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The Rockefeller Roundabout of Funding

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Severino Montano and the Development of Theatre in the Philippines in the 1950s

Abstract

For more than two decades after World War II, the Rockefeller Foundation supported theatre outside the USA. This essay focuses on the promotion of the Philippine writer, theatre practitioner and pedagogue Severino Montano in the 1950s. Montano received individual and institutional subsidies from the Rockefeller Foundation between 1949 and 1960 to ‘develop drama in the Philippines’ – on the basis of his work in theatre education and his practical theatre work, especially his large-scale project “Arena Theatre” at the Philippine Normal College in Manila.

Although the Rockefeller Foundation’s total funding for Montano is relatively small, it continued at a steady rate for a decade. The article first examines the Rockefeller Foundation's funding policy in the field of theatre in the USA and abroad in general and, in the main part, focuses on the promotion of Montano and the foundation’s funding strategies in particular. The paper works with primary sources from the funding context, in particular with the files of the Rockefeller Archives Centre.

Keywords

C.J. Abgayani, Arena Theatre, Developing Theatre, Drama Education, Charles B. Fahs, Margo Jones, Manila, Severino Montano, Philanthropy, Philippine Normal College, Rockefeller Foundation, Theatre in the Philippines

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Prologue: “Re: a person for developing drama in the Philippines”

Dear Professor Montana (sic):

I was in The Philippines only a few weeks ago and Dr. Gabriel Bernardo of The University of The Philippines and several other scholars mentioned you as one of the people with whom I should talk with regard to the development of drama in The Philippine Islands.

I expect to be in Washington on Thursday and Friday of this week, March 22 and 23, and I should like to take this opportunity for a talk with you if a time convenient for you can be arranged. I expect to be staying at the Hay Adams and wonder whether you would not be good enough to leave word there as to how I can get in touch with you.

Sincerely yours, Charles B. Fahs.²

This letter leaves the office of Charles B. Fahs, Director of the Rockefeller Foundation's Humanities Programme, on 19 March 1951. Its addressee is Severino Montano, Philippine playwright, director and, at the time of the correspondence, lecturer at the American University in Washington, D.C. The letter reveals that Fahs does not know Montano personally, but became aware of him through recommendations. His request is no small one, and initially opaque: “The development of drama in the Philippine Islands”. Fahs apparently returned from a trip to Asia where he specifically asked for recommendations. Whether Montano is a suitable person for his project is something he would like to find out during a personal meeting in Washington. The letter arouses interest and raises questions: Why does Fahs contact Montano? What interest does he or his client, the Rockefeller Foundation, have in Montano and his work? How is it that Bernardo and “several other scholars” know Montano and can recommend him? And above all: Who is Montano and why is he regarded as a suitable figure for this not insignificant task?

The letter is the starting point for this article about the promotion of Severino Montano by the Rockefeller Foundation in the 1950s and, despite its brevity, points to essential parameters that were central to the promotion and are examined here: the initiative of the sponsors, their interest in theatre, their selection and awarding methods and agenda, and the promotion of a candidate, an expert in the field of (Philippine) theatre.

Charles B. Fahs' letter to Severino Montano is in the files of the Rockefeller Archives in New York. In the spring of 2018, I undertook a research trip there to obtain an initial overview of the archives, which reflect the connection between philanthropic enterprise, theatre and its development since the end of the Second World War. Although this connection – theatre, theatre development and philanthropy – seems unusual at first, closer study shows it to be a fruitful relationship – and sometimes it has a profound effect on the theatre practice and history of those years. It is well known that the Rockefeller Foundation supported and thus promoted Derek Walcott's Trinidad Theatre Workshop (founded in 1959) over a long period of time and with good financial resources. The actual extent and scope of the Foundation's interest in drama and theatre

from the 1930s to the 1960s, however, is only revealed by the rich and heterogeneous archival material, which makes it clear that individuals, theatre practitioners, academics and authors are supported in order to undertake study trips or projects within the USA, outside the USA or overseas. The Rockefeller Foundation also supports institutions such as schools, departments and colleges, between the 1930s and 1950s. In the case of Severino Montano, both individual and institutional sponsorship are effective: he receives an 'ad personam grant' as well as institutional support for the Philippine Normal College in Manila, where he bases his projects from 1952/1953 onwards, as will be explained in more detail below. Detailed information on the Foundation's subsidy and Montano's applications and correspondence can be found in the aforementioned files of the Rockefeller Archive Centre in New York. There Montano's work in Manila is also extensively documented, firstly by the reports and letters Montano regularly sends to the Foundation to document his work and the need for support, and secondly by the meticulous diaries of the Rockefeller field staff, mainly represented by Charles Fahs, Boyd Compton and James Brandon, Compton's assistant. The surviving and never-evaluated material on Montano's activities financed by the Foundation between 1950 and 1960 piqued my interest in following his career and work in the USA, Europe and the Philippines. This paper gives an insight into the first results and observations on Montano as a case study.

This article is divided into three sections: the first section provides a general overview of the Rockefeller Foundation's commitment to cultural promotion in Asia; the second section examines Severino Montano and his career; and the more detailed third section provides a differentiated insight into his support by the Rockefeller Foundation, and their activities and methods. The following is based on documents from the Rockefeller Archives, newspaper notes, Montano's reports and publications, as well as statements and publications by third parties.

