



**'Citizen' scene* is defined here as a tool to find common language while understanding diverse perspectives in speaking together.

2 OF CONTENTS

TABLE

**Introduction: Art in the
Context of Daily Practices** 05
By reinaart vanhoe &
Emily Shin-Jie Lee

**Strolling South: Reflecting on
Our Institutionalised and
Otherwise Collectivity** 11
By Elaine W. Ho & Zoénie Liwen Deng

**When We Talk About the
Advancement of (art) Practice** 43
By Bunga Siagian, Ismal Muntaha
& Dicky Senda

**DIY Ethos and Collective as an
Organizational Structure** 61
By Wok the Rock and
Willy Chen Wei-Lun

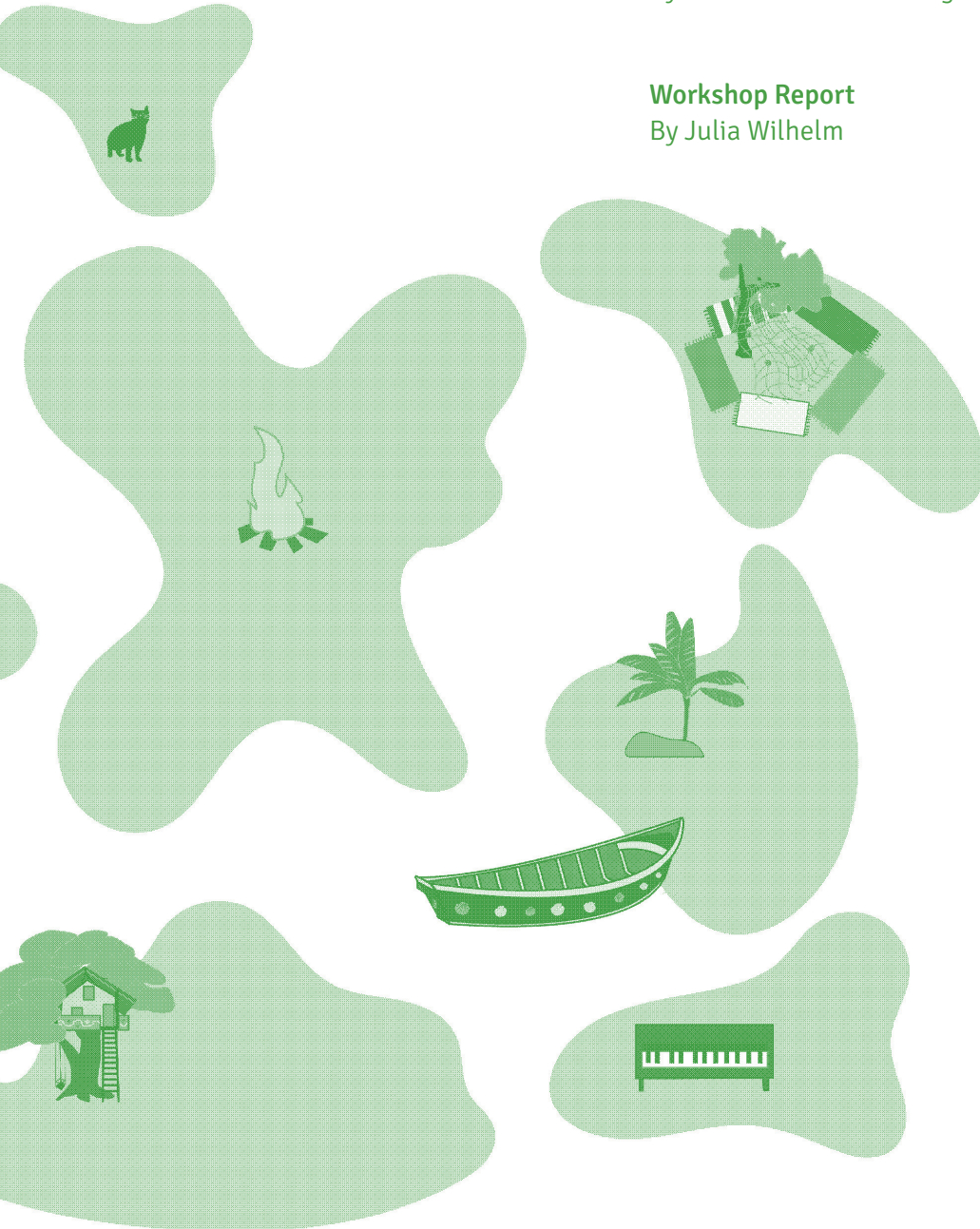
**We Need a Title for This
Conversation, Don't You Think?** 91
By Mayumi Hirano & Sig Pecho



**We Sell Reality? Who are “We”
and What do We Mean by “Reality”?** 125
By Rieneke de Vries & Brigitta Isabella

Workshop Report 147
By Julia Wilhelm

Art as Holistic Practice 161
By Kristy Ilyas, Múz Spaans,
repeelsteeltje, Elena Kolesnikova,
Chellysia Christen & Naomi de Wit



A Warm Welcome

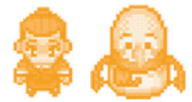
reinaart vanhoe

reinaart vanhoe studied audio-visual design in Ghent and Tilburg, and attended the Rijksakademie, Amsterdam. Since 2002, he has taught at the WdKA, Rotterdam.

reinaart vanhoe's current focus is the concept of neighboring, or how to speak and build together. His practice takes shape through education, installations, collaborations, books, and videos. His book *Also-Space* (2016) looks into an understanding of art for a citizen-scene through art practices based in Indonesia. Although he should work harder and be more dedicated, he engages regularly, both in and outside the art world.

Emily Shin-Jie Lee

Emily Shin-Jie Lee studied Anthropology at National Taiwan University and obtained her research master's degree in Art Studies from the University of Amsterdam with a thesis examining artist-in-residence programs in ethnographic museums from a decolonial perspective. Her work explores collaborative art practices and the diverse ways of art as a democratic form of learning and living together. She is one of the founding members of Lightbox, a public photo library and center for contemporary photography in Taipei; and co-founder of Hide & Seek Audiovisual Art, a multidisciplinary collective focusing on cultural mediation. She joined Framer Framed in 2020, a platform for contemporary art, visual culture, critical theory and practice.



Dear Reader,

We are happy to meet you here inside these pages of *Art for (and within) a Citizen Scene: Ambiguous art practices*. Thanks for your interest. We wish to share our appreciation for [gaining a better understanding of] artists' day-to-day surroundings as building blocks of their work. In this book, we share these day-to-day surroundings that define artists' agenda, instead of keeping them excluded from their so-called professional activity. Yes, those practices are not always easy to grasp or recognized by the contemporary art world. Therefore, we would like to show some hands-on ex-

periences through this publication. You will find five conversations with ten cultural practitioners and two texts derived from workshops based on the topics addressed in this publication.



These conversations provide insight into the contexts within which the writers work, where art is seen not as a purely self-sufficient profession, but as [comprehensive] ways of living and being. In January 2021, Wok the Rock, one of the invited authors for this publication, said on the internet radio-platform stranded.fm,: "I feel sad about art projects. I want to understand the need for an art project to be a tool, a socially integrated project, much less an artist project. The purpose is not to make a project into an artsy result, but to make it as an attitude."

Wishing to gain a better understanding of these sentences and to continue to support such attitudes within our situated context, we – Emily Shin-Jie Lee (Framer Framed) and reinaart vanhoe (Willem de Kooning Academy)–connected five pairs of participants from Indonesia, the Philippines, Taiwan, China and the Netherlands. We invited them to enter into a conversation from their [particular] situated context and to share insights about [their respective] producing, researching, positioning and doubts.

This selection started from our own circle. We invited practitioners who have been involved with some of our past projects, and share with us similar visions in art, education and social practice. We thought of their practices as being less trapped (or who have a good understanding of their being trapped) by the dominant neoliberal regimes of presentation and production in art - regimes whose logic, again and again, turns valuable and interesting subject matters into marketable commodities and comfortable abstractions. It feels to us that the complexity of production is often reduced to something manageable, something to be cut into parts. Mirwan Andan,

one of the members of ruangrupa, depicts this problem within contemporary art production with the sentence "Knowing without application is like a fruitless tree." With this observation in mind, "ambiguous practices" and "art for a citizen scene" became the main terms we used when choosing the contributors for this project. One of the aims of this publication is to make a younger generation of art practitioners feel comfortable with ambiguity. Often young artists are encouraged, through education and different kinds of institutions, to organise themselves through well formulated concepts and individualistic working structures. Collaborations are often considered stepping-stones for one's own career, not a substantial practice itself. Working together with other professional fields and knowledge systems are often framed as inter/trans-disciplinary projects as if this is exceptional. Another axiom is that the signature of the (exceptional) artist should always be protected. What is inherently a collective making process then becomes an individual achievement in the neo-liberal logic of art production.

None of these formulations feel comfortable to us and are perhaps even false images "modern art" imposed on us. Enough "good art" has been produced, museums and private collections are sufficiently supplied with objects of art. No pressure to add to that any longer. Let us explore other methods of being meaningful as an arts community. With this in mind, *Art for (and within) a Citizen Scene* is guided by the following

Slowed
down
(Learning
to deal with)
something
funny as
escape and
connect

questions: If we shift our attention away from artistic practices based on object production and individual success, what do other kinds of artistic practices bring about? How to understand those practices in their materialisation and relation to their surroundings? How do different artists collaborate, and how do they position themselves?

For this publication, we connected pairs of contributors who were located in different time zones, through email, Jitsi, WhatsApp and other social media platforms. It is important to note that the initially planned publication date of this book had been the end of 2020, yet witnessing how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the world, we quickly understood that its timeframe and publication format needed to be adjusted.

Accordingly, we rescheduled, and transformed parts of the dialogues into online workshops on gather.town, a virtual interface. There we could readily share and discuss the text in a lively manner and publicly invite people to become part of our work process.



