it challenges. This tension has become more visible in recent years, particularly through its engagement with themes of surveillance, censorship, disinformation, and state-sponsored amnesia. Rather than staging resistance outside of the state, MindWorks locates critique in institutional friction, using the stage to expose how state power operates through language, regulation, spectacle, and erasure.

Since at least 2019, the festival has more overtly addressed the contemporary entanglements of state power and representation. That year's edition, titled "Gahum: Naa ba Nako, Nato, Niya" (Power: Is it Mine, Ours, or Theirs?), foregrounded questions of ownership, authority, and control. The performances critiqued institutional gatekeeping and the uneven distribution of power in cultural and political life, asking who has the right to create, to speak, and to be heard. The theme mirrored ongoing national concerns about populism, state repression, and elite capture of public discourse.



Figure 5. MindWorks 2019, Gagum: Na aba Nako, Nato, o Niya?, photo courtesy of the author

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when in-person gatherings were banned, MindWorks transitioned to digital platforms like Facebook Live and Zoom. This digital migration foregrounded the shift from institutional surveillance to platform surveillance, where power operates not through censorship but through algorithmic visibility, privileging virality over critique and transforming resistance into data. The shift online highlighted how performance operates in environments shaped by biopolitics, as students negotiated curfews, health protocols, and digital fatigue while continuing to produce critical art. In using corporate-owned platforms, students staged performances that ironized the very media through which they circulated, highlighting what Foucault calls the disciplinary power of visibility. Viewers became both audience and data points; the performances were ephemeral yet archived, intimate yet monitored.

"Sakop, Sikop, Sagop" (discipline masked as rescue) in 2021 responded to 500 years of Christianity in the Philippines, the termination of the UP-Department of National Defense (DND) Accord, and renewed anxieties about academic freedom. Drawing on the polysemy of *sakop* (to include/conquer), *sikop* (to apprehend), and *sagop* (to rescue), the performances staged a sequence of capture and release, directly addressing legacies of colonialism, Christianization, and military oversight. Performers enacted scenes of ritual capture, mimicry of sacraments, and bureaucratic rituals of documentation, foregrounding the institutional violence masked by spiritual and bureaucratic benevolence. The critique here was not externalized but grounded in the daily, embodied reality of being a student in a state university increasingly subject to surveillance. In 2022, "Hukas, Hubo, Hangop" (exposing dis/misinformation) tackled the epistemic confusion of the post-truth era. This iteration of MindWorks moved from saturation to exposure, confronting the audience with the difficulty of seeking truth in a society plagued by state-sponsored disinformation and moral ambivalence. Here, performances function not only as expression but as epistemology—a method of grappling with what it means to know, doubt, and discern in a world flooded with misinformation. The theme illustrated that the search for truth is not linear but processual, emotional, and fraught. It dramatized what Alexander and Rueschemeyer (2005) call the contradictions of cultural institutions: that universities, media, and the arts can be both tools of state legitimization and sites of counter-narrative.

This tension carried into the 2023 edition, titled Mugnâ-Mugnâ (to imagine or generate). Coming after years of lockdown and restriction, the festival explored themes of post-pandemic freedom, institutional fatigue, and cultural rebuilding. While earlier years focused on critique and exposure, Mugnâ-Mugnâ suggested that performance could also envision alternatives. Yet even this act of imagining was haunted by bureaucratic realities—performances confronted ongoing restrictions, resource scarcity, and administrative oversight. The post-pandemic return in 2023 saw a revitalization with new events while retaining traditional ones, emphasizing face-to-face interaction and community building. FASO adapted the forgotten UP Cebu culture of Crazy Day during College Days, where the UP Community (students, faculty, and staff) dress up whatever they want. In 2023, the MindWorks festival opens with Crazy Day and a party after the performance art night in "diskoral", a localized disco held in an open space. Through collaboration with UP Cebu Office for Initiatives in Culture and the Arts, FASO initiates the Cebu Art Students Meet-Up (CASMU), linking all art and design students across Cebu in the MindWorks festival and beyond.