1. The Rockefeller Foundation and its promotion of theatre and culture

After the end of the Second World War, the Rockefeller Foundation's support for theatre was no longer limited to the USA. Rather, the Foundation took international paths in the promotion of the arts and art institutions, especially theatre. The combination of theatre art and academic training, which had proved its worth in the USA, was regarded by the foundation as a model, since it allowed the interweaving of artistic personality and work with a scholarly environment and expertise. As David H. Stevens, Director of the Humanities Programme of the Rockefeller Foundation from 1932 to 1949, notes in his review of the programme in 1948 about the Rockefeller Foundation's reasons for investing in drama since the mid-1930s:

In the sciences and in humanistic studies, the Foundation has depended largely on scientific or academic personnel and institutions, both as a source of judgment on the merit of requests, and for the administration of its grants. That it can sometimes do so in the arts is shown by its grants for university work in drama, and by those approved till now for the encouragement of contemporary work in literature. But in the arts, the term academic is hardly used to characterize work at the forefront of

their development; and if the Foundation is to limit its concern with the arts to what can be done through personnel in institutions, it will be neglecting much that might be of most benefit to the arts in general.³

In the following years, the Rockefeller Foundation supported numerous individuals and institutions in the USA and abroad, at universities and elsewhere in their theatre work. Asia had already played a major role during David H. Stevens' tenure as Director of the Humanities Programme, particularly through the Asia-US cross-cultural exchange and language training; this axis remained after Charles B. Fahs took over Stevens' position, and expanded it to incorporate his own interest in and commitment to Japanese studies and area studies. To quote again from Stevens' report:

If the humanities have a contribution to make to democratic life and to developing in the minds of men the understanding essential to world peace, then the need for humanities work in Asia is great and urgent. Moreover, the humanities by their very nature require for their growth the absorption of the ideas and values of other cultures. In cultural isolation they, even more than the natural sciences, are bound to stagnate. Our humanists, like the author of a recent book, can become "richer by Asia".⁴

One of these "many fields" was theatre. As far as the Philippines – the geographical focus of this essay – are concerned, it can be noted that after years of occupation by the Americans, then by the Japanese, the archipelago became independent in July 1946. Nevertheless, even in the 1950s many Americans settled in the Philippines, while locals set off for studies, training or political service in America. For the present case study on Severino Montano, the permanent exchange between the United States and the Philippines, the decades of transatlantic connections and relationships between educational institutions and their graduates play a crucial role in understanding the dynamics of network relationships in which the RF is involved. RF's many years of experience in promoting community and university theatres and their departments, as well as its solid personal and institutional network in Asia, formed a good basis for investing in Asian artists and local institutions. The local and specialist knowledge and personal networks of Charles Fahs and his colleagues and successors Boyd Compton and James Brandon, who were responsible for the Foundation's Humanities Programme between 1950 and 1960, contributed to a consolidation of relations.

The Rockefeller foundation did not start supporting drama and theatre abroad until the 1950s. As part of the Foundation's Humanities Programme, theatre had been given higher priority since the 1930s and funding was systematically expanded, albeit initially on a purely national level. Why did the Foundation pay so much attention to theatre over a period of more than two decades?

Since the 1930s, the Foundation's generally already strong university work had also been transferred to the more specialized field of theatre and drama education. Thus more and more universities in the USA, following the model of the theatre pedagogue George Pierce Baker and his famous *47 Workshop*, began to include the study of theatre and drama in their curriculum, setting up departments for drama, production facilities and workshops for playwriting. The Rockefeller Foundation contributed by awarding grants to support these new departments – either in the form of technical equipment or in the form of scholarships for young assistants or training. By supporting this theatre work far

away from Broadway, non-commercial theatre was also valued, with university theatre joining community theatre on an equal footing. By 1942, as stated in Stevens' Report, "grants dating from 1934 had given added strength to departments of drama at Yale, Cornell, North Carolina, Stanford, and Western Reserve [...]". The largest grant related to the theatre went to the National Theatre Conference. George P. Baker was among the initiators of this conference, founded in 1931 at Northwestern University; both the Rockefeller and Carnegie Foundation sponsored it especially during the war years.⁵

The Foundation's activities in the field of theatre from the late 1940s onwards are inseparable from the methods and principles of promotion tested in the USA in the 1930s. After the war, the foundation also attached great importance to the 'development of literature'. Enabling authors to 'write freely' was a priority, and this premise also applied in the playwriting sector as well as in radio and film, as Stevens notes:

The situation in the fields of radio and film is being carefully scrutinized, and also the international possibilities of drama. These means of powerful influence in the cultural life of nations, as of individuals, have uses beyond their commercial applications that are recognized but not widely realized. How far these forms of expression can be made socially influential toward better appreciation in the arts is an important question today.⁶

From its inception, the Foundation cooperated with individual and institutional advisers⁷, "experts", who are experienced and informed in the respective areas of funding, both in terms of potential grants and in terms of subject areas. Although the Foundation attaches great importance to the officers' assessment of the Humanities Programme and their personal encounters with those to be supported, the expert opinions are nevertheless important for a network of (often hidden) information. With regard to the promotion of culture, especially literature, education, language and theatre, Unesco (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) has played an important role since its foundation in November 1946. Its creation coincides with the Rockefeller Foundation's interest in expanding the promotion of the arts internationally. Unesco is regarded as "particularly advantageous for such international operation"⁸, especially because of its clearly formulated interest in the field of the arts and international relations. The latter in particular were disrupted by the war years and the resulting political divisiveness in the post-war period.