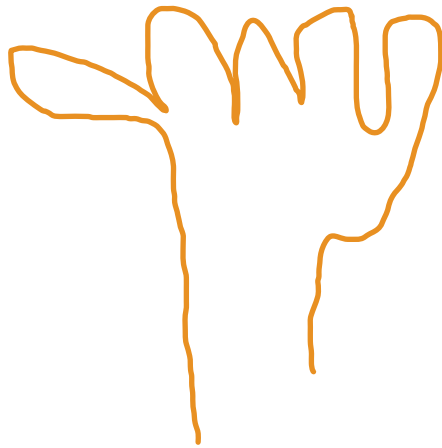
WELCOME

This slowed things down but reflected exactly the contributors' practices and our intention for this project: listening and learning together. For these reasons, the editing of this book was not so much about correcting sentences, but more about accepting and working with given conditions. Therefore, the articulations in this publication might at times sound funny, unusual, spot-on, or confusing - for you as the reader and for us, too.

Starting a project is easy, putting down a concept not a big task. The most challenging yet also most joyful part of making this publication was in how to speak together, how to build our framework, how to decide on the list of invitations, and how to design working methods correlating with the intentions of our project. To this end, the past programmes of Framer Framed and the works of our contributors continued to offer us insights and support in realising the publication; different members affiliated with Framer Framed and Willem de Kooning Academy Rotterdam have also been involved and had their voice in the process.

We hope that wherever and whenever you find us, the pages you turn might offer some energy and courage to not be constrained, to feel comfortable in the ambiguity of seeking different expressions and methodologies that bring art – for and with a citizen scene into play. To understand the need for an art project to be a tool, a socially integrated project, much less an artist project.

nice to



meet you



• Zoénie

• portable WHO

no-farm

Reflecting on Our Institutionalisations & Otherwise Collectivity

Elaine W. Ho

Elaine W. HO works between the realms of time-based art, experimental publishing and urban practice, using multiple vocabularies to explore the micropolitics, subjectivities and alter-possibilities of an intimate, networked production. The act of describing takes on a number of forms — a kind of grammar, a documentation, a gesture, a biography — or an experiment in Beijing known as HomeShop. She is the initiator of the artist-run space, active from 2008-2013, and continues to ask questions about the sociopolitics of syntax, more recently via print [•• PROPAGANDA DEPARTMENT (2017-ongoing) and Publication Studio Pearl River Delta (2018-ongoing)], pirate broadcast [Widow Radio Ching (2016-ongoing) and airTIME (2020-ongoing)] and as co-conspirator of Display Distribute, a networked research platform investigating bottom-up organisation amidst global trade (2015-ongoing).

Zoénie Liwen Deng

Zoénie Liwen DENG is an art writer, researcher, poet, curator, and translator. She obtained her PhD degree from the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA), University of Amsterdam. Being part of the European Research Council (ERC) funded research project, her PhD project focused on non-oppositional criticality of socially engaged art in contemporary China. She was the Secondary grantee of The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Greater China Research Grant 2019-2020 in Asian Art Archive, and she conducted a project about self-organisation of cultural practitioners in Southern China, in relation to practices in Southeast Asia. Her research and artistic interests cover social practices, feminism, the decolonial, otherwise ways of living together, and non-western epistemologies and cosmologies. She is a contributor to Leap and Artforum China.

Zoënie Liwen DENG: Hi Elaine, let's start our conversation. Feel free to ask questions as well. With some unsettled anxiety, I am currently in transition from my recently finished PhD research on non-oppositional and critical socially engaged art in China alongside a smaller research on self-organising practices in southern China.¹ I feel inspired by my research subjects/friends; and I am thinking about forming a collective or working/co-practising with others.

Now, as I read your writings and interviews, I see that there are so many possibilities, connectivities, and precarities in your practices — the multiple roles you take as artist, designer, curator, co-organiser, coordinator, and initiator, as well as accountant, database maintainer, peddler, errand runner, handler, courier, and cleaner. I am pretty much in awe! *(Although I know that work that involves more than one person would imply the different roles one needs to take, I'm still in awe, and also a bit daunted.)*

Perhaps I can form my question into this: for those who don't know much about your practices, how would you describe them? How do these aforementioned roles play out in your practices?

AUG 7
2020

1. Thesis: <https://dare.uva.nl/search?identifier=5d0fee95-011e-4398-8aa7-17864f65a324>



AUG 7 2020 Elaine Wing-Ah HO: Before I get to answering your questions, I'd like to bring in a bit of the subtext that has preceded this dialogue, starting with us sharing a couple of our own texts and interviews with one another in order to find a common place from which to begin. That was also accompanied by a few side jokes regarding a couple of "mansplainers," which have been intertwined with our work/research, and the question of how we choose to ignore or address that as a meta-issue infusing into any kind of social practice. You defended yourself by pointing out the explicit choice in including the voice of one female, oftentimes the non-vocal member of one of the collectives you have featured in your research. My challenge to that is: does this acknowledgement of ongoing inequalities play a role in the way you carry out your work? Do you have any implicit interest to displace existing power relations?

To go back to your initial questions, I would like to be lazy and simply tell readers to refer back to that interview in Bajaia.² At that time, I was in a properly reflective moment to approach the difficult task of summarising my practice. It's not an easy task for many artists, but there is also an overriding hegemony of the linguistic in contemporary art today that I would like to avoid. So, please acknowledge this old skool attitude of hoping that the work can speak for itself. Yes, as you have already mentioned, my work is especially splintered, distributed, and spread across multiple media, dispa-

2. See the interview with Elaine W. Ho in Bajaia: "描述的邀请 An Invitation to Describe", 八家 Bajaia, Issue 2 (July 2018) 79-86. PDF can be downloaded here: <https://indexoffio.net/press/2018-bajia.php#press>.

rate cultures and ways of working. It takes a great effort for anyone to try to grasp it, I know! (*I both insist upon and suffer greatly from this...*) Maybe what that all points to, again, is a meta-question of the politics of our practices, and how forms of collaboration can be experiments in new possibilities of being together.

“Being together” is maybe a sensitive question in this time of pandemic. Does this new paradigm of the entire world experiencing a common phenomenon offer the possibility for a new global discourse, or do we stick with being socially distanced? Referring back to the transitional anxieties you mentioned, how does your personal quandary of trying to get a job after your education extend to a structural issue that more of us can try to address together?

ZLWD: Hi, Elaine, you post a very acute question. As for my PhD research, I realised that I had the tendency to go along with the narratives of those who were very articulate about their practices, whether they be men or not.

**AUG 8
2020**

EWAH: Yes, this is exactly what I mean by a tyranny of the linguistic! I fall prey to it too — as in getting excited or impressed by a press release and making an opinion based simply upon that.

ZLWD: I also brought in the voices of doubt that were in dissonance — narratives that question the voices of initiators, curators, and of major/more active participants. I have to confess, however, that I didn’t do that in my first draft. It was only after my supervisors asked me why I was so positive about all the cases that I started to reread the interview transcripts, especially from those who were not in powerful positions. I also mentioned the gender inequality in the micropolitics of Theatre 44 only as footnotes in my dissertation, but more in length in the main body of the Asia Art Archive (AAA) research.



Another confession I want to make is: it’s easier to write from articulate interviews, especially when I don’t have enough time to conduct a proper participant observation or action research. I did this again in my second research about self-organising practices in the south of China. Ideally, I should have spent maybe half a year hanging out/*nongkrong* with the folks at Soeng Joeng Toi to witness and participate in the transformation of Theatre 44. They have now shifted towards collective writing that results in a monthly publication.

(I am typing this on my phone while I'm on the train, feeling as if the days of working while commuting are back.)

Today, I went to a birthday party in the park; and I talked to a friend who was questioning the logic of scarcity in the job market. She said, "It shouldn't be like that. We should imagine how to restructure the system, so that all the amazing minds could realise their capacities and potentialities." I didn't know how to reply; or perhaps, I hadn't thought about how to make this happen; or even further, maybe I am still lingering in the frustration of "de-selection" – I choose to use this word instead of "rejection," since it connotes the result of the job application itself and does not point to me as a person.

The other day, I was chatting with my partner about the future of a highly automated world, where a lot of jobs, bullshit jobs or not, are taken up by Artificial Intelligence (AI). The profits that they generate will be distributed equally among the population, so human beings can nurture and realise their possibilities. Of course, this is highly speculative but it's a vision of a non-capitalistic world that is not only about the accumulation of capital. I don't want to get into the ethics of exploiting other-intelligence/machines, or questions such as: what if big companies that are now investing in AI have a totally different vision? What would happen then?

I mention it here because current education and economic systems teach us to compete rather than collaborate with each other. So, perhaps we can make collaboration part of education. It's not about making "group project presentations" in class, but more about collaborating towards making some endeavours render something better (e.g. planting trees and plants in a communal garden and tending to them to create a space where people can hang out.)

As an attempt to propose an answer to your second question regarding my quandary of "trying to get a job," I would say, perhaps we need to rethink and reimagine what a job is. Is it possible to make a *dérive* from the corporate world (*For some reason, I mistype "corporate" as "cooperate" when the second can be an antithesis to the first*) while making ends meet? Can a small service/goods provider fulfill social and environmental responsibilities – realising people's abilities and potentials while creating connectivity among people – while generating enough economic income to support its operations and growth? Here, the economic exchange model is not limited to monetary exchange, but can also be through the gift economy, bartering etc. I guess opening co-ops with others would be a way to realise this: communalism, communitarianism. Bookchin. Rojava.

multiplicities of meanings

AUG 18
2020

This leads me to your questions about the possibility of a new global discourse (about being-living-working together) during a pandemic. I've read about mutual aid initiatives during the pandemic. Mutual aid appeared in many parts of the world: people helped their immuno-compromised neighbours to buy groceries; people crowd-funded to purchase PPE for medical workers in Wuhan, and arranged the logistics very swiftly; people cycled to deliver medicines to elders in remote villages etc. I do hope that mutual aid will become more of an important element in society, even after the pandemic passes. I hope that instead of focusing on "how to boost economy," we think of "how to redress inequalities together" — inequalities that have manifested themselves in this pandemic (e.g. who has access to the medical resources and who doesn't, who can afford treatments and who can't etc.)