Figure 6. MindWorks 2023, Mugnâ-Mugnâ, photo courtesy of the author

In 2024, “Boang-boangon ang Boang” (absurdity of the state) offered a searing critique of Philippine social absurdity, especially under the renewed Marcos regime. The title alone implies a recursive insanity: a system that gaslights the already unstable, a nation where absurdity is not an exception but the norm. The performances used repetition, cacophony, and farce—performers babbled contradictory slogans, mimicked manic behavior, and staged public breakdowns. The performances referenced how the fool, the mad, and the clown have historically been used to speak truth in veiled forms, here updated for a media-saturated, gaslit reality. It blurred satire and psychosis—echoing the idea that “the crazy acts crazy, the fool acts foolish, the mad acts madly, the insane acts insanely.” These recursive performances reflected a collective condition: to live under a regime that gaslights its citizens into questioning their sanity. Borrowing from the tradition of the carnivalesque, the performances destabilized meaning itself. Together, these performances form a progression: from exposing institutional capture, to navigating epistemic distortion, to confronting the psychic toll of incoherent governance.

Across these works, MindWorks demonstrates that the state is not merely repressive—it is also productive. As Miller and Yúdice (2002) suggest, cultural policy is often functionalist, using institutions like the university to promote values of nationalism, obedience, and order.

Yet these same structures can be leveraged to produce resistance. MindWorks takes advantage of the state-funded space of the university to stage critiques that may not be possible in commercial or explicitly activist settings. It is not merely tolerated dissent—it is institutionalized contestation, rehearsed annually on the grounds of a public campus.

The key to this critical positioning lies in how MindWorks inhabits the contradictions of the state. Its performances operate in sanctioned venues, yet the themes are often unsanctioned. It uses university resources while rejecting state narratives. It engages bureaucracy through proposals, clearances, and budgets, only to turn these processes into performative objects themselves. The result is a practice of critique that does not seek purity outside the system but engages complicity as a strategy.

As a result, MindWorks embodies what might be called "performance as institutional critique": a mode that is not oppositional from a distance, but frictional from within. By inhabiting the mechanisms of cultural legitimacy, it can twist them—make them strange, unstable, visible. In doing so, it models how art can function as both product and interruption of the state, teaching not only what to resist, but how to resist while staying inside the machine.

Navigating Paradox, Enacting Democracy

MindWorks does not merely illustrate how performance art can critique power; it embodies how resistance itself can be institutionalized without being neutralized. It is a pedagogical and artistic form that thrives in tension—a sustained negotiation between spontaneity and structure, community and institution, local specificity and theoretical abstraction.

Rather than recapitulating the previous sections' analyses, this discussion explores the broader implications of MindWorks as a political, pedagogical, and cultural form. Its defining paradoxes—rebellious yet institutionalized, ephemeral yet sustained, grounded in the local yet conversant with global theory—position it as more than a student initiative. MindWorks serves as a model of situated cultural democracy, revealing how radical art can flourish not despite, but because of its embeddedness in contested spaces.

As a former Fine Arts student who participated in and helped organize MindWorks, my formation as a performance artist was profoundly shaped by the festival. It was through MindWorks that I first encountered art not simply as aesthetic output, but as a space for critical inquiry, improvisation, failure, and collaboration. I did not learn performance art from a textbook; I learned it by doing—by staging, falling apart, regrouping, and engaging with others. Through that embodied practice, I came to understand art as a method of thinking, of resisting, and of making meaning with others.

Today, I return to MindWorks as both faculty and festival adviser, overseeing the very platform that first gave me space to experiment and become. This trajectory—from student to artist to institutional agent—enacts the very paradoxes this paper explores. I now occupy a dual role: facilitating the same rebellion I once staged, and negotiating the line between support and surveillance, freedom and form. This reflexive position does not resolve the paradox; it animates it. It reminds us that institutions are never static—they are lived and reshaped through practice.

Diana Taylor's (2003) framework of the repertoire versus the archive is particularly resonant here. MindWorks' performances resist being fully absorbed into institutional memory; they remain transient, relational, and affectively charged. And yet, their regular recurrence, use of campus infrastructure, and documentation efforts inevitably fold them into the university's archive. Rather than treating this as a contradiction, MindWorks embraces it: the performances

are designed not to escape the archive but to haunt it—to make its limits, exclusions, and rules visible.

This haunting is also institutional. MindWorks does not exist outside the university; it is what the university allows to exist, and simultaneously, what it does not fully control. Drawing from Jeffrey Alexander and Margaret Rueschemeyer's (2005) insight that cultural institutions function as both ideological tools and spaces of contestation, MindWorks exemplifies how critical art can emerge not through opposition alone but through the strategic inhabitation of power. Its refusal to disavow institutional affiliations—while consistently subverting their norms—offers a more nuanced vision of resistance: one not rooted in purity, but in friction.