In this context, in his report, Stevens pays particular attention to the International Theatre Institute (ITI), which had been newly founded by Unesco. In his words:

One opportunity for the Foundation to give encouragement on a truly international basis may develop shortly in the International Theatre Institute for the organization of which during 1948 Unesco has assumed responsibility. Unesco projects in the other arts may shortly offer similar opportunities.⁹

A private philanthropic foundation networks with an internationally operating organization to expand its international funding policy and its own network – a *mésalliance* that was not without consequences.

By tracking Montano's activities in the field of theatre, the following sections show how the Rockefeller Foundation's support measures were structured at the level of theatre education and practice. Montano will be the focus here, the very theatre author and maker who was addressed in Charles B. Fah's letter of March 1951 quoted at the beginning of this article as "one of the people with whom I should talk with regard to the

development of drama in The Philippine Islands” – addressed, or one might also say: identified.

The Rockefeller Foundation was looking for an expert in this field to develop the theatre landscape in the Philippines, and Montano seemed to be a suitable candidate for this mission. Yet who was Montano? What coordinates led the Rockefeller Foundation to identify him as an expert in the development of Philippine theatre?

2) Severino Montano: playwright, director, manager, pedagogue (1915-1980)

Little is known about Severino Montano outside Philippine theatre history; at best his most successful dramas, including *Sabina*, *The Merry Wives of Manila* and *The Ladies and the Senator*, are well known. In 2001 he was posthumously appointed “National Artist” by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts. In the comments on the nomination, it is stated that he bridged “the great cultural divide between the educated and the masses” as “noted playwright, director, actor and theatre organizer”, a “persevering pioneer in the formation of a Philippine national theatre movement and the professionalization of Filipino dramatic arts”.¹⁰

Severino Montano was born in Manila in 1915. His interest in theatre was ignited during his teenage years by Marie Leslie Prising, a British actress with Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson's Company; in 1931 he became president of the Dramatic Club of the University of the Philippines and began teaching there after earning a bachelor's degree in education with a major in English. In 1939 he left his homeland to study acting, directing and economics with a scholarship in the USA and Great Britain. In 1942 he received a Master of Arts degree in Dramatics from Yale University, where he also participated in the prestigious *47 Workshop* (his teachers included Theodore Komisarjevsky of the Moscow Art Theatre). He then went to Washington, D.C., to work under President Manuel Quezon and General Carlos Peña Romula for the Philippine Government in Exile (1943-1946). In 1946 he was sent to London as a technical assistant to the Philippine delegation to the United Nations Conference. In London he became a follower of the economist and political scientist Harold Laski. In 1948 Montano completed his MA in Economics at the American University in Washington, D.C., with a thesis on “Broadway Theatre Real Estate” and received his doctorate in public administration a year later. This professional combination of theatre practice, communication, management and political initiative seemed suitable for the Rockefeller Foundation's task of promoting the Philippine theatre landscape. Montano brought with him not only expertise and geographical knowledge, but also his own network of a professional, artistic, family and political nature. His artistic and scientific career is characterized by the interdependence of this network – which at the same time formed the foundation of his career. “It is easy to discover and promote experienced and established older artists”, as Stevens put it in the 1948 report, but far more challenging is the “selection of the brilliant, creative individuals at their time of undeveloped fullness in expression”, which does not follow any “rule of practice or theory of probability”.¹¹

Montano's answer to Fahs' request was positive, for he had himself toyed with the idea of returning to his homeland after twelve years abroad, on the one hand for family

reasons, on the other hand because of his desire to use the knowledge gained abroad in theatre practice, management and business for cultural work in the Philippines. For his return journey, he planned an extended study trip through cultural centres in Europe and Asia. By observing European and Asian theatre, he hoped to gain impulses for his future work in the Philippines, convinced that Philippine theatre could be designed and organized similarly to a European national theatre system. The study trip was also intended as preparation for his “mission” expressed by the Foundation, namely “the development of drama in the Philippine Islands”. It seemed to be of urgent need, for the Philippines had been under Western influence for quite a long time, and this influence had somehow caused the indigenous Philippine theatre traditions to vanish. As James Brandon puts it:

Given the Philippine’s long contact with Western culture and the dearth of indigenous theatre in the islands, it is not surprising to find Western spoken drama more widely and more deeply appreciated here than in any other Southeast Asian country. To the average, Filipino ‘theatre’ means ‘Western theatre’. Virtually all drama to which he is exposed is based on Western models. There are no professional theatre troupes (Brandon 1967, p. 78f).