In terms of how to get together in a pandemic, I think people can gather as small kin groups. With the consensus that they observe the physical distancing measure while maintaining the closeness and intimacy with each other within the group, people can be aware that in gathering they share risk together. (*I learned this from the anarchist podcast "The Ex-worker," although I don't agree with everything they say.*)

Hmm, I might want to change my answers later. For now, I'm curious about your answers to your own questions. Do you think that this is going to be something you will be working on?

AUG 20 2020 **EWAH:** I remember having a conversation in Shanghai with a mutual friend of ours, Ding Bo. He told me that when he was younger, he was always a proponent of the thought that he could achieve or do whatever he wanted if he invested enough into it. It was only later that he realised that wasn't the case. For various reasons, be it structural or unfortunate twists of fate, we cannot just do anything that we want to do. At the time, I found it quite poignant that Ding Bo, a Han Chinese male living in China (*which is, of course, the power equivalent of being a white dude in the west*), would come to this realisation. He was, at the time younger, than I probably was when I had a similar realisation.

I have been naïve most of my life. Maybe because I grew up in the United States with my parents as living examples of the pursuit of the American Dream, where it was instilled in me from the beginning (by them and by all of society's attitudes towards Asian-Americans) to be the "successful minority;" or maybe it is because of the fact that I have been lucky and privileged

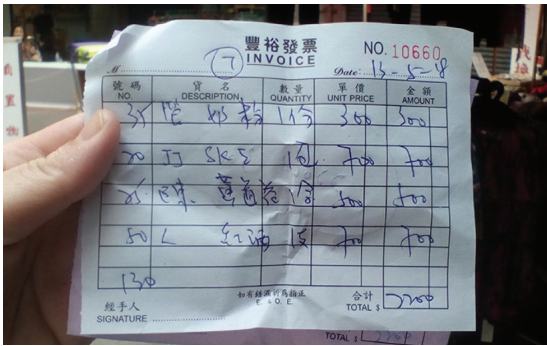


Wheatpasting the first edition of • • PROPAGANDA DEPARTMENT's *Etc. Etc.* broadsheet outside of a shopping mall in Beijing. The blue and yellow banner behind was originally intended to be red but had to be changed to blue by the museum because a red and yellow combination would appear too similar to official state propaganda printed similarly on banners throughout the country;

• • PROPAGANDA DEPARTMENT, 2017.
[photo courtesy of • • PROPAGANDA DEPARTMENT]



A live streaming session of the airTIME podcast with retired single mother Cindy; 2020 [photo courtesy of Rooftop Institute]



Notes and attachments on parallel trading between Hong Kong and Shenzhen via LIGHT LOGISTICS dispatch HQL-227. [photo courtesy of Display Distribute and Adam Hruby]



Intervention and performance by Asuka Yamaguchi for *Je Kunt Overal Zijn*; Arnhem, 2003 [photo by Elaine W. Ho]

enough in my life to have been able to do most things that I want to do. As an Asian-American high schooler, you know that getting accepted by a good university will be much more difficult because of the very fact that you are Asian. You, however, don't question or fight against that as a form of inequality. Instead, you just work harder as an individual fish in the tank. These are the affective relations that make competition and capitalism, self-exploitation and acquiescence work so well together.³

Anyhow, jumping forward to this second half of my life in China and Hong Kong. From the very beginning, I had this ambition to open a space, despite not having any knowledge at the time of what practices of commoning or community-engaged work were all about – only with the intuition that material space is very crucial to opening up time and resources to build the trust needed “to do stuff together.” I think it was in the Bajia interview where I mentioned that this way of intervening in space was the kind of spontaneous and grassroots way that my friends and I had collaborated on in the Netherlands (*I studied in Arnhem*) – like taking over a building and making an exhibition and performances when it was about to be torn down (*You can be everywhere*, 2003); or making a one-night key exchange, where each person slept in another person's home and made a response to another's space (*One Night Stand*, 2002).

So, I came to Beijing with this dream already brewing in my head. Although, of course, not knowing anything at that time coming from New York and Amsterdam, I had some funny vision of making a laundromat art space. I believe these spaces do exist in a few places but, of course, would never work in 2005 China. I remember sitting down very seriously with curator Chaos Chen to share this idea with her, and I really had to laugh because she must have thought I was insane. (*We were on the outdoor patio of the very first Bookworm cafe in Sanlitun. In my memory, there were clanging sounds of construction all around; or maybe my knowledge of what Sanlitun has become now reverse engineered in the memory*) Anyhow... I didn't have money then anyway. So, what came a few years later was HomeShop (Beijing, 2008-2013).

The point of wandering through these little bits of personal history is to talk about my relation to power. Growing up in a working class suburb in the southern United States, where most of your friends are black and Hispanic, you sit together in the back of the class and never speak up. This is not because you're not good enough, but because it's just not cool to engage with power in that way. I was actually a very good student but because of the social environment, it was always a shameful thing that has no credit among teenage hormones. This is how we grew up hating authority

non-oppositional criticality

— teachers, the church, beefy jock types, and so on — whether it comes from the education or social systems *because it just doesn't work for some of us.*

When you're young, before learning about structuralism or have had the chance to learn from the Black Lives Matters movement, as already mentioned above, you don't really realise it's a problem with society. You think you just have to work harder. It is only now that I can put these pieces together: to talk about how sitting in the back of class and never learning how to speak up relates to my interest to make a safe space for people to come together and learn in more cooperative, egalitarian ways; to nurture the belief that art and creative practices are inseparably intertwined with what it means to live, work and *feel* together and that we can make worlds with that.

To go back to some of the things you said before. I found it interesting that you wrote a lot of very related possibilities and rhetorical imaginaries, as in: can that kind of community work? Where can economic support work instead of becoming a burden for sociopolitical organisations? Then, you reply to yourself with plenty of examples that show that these things *have* happened, and *are* happening, and that it is, yes, the work that we are still trying to make happen.

Perhaps there are, historically, more examples of failures than successes, but varying temporalities and scales are relative to the intentions of each project. Instead of trying to delve into specific analyses of such, I think it is my nature as an artist and practitioner to try to work with the intention of testing and experimenting further.

My work with the LIGHT LOGISTICS, a project of Display Distribute⁴, is an on-going and incomplete attempt to try to intervene in the juxtaposed spheres of independent publishing, the infrastructures of logistics, and semi-autonomous, post-anarchist practices of East and Southeast Asia. This interest in infrastructure stems from the things I've mentioned before: out of an attitude towards institutional critique, but whereby we try to develop modes of sustainable, mutual support and dialogue for ourselves where it is otherwise lacking. To try to learn from the examples offered by parallel traders, smugglers, and the network of courier companies is to cull from the context that is now working between Hong Kong and China in a ground-up and politically sensitive way. I say "politically sensitive" both in the sense that we want to be sensitive to the politics of our practices, but also in this kind of work that may be deemed "sensitive" by the state because of some of its contents. Infrastructure, as defined by theorist Lauren Berlant, is, "that which binds us to the world in movement and keeps the world practically

4. The Display Distribute "distro" of publications are sold here: <https://distro.displaydistribute.com/>, and delivered (almost) exclusively via our artist-run courier service LIGHT LOGISTICS: <https://lightlogistics.com/>.

bound to itself.” So, I would like to see the LIGHT LOGISTICS project as one which tries to make alter-ties to this current world in movement with an open community of those that are still reading and open to discover it.

ZLWD: About Ding Bo’s social position, I think we need to consider not only ethnicity (Han, the absolute majority) and gender (male), but also class, economic background, and where they’re from (a.k.a household registration). Recently, I’ve read an article on young migrant workers in the Sanhe village of Shenzhen (rural China), who work as day labourers (delivery couriers/ construction site workers/security guards) for a day or two and idle away the rest of the week because they don’t want to be exploited by factories; yet they don’t really have the skills to get a decently-paid job that would allow them to live a life like urbanites. Most of them live in poverty. They’re mainly Han males, and they find themselves in a hopeless situation.

**AUG 20
2020**

5. <https://homesnop.org.cn>

EWAH: Oh yes, you are completely right! I don’t know anything about Ding Bo’s family status so had not taken that into account. Seeing however how he studied abroad, we can hardly compare the intellectual labour that he mostly supports himself with to these kinds of migrant workers, no?

ZLWD: As a researcher, I don’t have a lot of hands-on practice on being a part of a collective or running a self-organised space. Last month, I was chatting with a friend who just finished his study in “The Commoner’s Society” at Sandberg Institute, and he talked about how the bureaucratic and logistic delays and hiccups led to their frustrations since the supposedly site-specific course only became a bit site-specific after the students fought to install a container in the neighbourhood where most works, of course, should have taken place. He said, “Studying in this course actually pushed me away from doing socially-engaged art.” And he has done some social practice projects during the time of this course.

**AUG 28
2020**

I mentioned that I wanted to form a collective with others, so that we could do things together and support each other. He asked me whether I had some concrete thoughts about it; I said no. Perhaps I was inspired by my friends Clara and Golnar since they are both in collectives that make independent publications among other things, and their collectives are nurturing their own well-beings and practices.

I wonder: how does one start a collective?

6. See *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias* (1967) by Michel Foucault.

I also want to come back to your practices of building an “infrastructure of logistics” but one that is based on friendship and mutual support (and the network of friends and friends’ friends), of building an independent publishing house (and the circulation of it – yes, we’re back to logistics), and of building the previous HomeShop⁵ – a space for everyday practices of co-living and co-practising, a heterotopia for people from different walks of life to get together for other ways of exchange to happen (e.g. bartering second hand objects with stories; *WaoBao!*, 2012-2013).