In this way, MindWorks enacts what Arlene Goldbard (2006) calls cultural democracy: an ethic of creation rooted in community participation, contextual relevance, and an anti-hierarchical valuation of knowledge. Unlike elite cultural institutions or Manila-centric circuits, MindWorks foregrounds patakâ as both an aesthetic strategy and epistemic refusal of linearity, precision, or codified "excellence." It proposes a pedagogy grounded in improvisation, error, and unpredictability, rejecting state-sanctioned metrics in favor of local logics of meaning-making.

But what does this mean for performance art education and regional cultural autonomy?

First, MindWorks challenges prevailing models of art education that equate rigor with mastery. Instead, it embraces failure, collaboration, and embodied risk as pedagogical values. Here, Paulo Freire's (1970) vision of dialogic, consciousness-raising education is not simply cited but performed through gestures, collisions, silence, and presence. Performance becomes a form of public thinking, not instruction. My evolution as an artist-educator confirms this: I did not step into performance art through conventional instruction but through the messy, generative space that MindWorks opened. Now, I teach performance not as a set of techniques, but as a critical orientation to the world.

Second, the festival destabilizes center-periphery dynamics in Philippine cultural production. MindWorks does not seek approval from the capital; it asserts its legitimacy through situated, self-determined practice. This echoes Resil Mojares' (1997) call for a critical regionalism that resists cultural homogenization. In doing so, MindWorks opens space for vernacular avant-gardes—radical forms that are both rooted and mobile, improvisational yet reflexive.

Finally, MindWorks complicates the binary between critique and complicity. Rather than rejecting the institution, it turns institutional mechanisms into materials: forms, proposals, timelines, and regulations become part of the performance itself. This is what Pierre Bourdieu (1993) describes as the reflexive labor of cultural production—the ability to expose and subvert the field's internal hierarchies while remaining within it.

This is not mere irony. It is a politics of inhabited dissent, where students and artists move between visibility and subversion, authority and disruption, rehearsal and revolt. As someone who has moved through these roles, I now see that MindWorks is not a stable identity or a fixed event—it is a methodology, a space, and a set of relations that continue to shift and challenge.



Figure 7. MindWorks 38, Boang-boangon ang Boang, 2024, photo courtesy of FASO

Taken together, these reflections bring the core research questions into focus. First, MindWorks functions as a form of pedagogy not through conventional instruction, but through embodied, relational, and often chaotic processes of making and meaning. It transforms the academic institution into a space of Freirean learning, where failure, participation, and performance foster critical consciousness. Second, it critiques and subverts dominant ideologies, especially those of the state, by inhabiting institutional contradictions—turning bureaucratic routines and disciplinary expectations into materials for performance. Through this, MindWorks exposes how power operates and reclaims space for dissent from within. Third, the festival's Cebuano local context—its use of patakâ, its engagement with regional histories, and its resistance to Manila-centric artistic hierarchies—shapes not only its content but also its methods and institutional position. What emerges is a practice that is both grounded and mobile, radical and strategic, pedagogical and political.

MindWorks, then, is not only a festival. It is a method, a critique, a pedagogy, and a future—one that enacts a model of cultural work responsive to its context but never reducible to it.

Conclusion

MindWorks demonstrates that performance art within institutional settings can generate sustained, localized resistance while remaining attuned to broader political, pedagogical, and cultural concerns. As both a pedagogical tool and artistic platform, it challenges the false binary between rebellion and institutionalization. Through its annual rearticulation of critique, MindWorks reveals that institutional structures—when inhabited critically—can serve not just as sites of constraint but as laboratories for transformation. Its embeddedness in UP Cebu, a public university shaped by state bureaucracy, is not a contradiction but the very condition of its possibility.

My trajectory—from student-participant to artist and now educator and festival adviser—epitomizes the recursive nature of this institutional critique. MindWorks did not just teach me how to perform; it taught me how to think critically, improvise collectively, and sustain dissent in forms that are relational and context-bound. Teaching performance art today, I carry forward this legacy—not as doctrine but as a method of inquiry, a living archive of resistance, and a shared space of becoming.

MindWorks is not a finished project. It is a pedagogy in motion, a method of cultural production that reveals how performance can unearth, disrupt, and reimagine institutional logics. Situated within Cebu's regional histories and global theoretical conversations, it models a form of cultural democracy that refuses to choose between critique and complicity, form and freedom, politics and pedagogy. In this tension lies its critical vitality—and its future.

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