In a letter to Fahs dated 17 January 1952, Montano identifies three urgent innovations as indispensable for the envisaged development of theatre in the Philippines:

1. The need for broad technical leadership, which can help formulate and guide the fundamental policies in the rounded development of Philippine dramatic art in all its various aspects.
2. The need for a teacher who can impart the methods of playwriting as practiced in the modern theatre and during the golden periods of the theatre history of both East and West.
3. The need of a leader who can inspire freedom of thought in the theatre, and who can relate this growth to the activities of the free world.¹²

By formulating these “urgent needs”, he simultaneously formulates the programme for his own work and recommends himself as a “technical leader”, a “teacher” and an ambassador of “freedom of thought in the theatre”. After some adjustments to his concepts and travel plans submitted to Fahs, he finally received an individual grant in 1952, an ‘ad Personam Grant in Aid for a theatre observation route in Europe and South East Asia, including India, en route back to the Philippines’ as the title of the grant read. With the help of this scholarship – mainly travel costs of 3.500 US dollars – Montano set off in August 1952 on his roundabout way back to Manila via important theatre centres in Europe and Asia.¹³ Immediately after his arrival in Manila in December 1952, he activated his family and professional networks there. As early as 1949, he had given a workshop in theatre and rhetoric at the Philippine Normal College. After his return in 1952, he continued his work at the same institution and expanded it with other work, which shall be outlined below.

The Philippine Normal College was opened in September 1901 as the Philippine Normal School (PNS), the first college of higher education founded during the American occupation of the Philippines. Under the presidency of Elpidio Quirino (the godfather of Montano’s sister Jesusa M. Sadam), the PNS was renamed the Philippine Normal College. Even after the renaming, the state-funded institution aimed primarily at

providing teachers for Philippine schools and saw itself as a training centre for democratic ideals and democratic ways of life. Hence, the fact that Montano based his work programme at this college fitted in well with the school's more general philosophy. He saw the teachers and practitioners he would teach as multipliers of his ideas at their respective schools in the barrios.

Within the various networks involved, it is remarkable that Fahs not only turned to Montano for his expertise, but also asked his superiors and former colleagues to comment on his expertise, in addition to the recommendation he received from Gabriel Bernardo mentioned in the letter. On 23 May 1951, for example, he approached Paul F. Douglass, President of the American University Washington, for a "confidential comment with regard to his [Montano's] ability as a teacher, a writer, and an administrator of drama programmes. Mr. Montano does not know that we are writing to you and what you say will, of course, be kept confidential."¹⁴ Such requests for information about potential scholarship holders are not uncommon and can be found in numerous files about potential candidates and institutions for funding. In all of the Rockefeller Foundation's funding measures, it can be observed that the Foundation itself forms and claims at least two main networks, some of which overlap, some of which function autonomously: 1) an official network that is open to the beneficiaries, and 2) an unofficial, quasi "subcutaneous" network that is hidden from the scholarship holders. While the former discloses strategies and requirements and communicates them transparently, the "subcutaneous" network consists of confidential communication with "advisers", persons and institutions who are close to the person to be funded and form a network of advisers, as it were, as well as internal agreements within the foundation. Within this network, information and recommendations are collected, problem areas discussed, measures considered that affect the funding – and measures that elude the knowledge of the beneficiaries.

With regard to Montano and his first grant, Boyd Smith, Walter Pritchard Eaton (North Carolina, Chapel Hill) and Anna Cook (Harvard) are named as referees. In addition, people and institutions on the ground are consulted, local experts and American delegates in the Philippines. Gabriel Bernardo, whom, as mentioned above, Charles Fahs had already asked in 1951 for recommendations for a suitable candidate for the promotion of the performing arts in the Philippines, was contacted by Fahs again in 1954, this time to obtain an assessment of Montano's work and progress. For the same purpose, he contacted Margaret H. Williams, Chief Cultural Affairs Officer of the American Embassy in Manila. What did Montano do in Manila? What did the realization of the development and the RF's investment look like?

3) Far-flung in the Barrios – Centre-Staged in Manila: Montano's Theatre Development Programme in the Philippines

With the help of the Grant, Montano managed during the 1950s various measures to promote professional theatre and theatre education in his hometown of Manila. He was supported in this by his colleagues, some of whom he knew from his previous studies or professional contexts.

Within a short time, Montano established a graduate programme to train playwrights, directors, technicians, actors, and designers; launched the Arena Theatre Playwriting Contest¹⁵; and initiated and organized the first theatre festival in the Philippines in Pangasinan, 110 miles north of Manila (in November 1955).

Montano's greatest and most lasting achievement, however, was the Arena Theatre, founded in 1953. Here, (future) pedagogues who taught at the schools of the surrounding barrios, as well as actors, directors, theatre technicians and artists underwent a systematic, professional training in teaching and communication using the means and techniques of theatre. Authors and theatre practitioners, some of whom were later declared National Artists of the Philippines, enjoyed their training with Montano and his colleagues at the PNC (Rogers 2001, p. 101–108).