As for the term “heterotopia,” some main characters are, according to Foucault, spatial and temporal. “Heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces,” and “heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time – which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies.”⁶

As I browsed through the website of the HomeShop, it appeared to be a living room; a co-working space; an exhibition space;⁷ a courtyard for hanging out; community activities with people in the neighbourhood and small markets; and a publishing workshop (e.g. the independent newspaper of the neighbourhood; *Beiertiao Leaks*, 2011-2013). Foucault considered heterotopias, such as museums and libraries, as linked to the accumulation of time: “there are those linked, on the contrary, to time in its most flowing, transitory, precarious aspect, to time in the mode of the festival.” I guess the HomeShop was kind of both a space for the accumulation of time, and the space for flowing time – considering the things and archives and left-overs accumulated in the space and the festival-like activities that happened there.

I was surprised to read that the HomeShop was actually your master’s degree project!

EWAH: Just to insert two small clarifications here: the network of camaraderie that you speak of with regards to the LIGHT LOGISTICS project does not mean that it is only about connecting our existing friends and such. To the degree that it plays off as such, I actually find it to be a bit of a weakness. Of course, we can only reach out as far as we can, and it is natural that I would be aware of the travel schedules of people I know rather than those I don’t. We have had on several occasions people who randomly find out about us and volunteer to courier. That, for me, is the most exciting, because these are people who have a vested interest and not simply doing a favour for a friend. The fact that we consider trust and camaraderie as porous here comes with the fact that some of these volunteers do end up becoming good friends, or collaborators in various ways. Such shapeshifting subjectivities

7. Correction from Elaine: There was no exhibition space but there was a library and urban gardening on the rooftop. And there was also the very important space of the kitchen and dining area.

are actually one of the principal threads that, for me, tie both LIGHT LOGISTICS and HomeShop together.

The second clarification is about HomeShop being my MA thesis project, which I think you must have read from the text Abu wrote. (*His and the other texts in that series will be published later this year by HB Station in Guangzhou, yay!*). It also comes out of a bit of a misunderstanding because I told him that I was writing my thesis about HomeShop, but it was certainly not like a planned MFA final project!

My degree is in Philosophy, Art & Social Thought (This was an MA that I pursued after Arnhem). I was studying at the same time that HomeShop was basically the entirety of my existence. So, being an artist-researcher rather than a humanities researcher (*I make this distinction because it appears to me that distanced observation is the ethical mandate for most academic researchers, while I do not work that way at all*), it was only possible for me to draw from the things that we were attempting, processing, and failing through as the thinking-drawing ground from which to write. To give a bit of credit back to the academic mode, however, all of that was too much for me, and I couldn't write at all. Not for over ten years.

So, as our other mutual friend Amy leaked to you the other day, it is only actually this year, amidst the loneliness of a pandemic, that I have finally been able to return to it. I just completed writing last month. I really hope to be able to publish it somehow, but it will need a few more rounds of adjustments to make it what I would like it to become...

Anyhow, thank you for bringing up heterotopias. Fotini Lazaridou-Hatzigoga, one of the other co-collaborators of HomeShop, would probably have a lot more to say about that than I would, as it is a concept very dear to her work. It actually gives me a sigh of relief that you didn't mention "utopia", as visitors to the space have described us more than once and makes me cringe without fail (*kind of how seeing Ou Ning's new book Utopia in Practice gives a similar shudder; but I have not read it yet, so please forgive the judgemental attitude*).

ZLWD: So here's my question: after closing HomeShop, how did you find ways to continue your practices and connect to others when the physical space, where a considerable part of your practices took place, disappeared? What are your reflections on the materialities of your practices before and after the HomeShop's closure?

Here materiality refers to that addressed in new materialisms, which is relational, plural, open, complex, uneven and contingent, one cuts across dualistic boundaries between natural and social worlds, and, for some new materialist scholars, is invested with vitality or liveliness.⁸

9. Agnes Chow is a young activist and politician in Hong Kong, best known for her work alongside Joshua Wong with the political party Demosisto, which disbanded the day before the National Security Law was instated in Hong Kong. Her ability to speak Japanese has offered a face to the democracy movement for supporters in Japan, and her Twitter and YouTube handles have popular following.

EWAH: Before I open that link and try to understand more what you mean (*I guess I would have placed a ‘materialist’ analysis on par with Marxist thought, but it sounds like you mean something very different here*), I want to respond first to your previous paragraph that questioned the “how” of starting a collective. Definitely not that I can give you an answer *hehe*, because there is no exact precision to the how’s when there are so many different modes and intentions for organising.

I was recently watching Agnes Chow’s YouTube channel, and in one episode a netizen asked her precisely this: “How is a political party created?”⁹ I believe her reply is more specific to the bureaucracy of representational politics than what we would be talking about here, but it is interesting to note nonetheless:

I guess it’s not really something to create. It’s more when a group of people gather, there’s a really important question that you should be able to answer: what’s the difference between you versus the parties that already exist in Hong Kong right now? In other words, you should be possessing a very unique philosophy. Also, this philosophy that you’re believing in should be a benefit to the future.

What is striking here is how the mandate for the new and unique, something of course so embedded within the arts, is also imbricated within the administration of politics and social change. We are always looking for new ways to deal with the same old problems, which have plagued societies since the dawn of humankind.

Referring again to the new materialisms you mentioned, I think the closest readings I have done along those lines would be the ideas of Rosi Braidotti and Anna Lowenhaupt-Tsing. While the work I do has certainly less to do with the human/non-human relationality that they emphasise, we are in the same line of thought to focus upon relationality as a lens by which subjectivity itself is transformed. Perhaps it is because my practice has been so involved with those questions of “how to be together” and “how to collectivise.” And I think the materiality post-HomeShop is the same, although experimented upon from another angle.

11. Listen to the 空中媽咪 air-TIME podcast here: <https://airtime.libsyn.com/>. As of the time of writing, all episodes are in Cantonese, but future episodes in English and Mandarin are planned and in the works.

In the case of LIGHT LOGISTICS, it relates to bottom-up, networked relations enabled by fissures within a larger global infrastructure; while in the case of • • PROPAGANDA DEPARTMENT¹⁰, I would say it is informed by the space of ephemeral, throwaway printed matter as a dialogical form among bodies in public space.

Another project that has been challenging me quite a bit in the last months is the airTIME online radio programme which is recorded with single mothers¹¹, and the quandary that still plagues me is the overwhelming reliance upon the relationship between a mother and child – both within the mother-child dynamic but also from the perspective of society in general. It seems to simultaneously prevent women from organising other forms of solidarity, in terms of the stigmas associated with single motherhood or in terms of the lack of mutual support which could grapple better with the labour of child-rearing. There is a tyranny at work here that frightens me. So, maybe it would be a good time to return to the comforts of theory.

I also recently discovered the work of “uterine geographer” Sophie Lewis, so looking forward to understand more.

To go back to your question and to respond to it more directly, all of the above examples are attempts that are on-going in my “post-HomeShop” era, working across borders and without the cohesiveness of a physical space. There are obvious disadvantages to this. The primary one being the difficulty of cultivating the organic, long-term forms of relationality that material spaces attract, but the sociality and economics of Hong Kong create a challenge that I have not yet been able to overcome. There continues to be small efforts to that end however, so we shall see...

ZLWD: I listened to a few episodes of the airTIME podcast about single mothers, and I was amazed by how strong they were. I felt a bit sad when I listened to the interview with the single mum who came from mainland China. Since she knew that this identity alone could beget discrimination, she tries to hide it (*I believe her mother tongue is also Cantonese*) and tries to behave like the middle-class mums with whom she socialises with for the sake of her son. It is also quite sad in the sense that in the current social-economic-cultural infrastructures, wherein a single mother can only resort to performativity instead of solidarity and mutual help that are based on trust and openness. I wonder whether the interlocutors of the radio programme would like to meet each other after listening to the stories of other single mothers.

friend

EWAH: I felt exactly the same with regard to Kimmy's situation as shared in the programme. So, your mutual recognition of this as a problem is something that I hope the platform can slowly address — by first simply allowing these things to be “aired” in the public sphere, and hopefully would lead towards developing support structures for mothers and women.

my

I am currently in discussion with Rooftop Institute, the arts organisation that supported the airTIME project, to think through a future second phase of the project.

Be water

To turn it back over to your work, I recall a conversation we had earlier this year in which you seemed to have found a clear sense of purpose and direction in terms of how to bring your research interests and the social geography of the “southernness” you spoke about in your AAA project over to the context of Europe. It is a massive project of translation — from East to West and South to North — and I wonder how you feel about that now considering the world has shifted so much since that time, or how the tactics may be altered in this new light of a corona sun.

ZLWD: Thanks for the clarifications regarding LIGHT LOGISTICS and HomeShop. Perhaps I got the idea of HomeShop as an ad hoc exhibition space from the art project that participants made about real estate prices in the neighbourhood where HomeShop was located, reflecting on urban renewal and gentrification (*I Love Your Home*, 2011).

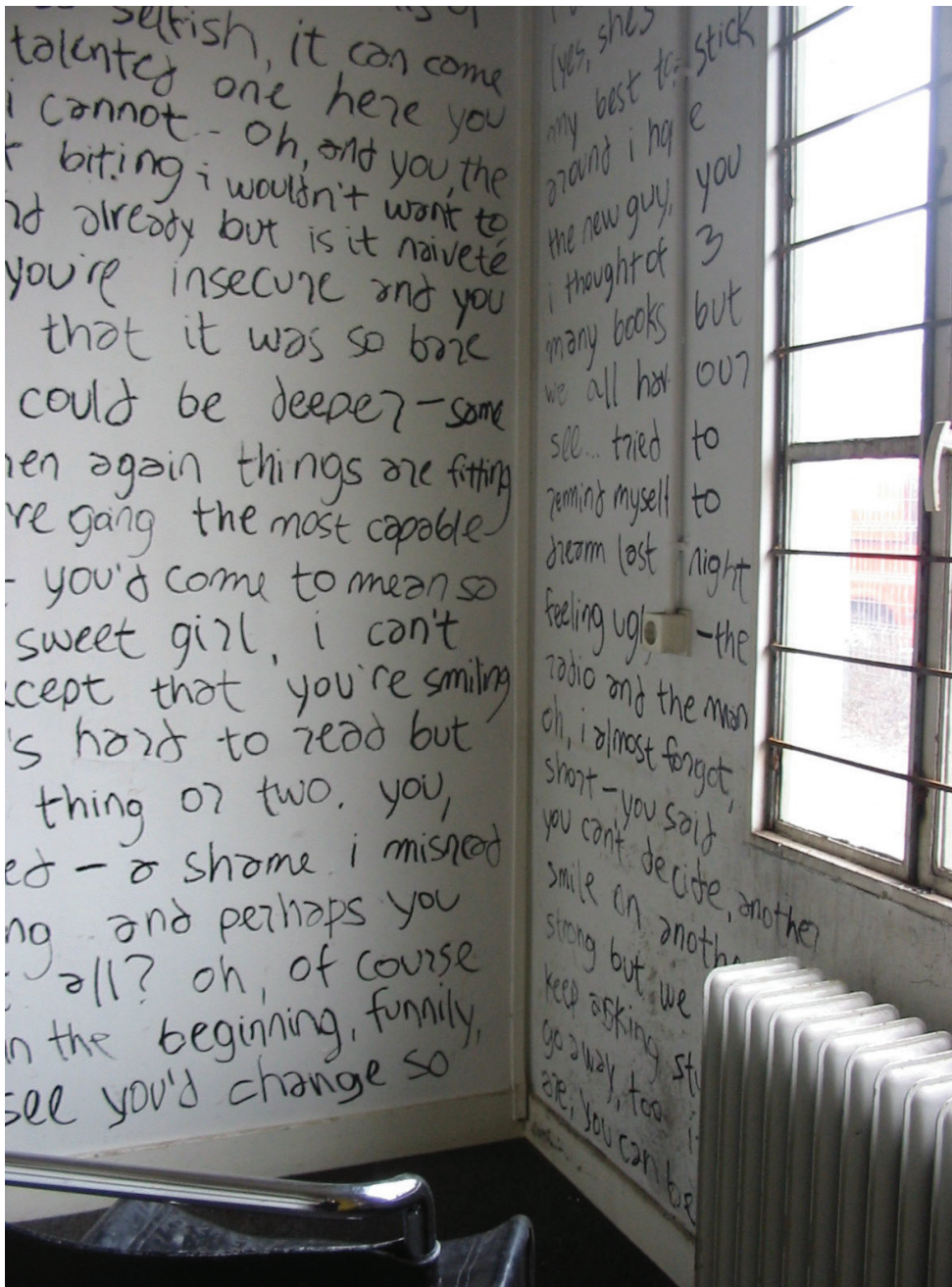
SEP 11
2020

Going back to materialism, Marx's historical materialism also stresses on interrelationality:

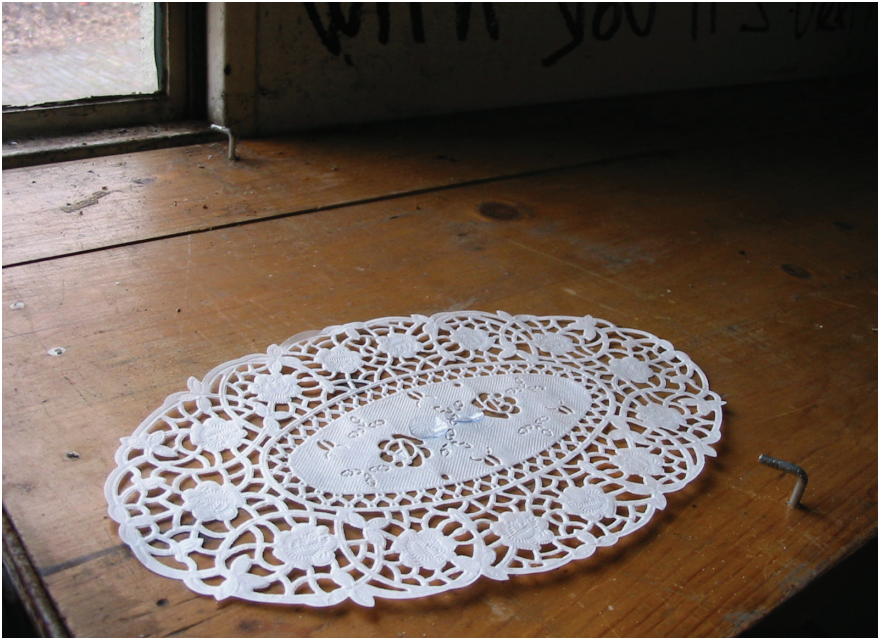
Society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand.

- Karl Marx, Grundrisse, 1858

I think the otherwise interrelationality and flows of people and things are cornerstones of your practices, since they allow new affective and social infrastructure to emerge. Here, I prefer “otherwise” than “alternative”, since the latter already assumes the binary of “norm vs. the alternative.” I refer to Elizabeth Povinelli's use of the term. They are not based on the logic of capitalist economy, and they go beyond the immediate social-material circles of the individuals.



Installation by Elaine W. Ho for *Je Kunt Overal Zijn*;
 Arnhem, 2003 [photo by Elaine W. Ho]



Installation by Elaine W. Ho for *Je Kunt Overal Zijn*;
Arnhem, 2003 [photo by Elaine W. Ho]

Regarding the doubt of your ability in writing academic work: I would say that your writing strikes me as work with first-hand experiences and theoretical reflections, which are already academic (although slightly shorter than a paper). About the methodology, I've also employed participatory action research: I lived at Dinghaiqiao Mutual-Aid Society (DM-AS) for two months and collaborated with members there to organise activities, which was actually the part of my fieldwork that I enjoyed most. I was involved in the interrelations in and around DM-AS, and I enjoyed talking to neighbours in the neighbourhood and to young people who visited DM-AS. Here, I felt the joy of practice.

In my writing, I have to reflect on my positionality as a research-practitioner, and my biases and critical reflections upon what we have done. Of course, writing is also a practice, but it's less grounded for me.

ZLWD: I was listening to Silvia Federici's talk and discussion online today, which was organised by Formerly Known as Witte de With. She stressed the importance of getting together and organising, especially for women who have to undertake their own practice, reproductive labour and care, and which includes accompanying someone who has to face an institution like the hospital.

SEP 18
2020

I actually asked a question about how to organise ourselves as the precariat/freelancers/art workers when we have to struggle to survive in the time of pandemic. And although the state has granted subsidies to cultural workers in the Netherlands, what about after when the society becomes even more precarious and neoliberal? To this, she responded, "Overcome our inertia and organise."

I guess what I really want to know are the methodologies of self-organisation, the nitty-gritty of the know-how. I wonder whether you know any resources about this?

Regarding your question about the translation of my southernness project, to be honest, I don't have a concrete plan.

Recently, I visited Reinaart and Mariëlle at ook_huis, and Reinaart talked about his concerns towards the institution of documenta while coordinating for ruangrupa. The curators want to give space to collectives, where the collectives (the lumbung members) got their own web presences that would be different from documenta's. The institution, however, did not agree at first and it turned into a long discussion. The rigidity of organisation and exhibition-oriented way of thinking made it hard to "southernise" documenta.

The methods of the south — such as being fluid and open for spontaneity, welcoming people with different interests and skills from different backgrounds, getting together and hanging out, drinking and eating together — are keys to nurture trust and making space for collaboration and collective action. Of course, these are not unique to the south, as I've seen some in the community art and performance projects here in the Netherlands as well (i.e. MOHA)¹² I haven't, however, encountered groups like ruangrupa or Soeng Joeng Toi, who have a space for members, their friends, and those who are curious to hang out and organise events. There seems to be no need to cultivate connection and trust with people in the neighbourhood and to develop co-practices together.

Perhaps the best way to translate southernness is to do it, to practise it on the ground. *(But I don't think this is the best moment to open such a space, and I am not prepared to do it yet. Besides, the language barrier still exists as my Dutch isn't good enough to have a meaningful conversation).*

Allan Kaprow (1927-2006), an American artist who helped to develop "Environments" and "Happenings" in the 60s, wrote this in 1963:

It's not only the transformation of the public consciousness that we are interested in, but it's our own transformation as artists that's just as important. Perhaps a corollary is that community change can't take place unless it's transformative within us... means that every prejudice, every misunderstanding that we perceive out in the real world is inside of us, and has to be challenged.

- *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* by Allan Kaprow, edited by Jeff Kelley, published 1993, this quote from an essay titled "Impurity" dated 1963

Perhaps before I start my own socially engaged practice or grounded translation of southernness, I would become a helper/cooperator in some community-based or social practice project; so that I can work with my biases and blind spots to transform myself, find my positions, and to learn the skills to work with people.

In the time of a pandemic, perhaps we need to invent new ways of getting together while taking care of one another's health — for example, having outdoor gatherings with physical distancing, encouraging people to talk about their traumatic experiences in the pandemic. From there, we can perhaps imagine a different future: a less exploitative, less divisive, and less precarious future; a future where the state does not put the interest of the big corporates in front of its citizens (*perhaps we need to rethink what a state is and what it does*); a future where collective actions can bring about change, towards more just and

equal worlds for living and non-living beings.

ZLWD: Let's return to your practices.

**SEP 27
2020**

As I myself am entering this stage of finding the practices that I want to dedicate myself to after my PhD, I am quite eager to know more about how you started your myriads of practices that might not be that easily identifiable or identified as "art" (*aka* the art works that one sees in white cube model art institutions).

For instance, why did you start airTIME on single mothers? How do all your practices and roles (artist, designer, courier, writer, podcaster, *etc.*) relate to each other?