The space for the Arena Theatre was initially, very provisionally, the girls' dormitory of the PNC. Here workshops took place and the local theatre group, under Montano's guidance, rehearsed (mainly his) plays. The second branch of the Arena Theatre opened in March 1955 in Bulacan, another one was planned in Laguna, and there were Arena Theatre branches in Luzon and the Visayas. The concept flourished and was in demand because of its simple and economical design. Montano's idea of the Arena Theatre at the PNC spread to the surrounding educational institutions and theatres. If one followed the Arena Style, this meant, above all, making theatre in a simple stage setting, with little technical effort, a circular arrangement of auditorium and stage, and the production of locally specific, indigenous or foreign (i.e. Western) plays in English and Tagalog. As Brandon notes in 1967:

In Manila there are about half a dozen long-established semi-professional community theatre organizations. These groups perform European and American plays for the most part, but they also produce some Philippine plays. One of the most unique is the Arena Theatre of the Philippines. Since its founding twelve years ago it has been attached to Philippine Normal College in Manila. Though university-based, it is organized as a community theatre project, with some sixty branches on the major islands of the Philippines. Each local group produces two or three plays a year. All the plays are written by Philippine authors, among them the best playwrights in the country, and all concern Philippine life. Through the Arena Theatre provincial folk-theatre producing groups are linked with sophisticated, big-city creative artists, to the benefit of both parties (Brandon 1967, p. 79).

Montano's nomination for the National Artist of the Philippines in 2001 states of the Arena Theatre: "Through the arena style of staging plays, Montano sustained an inspiring vision for Philippine theatre appropriate to local traditions and conditions, thereby integrating his passionate lifelong commitment to, in his own words, 'bring drama to the masses'".¹⁶ Montano was convinced that the Arena Style was "the original theatre form of all Southeast Asia"; it brought, he writes in his report on the progress of the Arena Theatre at the PNC, "participation of the audience to its highest degree, and, therefore, is an effective vehicle for the communication of ideas and emotions."¹⁷ In the arena he saw a renaissance or resumption of a traditional model. Another interpretation of form and concept comes into play here that Montano himself does not mention in the source material hitherto explored. That is, an interpretation that sees in the Arena Style of Theatre the adaptation of a model for community theatre that was popular and exported

in the 1950s. Naty Crame Rogers, a long-time associate of Montano and one of his supporters from the very beginning of his career at the PNC, remembers Severino Montano in a biographical tribute in 2001:

I had returned from Stanford University where my professors, Dr. Norman Philbrick and Dr. Nicholas Vardac were his colleagues at Yale. They had suggested theater-in-the-round as the answer to a developing country's need for theater arts. But since it would be difficult for me to embark on this project alone, I saw in Dr. Montano the leader that the country needed. I went to PNC to volunteer my services as Dr. Montano's first stage manager (Rogers 2001, p. 103).

It is relatively clear that Philbrick and Vardac had come into contact with the book of the same name by Margo Jones, *Theatre in the Round* (1951).¹⁸ And even though Montano does not explicitly refer to Jones in his writings, it can be assumed that, as an author, director and manager who was not only interested in theatre but also working in it, he knew about and had come across Jones' idea and book when he was in the USA.

Margo (Margaret Virginia) Jones (1913-1955) was a theatre director and producer and advocate of the regional theatre movement; she founded *Theatre '47* in Dallas, the first not-for-profit theatre in the country. Jones pursued her entire career as a theatre practitioner with a vision of "decentralized" theatres: She believed that the performing arts should be shown not only in the main theatre centres, but also in smaller towns and cities. The community and college theatres, as sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation (see above), contributed to this decentralization (Jones 1951, p. 17).¹⁹ Jones herself had benefited from a Rockefeller scholarship, which she had applied for in 1944, to study the theatrical landscape of the USA, especially in Dallas.²⁰ The "Theatre in the Round" – also called Arena Theatre, central staging, arena staging, circus theatre or 'penthouse style'²¹ – could be rectangular, circular, diamond-shaped or triangular; it was a theatre without any curtain. Jones ascribed manifold benefits, such as simplicity, inexpensiveness, incidental quality of the stage set, to the concept and form of this theatre; she praised its quality of awakening the audience's imagination despite its simplicity. Theatre in the round renounced opulent production, and the setting promised a high degree of immediacy in reception. Her pioneering work in Dallas culminated in the book *Theatre in the Round*, published in 1951, which was received by theatre practitioners as well as by the Rockefeller Foundation, which had supported and co-financed Jones' initiative and recommended it to (potential) scholarship holders who wanted to pursue similar projects in the field of theatre. In the files concerning Montano's promotion, there is no mention of Jones' book and concept, but his mission and vision as a theatre maker and educator were almost congruent with the idea of *Theatre in the Round*, both in terms of the arrangement, design and philosophy of a theatre accessible to a wide audience, and in terms of the (initial) embedding of Arena Theatre in an educational context (the Philippine Normal College was considered as the starting point and hub for the Arena Theatre idea).

Yet Montano's recourse to the arena style as a conventional form of Southeast Asian theatre is also justified. It could also be argued that he saw in it a re-import: the theatre circuit as imported and recoded by Western countries, here the USA and Margo Jones' writing; then again exported and re-imported to Asia.