As you mentioned before, there are some principal threads that tie LIGHT LOGISTICS and HomeShop together. If you take a bird's eye view, how do your practices connect to each other in the constellation? Is interconnectivity among your practices a concern for you?

EWAH: Goodness, suddenly so many questions!

**OCT 1
2020**

Let me try to work through them one by one.

About how my various practices started, the example mentioned more than once above touched upon how when I was in school in the Netherlands, friends and I simply got together and made small events, interventions and/or exhibitions (*however you'd like to name them*). What can be emphasised from this is that these were things we did outside of the curriculum of the institution with little money and purely out of interest. Of course, because we were mostly studying together and still part of the same institutional structures, I wouldn't call these isolated activities. Perhaps because we were actually not art students (*mostly from design and/or the legendary EDDC department that Arnhem used to have*), I don't think any of us felt pressured by the mandates of what you call the "white cube model." This fact of being an outsider, you can perhaps say, has been a core aspect of most of my life and practice, whether in relation to the institutions above, with my background (never American enough, never Chinese enough), or by being an artist not trained in the professionalised way of the art academy (*thinking here in reference to very recognisable and marketable modes that comes out of institutions like Städelschule, Goldsmiths, or de Appel, at a certain moment*).

While I did study art and art history for my first degree, it was in a very lonely manner at a science and engineering school!

What I am really getting at here is our own naïveté — or stupidity, if you will — to trust making attempts without recourse to the standards of how things have been done or should be done. This also means that we may end up falling into a lot of the same mistakes and traps that people before us have made. For example, when I learned that there is a whole history and discourse around the so-called community arts or socially-engaged practice, it became clear that these initiatives occur in ebbs and flows that are utterly borne of and prey to very common disintegrating forces like gentrification, power struggles, and the difficulty of self-sustenance.¹³

ZLWD: You know what, I find your practices more interesting than some professional artists' works, even though they graduated from renowned art schools. Perhaps professionalisation also limits their vision, scope, and toolset — only prepares them for the system of institute-market wherein they only make works that fit into this system.

Well, back then, I was trying to study art and design theory, but my university entrance exam scores weren't high enough so I was dropped to English translation and interpretation. Though my progress was not bad, I never felt that I belonged in that environment. It was only in the second semester of the first year that I asked the teacher of the urban planning department whether I could join his drawing and painting class as well as a class on the history of design, and he welcomed me. I still maintain a good relationship with him nowadays (*It was Liang Jianhua!*).

In my final year, with the cover-up of a (*fake*) internship certificate, I ran away from the university for a month or two to audit at the China Academy of Art. All of this is to say that, although I wish I had a more solid foundation of knowledge of art, there are so many paths to art, and what we have experienced before nurture shape our practices today.

Even if we have a good theoretical review on the traps and pitfalls of socially-engaged art, we may still encounter problems in practice such as rents that are too high to keep an independent space running — one of the reasons why HomeShop came to an end. This reminds me of Chen Yun's reaction to our Academy of Failure field trip to the post-evicted villages in Beijing: "There are problems, but it doesn't mean that we don't do it because of the foreseeable problems" (*my paraphrase*).¹⁴

13. Sociologist Pascal Gielen talks about this extensively in his research involving hundreds of interviews with artists and practitioners of socially engaged work, referring literally to the 'trap of community art'. Pascal Gielen, 'Son[]ja #218. Pascal Gielen', *Radio Web MACBA*. Son[]ja, podcast audio, 10 December 2015, <https://www.macba.cat/en/sonia/sonia-218-pascal-gielen>.

EWAH: While not everyone can work well in a more guerrilla or spontaneous manner as some would prefer to have a supposed overview of the playing field before running onto it, to go back to this idea of trust that spontaneity and impulse requires, your previous use of the term “*nongkrong*” would be interesting to dissect further. It’s a fascinating exportation of an aspect of Indonesian culture that has become grasped eagerly by the art world in its efforts to understand what appears to be a uniquely Indonesian trait of collectivity with which socially engaged work where other places seem to struggle.

Speaking recently with a good friend, the artist and researcher Riar Rizaldi, he is highly critical of this absurdity of the West’s attempt to commodify what is essentially non-productivity as a “new artistic concept” to supplement the recent surge of contemporary Indonesian collectives on the international art stage. It’s doubly fascinating to see how that trend has also more recently migrated back east to China, where institutions like the Times Museum and HB Station, and the works of researchers like yourself and Liu Di, also seek to forge ties with Indonesian knowledge as a remapping of geographies of southernness. I hope you don’t misunderstand me to qualify such work as merely appropriating, which could perhaps describe the overarching trend within the art spectacle. What I mean is, why haven’t we in Hong Kong and China tried to look closer to home like this much earlier?

If I had known of a concept like *nongkrong* at the time that HomeShop was active or could pull better from the lexicon of *hutong* vernacular to describe HomeShop, perhaps it would have been received differently or be in a different position today. But as far as I understand *nongkrong*, that is exactly what we were doing — nurturing a space of simply being together, where, as Riar says, art was never the goal but a means. I could add “tone” to that as well, for the aesthetics of being together are exactly what make them political possibilities. Within *nongkrong* — and why don’t we also introduce a parallel Cantonese concept 吹水 *ceoi seoi* — there is, in contexts like Indonesia and China, no need to predicate the politics of the practice as a valuation of what is happening. We can argue, rather, that their value is understood more laterally exactly in that they are directly non-productive and filled with useless banter.

This relates directly to the airTIME project, because it’s expressedly cast as a platform for 放空 *fong hung* and 吹水 *ceoi seoi* — letting loose and shooting the shit, you could call it. And I hardly talk about the gendered political inclinations that have motivated it, though I do hope that they come through somehow.

giving attention

Actually, during one of the recordings, when I did try to explain to one of the single mums about my ulterior motives for using this project as a way to consider social reproduction and greater equality for women within the schema of politics, economy and society, she responded – to my horror – by saying that I sound like Trump. Granted, I wasn’t actually able to elaborate about “social reproduction” in Cantonese, so maybe my toddler-level talk about equality is how she sees a general American naiveté that is somehow now compounded by bombastic Trumpian stupidity. So, whether it’s one mother explaining about how she has taught her son to rebel against his Mandarin teacher because “We are Hongkongers, and we speak Cantonese,” or another mother who is retired and likes to fawn over G-Dragon and watch a YouTube science channel featuring mansplainers discussing why it is dangerous for astronauts to fart in space, it was a deliberate decision to want to work with single mothers as collaborative partners in this project – both in resonant empathy from my own position as the daughter of a single mother and also as a way to address together what I felt was a mutually ill-advantaged position with respect to our voices and representation in the public sphere.

I recently had a meeting with members of the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination, and they describe art as the practice of giving attention. This struck a chord with me, because it shifts the relations between artworks as objects of contemplation, and the processes between theory and praxis that we may call creation. It also begs the question of who it is we are giving our attention to, and who it is that might deserve more attention. So, practices of listening are important to the airTIME project, and I want to experiment with that in both casual, conversational ways but also via more experimental exercises like the sonic meditations of Pauline Oliveros, field recordings, or even ASMR.

ZLWD: Regarding your question about vernacular concepts and the appropriation of *nongkrong*, I wouldn’t say that I “imported” this concept in order to explain the practices in southern China, since there was connectivity between the practitioners in Guangzhou and collectives in Indonesia such as *ruangrupa* and KUNCI. Some people I have interviewed from Theatre 44, also part of Soeng Joeng Toi, went to Southeast Asia, and were inspired by the collectives there.

**OCT 6
2020**

In the interviews, they didn’t mention the term *nongkrong*, but they did express the importance of 相處 (*seong cyu*), which can be translated as spending time together, hanging out, and getting along with each other. This compound Chinese word can be separated into two characters, the first

one 相 (*seong*) can be interpreted as “mutual” or “with each other,” and the second one 處 (*cyu*) “to situate” or “to deal with.” I can take your questioning of Southeast Asian practices and concepts becoming hot in the global art scene and in southern China as a reminder to discover vernacular concepts from the ground, from the practices I researched. So perhaps I can develop this term 相處 *seong cyu* into a concept about mutual situatedness, the importance of spending (non-productive) time together, and dealing with each other’s differences in the togetherness. Compared to 吹水 *ceoi seoi*, these terms stress everyday life: chatting, cooking together, eating and drinking together, taking care of the nitty gritty of keeping a space together, etc.

On the other hand, I still want to stress the interconnectedness of collectives and groups in Southeast Asia and Guangdong (*Feng Junhua, one of the stakeholders of Soeng Joeng Toi, was inspired by Dinghaiqiao Mutual-Aid Society’s initiator Chen Yun’s remarks that Guangdong is part of Southeast Asia*).

The birth of SJT was inspired by the collectives and independent spaces in Southeast Asia. So, in this sense, the use of the Indonesian term *nongkrong* to describe the practices in SJT is perhaps less superficial.

ZLWD: I was talking to our common friend Clara Balaguer yesterday, and I mentioned your questioning of my use of the term *nongkrong*. She asked why using a term from non-Western context needs justification, but why terms in English don’t need so. If we only use vernacular concepts once, they would be no more than novelty.

**OCT 14
2020**

Perhaps we do need to hack into the art discourse dominated by the global north by repeatedly using some terms in order to make these concepts more than novelty. It is a collective effort. On the other hand, as my PhD research focused on practices in China, I used Deleuze and Guattari’s theories to explain some of the cases when I had to justify why these theories, which grew out of a very different context, were applicable in China.

**OCT 21
2020**

EWAH: It sounds like I’ve offended you, which makes me quite sad. I’m sorry... Language is such a beautiful but damning trap. Actually, I was not questioning your use of the term *nongkrong* per se. Instead, I was looking at the phenomenon more generally as it has drifted in different art circles over the last years and trying to think through Riar’s critique, which is aimed not only at the consumption of *nongkrong* by the West but the active exportation of it by Indonesian artists. The need for justifications, as you say, are not only of non-western concepts, but more so about the juxtaposition

of concepts taken out of their so-called “originating” contexts, which is why you may have felt the need or were asked to justify thinking through Deleuze and Guattari when talking about Chinese practices. If I think about it now, perhaps this is another reason why certain interests and discussions among HomeShop members made it strange or further alienating to many publics.