The local conditions at the PNC prompted Montano to consider building a modern proscenium theatre with a capacity of 1000 seats just one year after the Arena Theatre began. On April 8, 1954, he mentioned his plan for a purpose-built theatre in one of his reports to Charles Fahs and asked for funding from the Rockefeller Foundation. Fahs hesitantly gave a negative response to Montano's request in a letter dated 19 April 1954, pointing to the possibility of local subsidies, as the Foundation was generally unable to provide funds for a building. But Montano's idea did not fade away. Rather, his plans and visions drew larger circles. His interest in theatre management and construction, but above all his vision and mission of the Development of Theatre in the Philippines and the promotion of national culture there led him to communicate the idea at the end of the 1950s of turning the Arena Theatre into a National Theatre for the Philippines. The theatre models of those countries and cities which he had visited in 1952 with the help of the Individual Grant in Aid, namely England, Germany, Japan, France, Italy etc., served Montano as orientation and models; these "modern governments", as he noted in the already quoted Progress Report on the Arena Theatre, "long recognized the value of the theatre as a necessary component in the life of the individual, and have established government theatres."²²

The requirements for a national theatre for the Philippines had to be "inexpensive enough to meet all sorts of marginal conditions", but also designed in such a way that it would reach "every nook and corner of the land". Only in this way could "enlightenment and cultural advantages [...] be brought to the grass-roots. Through the economical nature of arena staging, we can achieve our purpose."²³

The concept and a first architectural design for the national theatre can be found in Montano's report on the Proceedings of the Arena Theatre. The young architect C.J. Abgayani produced the detailed plan for the stage, classrooms, offices and workshops.²⁴ A note by Boyd R. Compton shows that the plans for the construction of an Arena Theatre building were also presented during the visit of Rockefeller representatives to the Philippines. Compton noted in his Officer's Diary:

With some fanfare, the new plan for an Arena Theatre building on the Philippine Normal College campus was presented. Architect C. J. Agbayani has designed a building, which would contain an arena theatre auditorium and enough class and rehearsal rooms for a full dramatic course. The cost would be P. 300.000, of which some P. 28.000 have already been promised by senatorial pork-barrel funds. [...] CBF made it quite clear that the RF would not be able to contribute to the costs of construction, then side-tracked the discussion to the subject of theatre equipment. He spoke of the possibility of getting an RF promise of a certain sum for equipment, providing the funds for building are raised locally and the Philippine Normal College provides salaries for an adequate staff. The idea seemed to interest the group, but discussion did not proceed much further.²⁵

Reports like this one by Compton, called "officers' diaries" – i.e. reports recorded by the representatives and programme managers on their travels to sponsored institutions and scholarship holders – are, in their detail, valuable sources for understanding the activities on the part of the sponsors and scholarship holders. In addition to descriptive parts, they always contain critical comments and explicit recommendations for follow-up grants or adjustments in the allocation of grants. The records reveal that the officers

spent weeks traveling in assisted areas to visit and interview scholarship holders and grant recipients, as well as other cultural and educational institutions, and U.S. embassies. In addition, the Rockefeller Foundation maintained ongoing contact with local informants to keep abreast of the progress of the sponsored individuals' activities. This 'monitoring' was not specific to Southeast Asia, but was rather part of the usual funding procedure. One of the Foundation's funding strategies was the targeted and continuous monitoring of the beneficiaries, including by means of visits of the respective officers of the Humanities Programme on their travels to the respective areas.

The idea of turning the Arena Theatre into a national theatre with its own architecture was never realized, probably because of the exorbitant costs, for which there was simply no sponsor to be found. In the early sixties, James Brandon wrote to Boyd Compton about Montano who in his eyes was a "remarkable fellow – artist to his fingertips but also quite obviously a skilful organizer". In his view, he had achieved so much and yet so little of what he hoped to achieve. His school had not provided him with enough funds to continue his grass-roots programme. Montano was therefore tempted, as Brandon noted, [...] to switch schools and push for this new theatre-complex as a National Theatre. This can't be an easy choice for him, because if he succeeds [sic] in getting his new plant, the direction of his work will inevitably be toward greater professionalism in production, higher costs, and less-grass-roots work. [...] (This may be a heretical thing to say, but I'm convinced that much of the remarkable success of his program is due to the lack of facilities not in spite of it).²⁶

The Rockefeller Foundation had identified Montano as a potential candidate for the development of the theatre in the Philippines. His extensive knowledge in the fields of dramaturgy, theatre construction, communication and management seemed ideal for this task. At the PNC, he used all these skills and abilities to put his vision into practice – supported by a collegial network of directors, theatre directors, theatre educators, lighting technicians, etc. – and was able to develop his own vision. The Philippine Normal College seemed to him to be an ideal 'hub' for his agenda and visions. His graduates were stationed in all parts of the country and were able to apply the skills and ideas they had acquired. Montano focused on plays by Filipino authors on Filipino themes – in English as well as in Tagalog; this and the economic arena style of the productions made the theatre programme he developed highly suitable for imitation in schools and decentralized locations. The idea of a decentralized theatre scene, as described by Margo Jones in her book, seemed to have been realized here. Jones had argued that the performing arts should not only be shown in the theatre capitals, but also in small towns and provinces, and viewed the community and college theatres as suitable forms for this.²⁷