Ouyang Xiao and I were classmates who came together through studies in European continental philosophy. Fotini Lazaridou-Hatzigoga has a background in architecture theory, and Qu Yizhen has also always been an avid reader of philosophy both East and West. A curious, little known fact about him is that, while he probably would qualify himself as having been an outsider for most of his life, one of his previous experiences with collectivity was through an active engagement with an underground sect of Hare Krishnas in Beijing in the mid-90s. The most tickling part of that story is that he was eventually kicked out of the group for falling in love with another member and questioning their ideas too much! Regardless, my point with this little portrait is that perhaps we didn’t justify ourselves enough (or feel the need to). So, when I say, “Why haven’t we in Hong Kong and China tried to look closer to home like this much earlier?” what I mean is if southern China and Hong Kong are part of the geopolitical imagining of Southeast Asia – and I agree with you that it is – why is it only especially now that we are hearing more discourse in this regard, *following* the West’s mini-explosion of interest in that particular brand of Indonesian collectivity?

Of course, this perspective is oversimplifying if we are talking about the transmission of culture and ideas across borders and through history. The real critique is about the commodification of ideas and how that is implicated within repeated and on-going relations of power. It is no coincidence that there are also lots of Southeast Asian infrastructure projects to invest in and business deals to be made, and art and culture are not isolated phenomena, especially if we are looking at institutional relations.

Apologies for being such a cynic, but the *SUNSHOWER* (Mori Art Museum and The National Art Center, Tokyo; 2017) from Japan suddenly takes on a very different light, doesn’t it?

ZLWD: Well, as someone with an academic background, I felt that I needed to justify the use of the term if I hadn’t before; so please don’t take it personally. It’s simply about the argument or criticism made by your friend and my reflection upon it. I also wanted to clarify that my use of the term *nongkrong* was more of a concept that I could refer to within the context of southern China from an inter-Asia perspective.

OCT 27
2020

Why have we heard these terms more often only recently? I have to admit discourses, or choosing what enters into the lexicon of the “Art World.”

I wonder why documenta invited ruangrupa to curate the new edition: is that a recognition of the other modes of art (non)production? Is it that the western institution tries to refresh itself by inviting the other? Why did I feel happy when I heard that ruangrupa was appointed as curator? Was it because I felt that it was very necessary to break this hegemony of both practice and discourse? But the upcoming documenta still happens within the imbalanced power system of the art world — a one-off event might not be able to change the institution, not to mention the power structure.

ZLWD: Yesterday, I went to a theory programme called The Vantage Body, hosted by the Social Practices department at Willem de Kooning Academy. The last talk was by Grace Samboh, a researcher who works with Jatiwangi Art Factory in Indonesia. She talked about giving and taking, and friendship in artistic practices.

**OCT 30
2020**

In her presentation, she said: “We can only go as far as we take care of each other.” In her paper, she asked: “I wonder, how we can institutionalise friendship in order to instigate practical change?” I asked a rather irrelevant question about *nongkrong*. She said that only boys and men can do endless *nongkrong* — hanging out endlessly and smoking together. Girls and women have to work to support themselves; and if they hang out, they need to make appointments. Only then did I realise that having not been aware of the gender specificity and affordances of this term, I had idealised the concept.

ZLWD: Regarding the single mum’s comment on your motivation of making air-TIME, I am quite puzzled by what she said. Is that her only impression of social discourse from the U.S., or is she a Trump supporter? (*In the context of Hong-Kong, some people fall into this illusion of Trump saving Hong Kong because Trump “dislikes” the PRC.*) Perhaps you can explain your goals in a simpler way such as, “I hope that single mums as a group can speak for themselves, and I hope that in the long run they will face less prejudice and inequality.” I agree that “art is the practice of giving attention.” I remember in the Haunted Bookshelves session of Read-in that we participated in, someone also mentioned the politics of giving attention and the politics of memorising; but art is also the practice of imagining otherwise and facilitating otherwise to happen.

Since the passing of David Graeber, I have been listening to his talks or podcasts about him. My friend Wu Ching, quoting from his *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, said that an example of direct action is: “When the local authori-

ty takes control of the only well of the village and commercialises the water, you (plural) dig another well.”

NOV 2 2020 **EWAH:** Yes, I think that we can see these two streams, of “giving attention” or “imagining otherwise,” to be able to clarify forms of art making and being in the world with either more emphasis upon revealing and discovering in the former or speculating and perhaps actively changing in the latter. They are not mutually exclusive, of course. If I try to reflect back upon my own practices, I think I would tend more so toward modes of exploration and discovery. The world as it is is already so, so much. Well, maybe my cynicism limits something more visionary. I feel a bit more than defeated these days.

ZLWD: About your reflection on your practices as modes of exploration and discovery, I will say that there are also aspects of actively changing and making. For instance, LIGHT LOGISTICS is an otherwise way to transport things. It is not subsumed into a commercial logistics system, but weaves a network of trust and mutual help.

Here comes my final question about materiality and the mediation of your practices (*yes...reinaart's request*).

The other day, I was listening to an Arjun Appadurai lecture on materiality in globalisation where he emphasised mediants and mediation:

Mediation, as an operation or embodied practice, produces materiality as the effect of its operations. Materiality is the site of what mediation — as an embodied practice — reveals. Thus, speech is the materiality from which language — as mediation — takes its meaning. Pictures are the materiality — as Mitchell (2006) shows so nicely — from which images, as practices of mediation, take their meaning.¹⁵

As far as I can tell, a lot of your practices need mediation. For example, as you mediate between the senders and receivers in LIGHT LOGISTICS, how do you reflect on the materiality of your work in this regard? Is the in-betweenness of your identity also a form of continuous mediation?

(I am highly skeptical of the discourse of “Chineseness” or “Americanness”, since the term itself already implies essentialism that is bound with the nation state. So, I won't say you're not Chinese enough or American enough,

MOTS

15. Arjun Appadurai, “Mediants, Materiality, Normativity”, *Public Culture* 27:2, 2015: 224.

but rather in-between different cultures including Chinese cultures and American cultures).

EWAH: We've come to a critical point, hehe.

Mediation is about negotiating desire, control, and power that requires a great deal of compassion and patience, and relies on a kind of delicateness with language to navigate between different parties, perspectives, and biases. Actually, I think we are describing you much more than me! I would suspect your background in translation has primed what I see as the punishing task of trying to work through decolonising practices of a part of the global south — *from the heart of empire*. I don't think I have the stamina for it and find myself somehow always much more attracted to the figurative “back of the classroom,” where power casts long shadows and I can at least dissimulate the slight degrees of freedom enabled by being eclipsed and forgotten.

Perhaps that is why, Display Distribute — if some of its practices can be called a mediation — works more in the in-the-cracks sort of way of pirates and smugglers; or, in the case of the upcoming Radio Slumber¹⁶ collaboration with Amy Suo Wu, invisible women, minorities, and witches. If I am negotiating anything between these roles, imagine mediation as the shape-shifting of being a medium — an interface or infrastructure that could, on one hand disappear itself as McLuhan-esque message; or conflate content, subjectivities and the circulation between them in such a manner as to, hopefully, rescore the parameters of our socio-material economies.

Does this mean that “the work” happens in the between-space, or is the between space itself? Or rather, what would either insinuate? Well, it would betray the work to answer so directly, now wouldn't it...? *[smiley]*

As I read somewhere recently: words can be the enemy of understanding.

Regardless, this is an on-going struggle, convoluted by inherent precarity and contradictions between something that could be called a “designer-comptroller” self (*which envisions certain processes and outcomes and hopes others would see and work towards those ‘somethings’ together*), and the “facilitator-supporter” self (*which wants to open up to whatever active outcomes can unimaginably emerge from a constellation of figure-participants*). Invention and discovery — this spectrum already assumes the production of “somethings” over “nothings” — the latter of which is a third axis of possibility which haunts much of our discussion like *nongkrong*.

Amidst pandemic, global crisis, oversaturation of media, the commodification of everything, ongoing inequality, and widespread social and mental instability, what is a *collaborative* “doing nothing”?

Actually, I think it still moves. And that, maybe, is the between-ness of becoming aesthetico-politics.

EL: Dear Elaine and Zoénie,

Sorry to only get back to you now.

Having read your conversation for the second, third, and fourth time, I kept wishing this was a real conversation where we are all present in the same space-time, and where I could jump in at a certain moment and share my thoughts with you. As our traditional idiom describes, there are so many points where I am literally 點頭如搗蒜 (nodding my head as if I am pounding the garlic), or relating and agreeing upon the difficulties and potentials we are often situated in in this neoliberal system.

This past summer, I participated in Rossi Braidotti’s (online) Summer School organised by Utrecht University, titled *Posthuman Convergences*. It was the first time I had the chance to learn about Braidotti’s theory of the posthuman subject and the genealogy of new materialisms. As I am from an anthropological background and thus not familiar with all the philosophical debates concerning humanism and materialism, the rhetoric was rather overwhelming, although I still feel that her concepts were a nice way to help me articulate a lot that I had already been thinking about, or had been working on but found difficult to articulate myself.

In her Book *Posthuman Knowledge*, she writes:

*“Posthuman thinking is a relational activity that occurs by composing points of contact with a myriad of elements within the complex multiplicity of each subject and across multiple other subjects situated in the world. Thinking takes the form of cartographic renderings of embedded and embodied relational encounters.”*¹⁷

I feel that both your research/practices have this endeavour of attending to those relational capacities, and that, in a certain way, post-humanist thinking can function as an approach for research and art — a way to create a ‘space’ in a way.