Sociologists Helmut K. Anheier and S. Daly note in 2005 that philanthropic foundations are "one of the main sources of support for global civil society organizations" that are, in turn, building a more open global order and trying to "humanize globalization" (Anheier / Daly 2005, p. 159). The political scientist Inderjeet Parmar clearly views this quite supportive reading with suspicion: even if in theory and proclaimed philosophy they adhered to the spread of democratic ideas and the reduction of social grievances, especially in developing countries, Parmar argues that philanthropic foundations were "intensely political and ideological and are steeped in market,

corporate, and state institutions – [...] they are a part of the power elite of the United States” (Parmar 2012, p. 1–2). The networks of their function as foundations were also networks of power, of the economic and intellectual elites; their influence was not only exerted on the promotion of “the well-being of mankind throughout the world”, as John Rockefeller, the foundation’s founder, had put it in the nineteenth century. It is precisely such interdependencies and areas of interest that will have to be further investigated in future studies.

Conclusion

In his 1948 report on the Rockefeller Foundation’s Humanities Programme, Stevens noted that it was particularly the young nations whose promotion was a particular concern of the Foundation, but also needed special initiatives and programme adaptations:

Conditions in Asia will require Foundation programs different from those current in the United States. In countries, which are decades behind the United States in educational development, the Foundation’s help may be appropriate in fields in which the Foundation is not longer active in its program at home. Much of the current humanities program can, however, be applied to Asia with advantage. In many fields the progress made in the United States becomes the basis for effective assistance abroad (Anheier / Daly 2005, p. 159).

Charles B. Fahs’ letter from the beginning of 1951 that this paper started with, had, as became clear in the previous paragraph, an impact on the career of a theatre maker and educator and on the theatre landscape of a country that had only achieved independence a few years before the start of funding. Based on its experience in the USA in promoting college, university and community theatres, the Rockefeller Foundation developed a funding model that it also applied to developing countries – with necessary adaptations for each country / region. Over a period of almost ten years, the foundation repeatedly granted Severino Montano smaller applications to procure literature, media, technical equipment for the PNC / Arena Theatre or to (co-)finance Montano’s wages and travel as part of his Arena Theatre programme. All in all, between 1952 and 1959, the Rockefeller Foundation supported the Arena Theatre project with 32.000 US dollars, the largest portion of which was apportioned to Montano’s salary. The foundation expressly did not see itself as the main financier of the ‘Development of Drama in the Philippines’, but only as a co-sponsor with the expectation that the Philippine Normal College or the Philippine government would guarantee continuity and sustainability. However, this was difficult due to the school’s limited resources. Boyd R. Compton noted this in his Officer’s Diary on 8 September 1958:

Philippine Normal College President Emiliano Ramirez took BRC and CBF to breakfast and then to school. He apparently wanted to show his good will and interest in the Arena Theatre program, but nothing much more. [...] He has high hopes that more “pork barrel” money will be found for the theatre building. In his view, the AT movement is already an integral and important part of the PNC curriculum. With the present Board of Directors and Department of Education policy, the AT has strong support and can be considered permanent. It will be

difficult, however, to get Severino Montano a full faculty position for next year. ER assured us that he will get the funds for SM's "item" soon.²⁸

In the 1950s, personal and institutional networks went hand in hand with Rockefeller's support of the Philippine playwright, actor, director, theatre director and educator Severino Montano and his "Arena Theatre" at the Philippine Normal College (PNC) in Manila. Montano's support from the Rockefeller Foundation was twofold: he received individual "ad personam" scholarships for his study trips and education, as well as scholarships for the development of his Arena Theatre and theatrical management and educational programme at the Philippine Normal College in Manila and in the surrounding provinces. By the end of the decade, Montano's support from the Rockefeller Foundation was largely phased out, except for a few minor travel grants.

The outlined initiatives by Severino Montano in the Philippines and the measures taken by the Rockefeller Foundation in the context of the development of drama in the Philippines are only preliminary findings. Further research is needed to get closer to the interdependencies and networks that led to Montano's theatrical achievements in the US and the Philippines and the promotion and governance of his work by the 'Rockefeller roundabout of funding'.

Endnotes

¹ Studies for this paper were funded by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant agreement no. 694559 – DevelopingTheatre).

² Charles B. Fahs to Severino Montano, American University, Washington, D.C., 19 March 1951. Rockefeller Archive Centre (RAC), Montano, Severino (drama) 242R, Box 19, Series 1. 2, Projects 242, Philippines.

³ David H. Stevens, RF Humanities Program Reviews, 1939–1949, Preface, 15 April 1948, (RAC), Stevens Papers Humanities Program Reviews, 1939–1949, IV 2A34, Box 4, Folder 13 David H. Stevens. Quoted in the following as: RAC, Stevens Report, 1948. David Harrison Stevens (1884-1980) initiated the establishment of important programmes in drama, film, radio, literature, linguistics, and international cultural exchange. He began his work in the field of drama by funding regional and community theatres and university drama departments.

⁴ RAC, Stevens Report, 1948, Preface.

⁵ For the founding purpose of the National Theatre Conference see, for example, the minutes of the Rockefeller Foundation from 4 June 1938:

The National Theatre Conference is a co-operative organization of directors of community and university theatres. Its purposes are to improve the quality of non-commercial drama and to increase its social significance in all sections of the country. [...] The Conference was established in 1932 with different purposes than those now in force. Its first president was the late George P. Baker of Yale University. He and his colleagues in the original group desired to bring the members of the Conference into relationship with the professional theatre. They were concerned with methods of finding professional opportunities for their own students and with the general status of the profession outside of metropolitan centers." Minutes of the Rockefeller Foundation regarding the National Theatre Conference, 4 June 1938. RAC, Rockefeller Foundation records, projects, RG 1.1, series 200.R, box 255, folder 3042. The website of the NTC reads: "In 1925 a group of leaders of such university programs including George Pierce Baker at Yale, Thomas Wood Stevens at Carnegie Tech, Frederick Koch at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. E.C. Mabie, at the University of Iowa, and Garrett Leverston, at Northwestern University called a series of conferences that led to the founding of the National Theatre Conference. The NTC was initially organized and adopted its name in 1931 at a conference at Northwestern University. In 1932, at a second conference at the University of Iowa, a constitution was adopted and officers were first elected.

<http://www.nationaltheatreconference.org/about.html> (last accessed 1 August 2019).

⁶ RAC, Stevens Report 1948, Preface.

⁷ In his review of the RF humanities programme, Stevens stresses the importance of these informants whom he calls "advisers": "Advisers are a great resource, as in awarding of fellowships, wherever the sources of information are highly critical or unusually close to the contact equally. There the officer has an

alternative for his own primary evidences of considerable value. On his own, however, he will talk with the individual repeatedly, if possible, and will care less about secondary sources of opinion, which may be friendly or unfriendly, casual or judicious.” Stevens Report 1948, p. 39.

⁸ RAC, Stevens Report 1948, p. 21.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹⁰ National Artist Folio for 2001, published by the Order of National Artist (ONA), National Commission for Culture and the Arts, Manila. I would like to thank Sabrina Tan from the ONA for kindly making the folio available.

¹¹ RAC, Stevens Report, 1948, p. 38.

¹² Severino Montano to Charles B. Fahs, 17 January 1952. RAC, Montano, Severino (drama) 242R Box 19 Series 1.2 Projects 242 Philippines.

¹³ Montano provides detailed reports on the journey through the theatre centres of Europe and Asia, the evaluation of which will be the subject of a separate paper.

¹⁴ RAC, Montano, Severino (drama) 242R Box 19 Series 1.2 Projects 242 Philippines.

¹⁵ The Arena Theatre Playwriting Contest led to the discovery of Wilfrido D. Nollodo, Jesus T. Peralta, and Estrella Alfon.

¹⁶ National Artist Folio for 2001, published by the Order of National Artist (ONA), National Commission for Culture and the Arts, Manila. I would like to thank Sabrina Tan from the ONA for kindly making the folio available.

¹⁷ Severino Montano: *Progress Report*, n. pag.

¹⁸ Margo Jones: *Theatre in the Round*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press 1951.

¹⁹ See Jones 1951, p. 17. “What our country needs today, theatrically speaking, is a resident professional theatre in every city with a population of over one hundred thousand. [...] I assure that the best way to assure quality is to give birth to a movement which will establish permanent resident professional theatres throughout the country.” Jones 1951, p. 4.

²⁰ In her application, she explicitly describes her agenda, which was to get “a concrete picture of the present American theatrical scene”, to “spend enough time in Dallas to begin to know the city, its people, schools, libraries, museums, etc.”, to “talk to young creative theatre people in the country”, from which she planned to recruit 20 “for the creation of a resident theatre in Dallas”. Jones 1951, p. 53.

²¹ The first theatre of this kind is said to be the Penthouse Theatre of Glenn Hughes in Seattle, 1940.

²² Montano, Progress Report 1948, n. pag.

²³ Severino Montano: Progress Report, n. pag.

²⁴ The design was also part of an Abgayani qualification brochure supervised by Severino Montano. Born in 1925, Abgayani graduated in Civil Engineering from the University of Sta. Tomas in 1949 and completed his architectural studies at the same university in 1953 with a graduation thesis on “A Study of the Arena Theatre for Philippine Normal College”; Severino Montano was his principal assessor; from 1949 Abgayani worked in various construction jobs, practicing as an architect from 1953 onwards. See Montano, Progress Report, n. pag.

²⁵ RAC, Officer’s Diaries, Compton, Boyd R. 1958–1959, Diary South-East Asia, 905 Com 1958.

²⁶ James Brandon to Boyd Compton, RF, 18 November 1963.

²⁷ “There has been notable progress in the educational theatre. Every year more colleges and universities are establishing drama departments, and those, which already have them are adding new courses to their curriculums and enriching their staffs with professional theatre people. This is of vast importance because most of our young theatre people will emerge from this kind of theatre. Since its main duty is the preparation and training of actors, technicians, playwrights and directors, the university theatre must approach professional standards as much as possible, both by having instructors with professional experience and by assuming a sound theatre attitude in its productions.” Jones 1951, p. 11f.

²⁸ Boyd R. Compton in his Officer’s Diary from 8 September 1958; RAC, Boyd R. Compton Diary, May 23–July 6, 1959.

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