Then again, as you also touched upon in your conversation, language is such a tricky thing. Once you start to use it, especially in a certain field (for our case it would be the "art world"), there's always this risk of hegemony of the linguistic. The main thing I often struggle with sometimes are academic terms – such as "posthuman," "new materialism," and many of the philosophical buzz words from Deleuze and Guattari.

This same feeling applies to the notion of "curator" or "artist." I wonder if it would be more liberating if the world functions without any of those terms and labels – a world where we do not have labels or terms to define exactly what is it that we are doing/researching/thinking on but are still able to find alliances and resonance with others through actual exchanges of thoughts and practices – perhaps something similar as we are doing through this conversation!

For me, coming to read (and browse on the internet) about Elaine's practices, I cannot help but relate to what anthropologist Tim Ingold mentioned once in his lecture about art that is anthropological. For him, art that is anthropological is curious and rekindles the sense of care and longing. Such art is generous, open ended, comparative, and critical. It does not impose itself or seek to intimidate. It does not set out to make a statement. It is inquisitive rather than interrogative, offering questions instead of demanding answers and being modestly experimental. I feel that these are the most beautiful but also maybe the most precarious kinds of practices in our highly commercialised, capitalised society.

How can we make it sustainable? I am a bit pessimistic at the moment, but want to remain hopeful nevertheless.

Another thing I came across when reading your conversation and other participants' texts is the resurging issue of how to live together with care and friendship. Often asking myself this question as well, I recently found inspiration from Maria Pouig de la Bellacasa, a feminist scholar who recently published a book called *Matters of Care*. In the book she says:

*"Thinking-with should always be a living-with, aware of troubling relations and seeking a significant otherness that transforms those involved in the relation and the worlds we live in."*¹⁸

She points out that care should be a transformative ethos instead of a normative ethics, and that care is not an option but a vital necessity of all

18. María Puig de la Bellacasa de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017: 83.

beings. When we care, we need to continuously contest and rethink how we care, especially when the ones you care for sit in a different social-political-class position. Otherwise, care could turn out to be something paternalising, humiliating, or frustrating.

I can also resonate well with Zoénie in that especially when we do research, we so often need to justify ourselves through scientific methods and address our academic circles in a certain way. However, thinking about the non-western/indigenous/non-human species' cosmologies, academies often act as great apparatus for colonising our ways of thinking otherwise. They often become one of the forces of ontological occupation of other species' life, producing experts that go on to categorise and manipulate their ontologies.

How do we work within these institutional infrastructures and generate care instead of becoming one of the perpetrators?

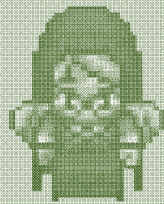
Amongst all the challenges we are facing, I still tend to believe that both artists, in a broader sense of course, and researchers are able to imagine, experiment, and facilitate caring relations between things and people through new types of practices that are not bound by existing discourses. A speculative and critical effort is crucial in creating these caring spaces that encourages thinking and living otherwise (instead of doing politics with a capital P), and I feel that this series of conversations can somehow become a minor step towards creating those spaces.

Thank you both again for this lovely conversation.

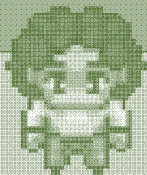
concept of community
opposed to (art) institution



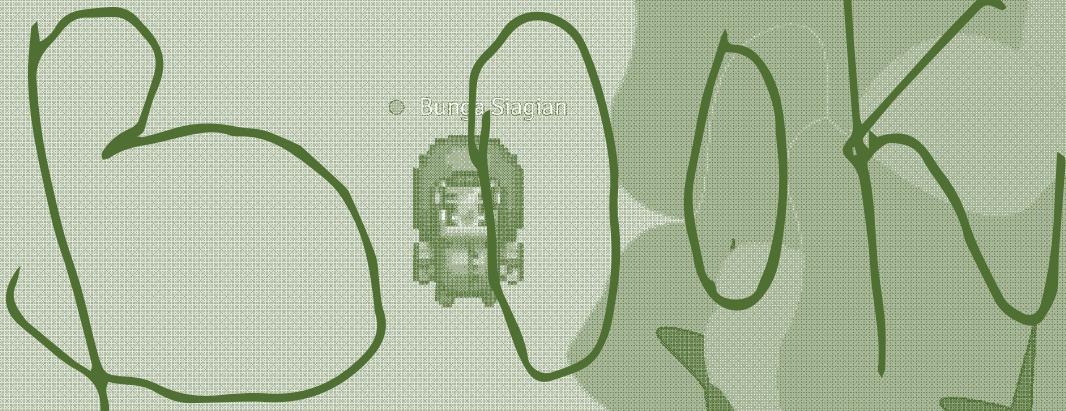
● kanuku leon



● Ismal Muntaha



● Bunga Siagian



When We Talk About the Advancement of (art) Practices¹

Bunga Siagian

Bunga Siagian Studied at Driyarkara School of Philosophy. Curator at ARKIPEL Film Festival in 2013-2016. Occasionally write about moving images. Currently interested in practicing artistic experimentation of moving image exhibitions in the public space. Since 2017, she has been actively managing the Land Affairs Study Agency, a temporary agency experimenting methods and forms of arts in the study of cultural landscape related to land affairs.

Ismal Muntaha

Ismal Muntaha is a multidisciplinary artist who lives and works together with the collective Jatiwangi art Factory (JaF). In 2009 together with Sunday Screen initiated the Village Video Festival, an annual residency-based video festival in Jatiwangi. In 2017, he formed the Land Study Agency (BKP). A temporary institution that focuses on the study of land and all cultural landscapes contained in it, through various artistic projects. Currently took a Master on Development Studies at Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB).

Dicky Senda

Dicky Senda is a writer and food activist from Mollo, South Central Timor, Indonesia. Has published a poetry compilation "Cerah Hati" (2011), a collection of short stories Kanuku Leon (2013), Hau Kamelin & Tuan Kamlasi (2015) and Sai Rai (2017). He was invited to the Makassar International Writers Festival (2013), Bienal Sastra Salihara (2015), Asean Literary Festival 2016, Ubud Writers & Readers Festival 2017 and Melbourne Writers Festival 2018. Now lives in Taiftob village in the mountains of Mollo, South Central Timor and manages social entrepreneurship communities named Lakoat.Kujawas, which integrates art communities, citizen libraries, archive rooms and production space for processed agricultural products. Together with community in his village he initiated Skol Tamolok, a critical and contextual education model for indigenous people, the Apinat-Aklahat residency program and the Mnahat Fe'u Heritage Trailer, a gastronomic tour program during the harvest season in the Mollo mountains.

In conversation: *Bunga Siagian, Dicky Senda, & Ismal Muntaha*
 Foreword by *Bunga Siagian*
 Translated by *Eduard Lazarus & Phycita Juli*



When Ismal and I were invited to contribute a chapter for this publication, the editors suggested we look into female artists from previous generations. We believe anyone can easily understand the urgency of exploring female artists, yet why does it have to be someone who isn't young?

Later, it became clear for us that the editors consider at least two things: First, Young people can easily initiate new artistic endeavors due to their reservoir of stamina and energy. On the other hand, for them, it is important to see resilience and endurance as equally important factors to carry on what has already been started.

Indonesia isn't short of artistic figures who are renowned for their consistency and perennial works. Unfortunately, these figures can only be strictly accessed on the internet due to the pandemic as we can't really conduct face-to-face conversations. In other words, we were unable to witness, study, and engage with their works directly. These hindrances ultimately forced us to consider artistic practices on a smaller scale that is easier for us to reach: our own friendship circles.

1. The term 'Advancement' as a title was inspired by a progressive policy 'Advancement of Culture' of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology Republic of Indonesia, led by Hilmar Farid the Director General of Culture. The Law of Advancement of Culture is based on the cultural dynamics that are found in the community every day, from the most traditional culture to the most contemporary one, from the one that is on the brink of extinction to the one that continues to develop. <https://pemajuankebudayaan.id/en/>

Naturally, there are two approaches in observing the artistic practices of our friends. First, we are more “intuitively” attuned to them due to familiarity in this shared scope of work. Whatever the context (rural or urban, individual or collective), they are all influenced by and are influencing the larger ecosystem of communities. Second, our paths, at one point or another, have intersected. We have all been engaged in each other’s practices collectively, either through collaborations or through direct witnessing.

In one of my conversations with Ismal, while thinking about our friends who are in most of our circles dominated by young people that we clearly admire a lot, I asked: if age is the only yardstick, does that mean endurance is merely measured by long periods of time? If so, how long does it take to be considered as endurant?

In all honesty, I am now thinking of artistic works that do not last as long – works and practices that either have to cease due to circumstances and changes within the art ecosystem, or have simply lost their contextual urgency. This also means that they embody a certain flexibility towards the flow of nature, and the dynamism of time and space. This flexibility affirms that the human subject is not fixed nor resilient to the contingencies of their environment, whether it be one’s social, political, economic and cultural contexts. Then again, these short-lived practices might actually be precedents, inspirations for an existing context, and even ways of enabling an ecosystem for the practices that are currently visible and have already been established for a longer period of time. In other words, I am thinking of a context of creation that, in its process, is not autonomous or isolated – inseparable from its relations with others or from its social and political nuances. An awareness of such interdependency reveals a new perspective on the different roles and dynamics of different subjects within the context of creation. Rather than positing endurance as the wealth of knowledge and achievements of “successful individuals,” as determined by the persistence of their works, this piece intuitively chooses to treat endurance as an essential element to the practice of collective creation.

Here, “collectives” are defined not only as works that are purposefully and systematically done together by a group of people, as is usually designated to describe an arts collective or community, but also as an ecosystem or medium that shapes, underlies, and influences the practices within it. An ecosystem that plays an immeasurable (undefined, or yet to be defined) role – serving as a socio-political context, a platform for learning, a circle of friends, a model of capital, or a support system to a host of other functions. Within such definition, the practices we explore in this essay are not posited as isolated figures or subjects but one that is, therefore, part of a larger ecosystem.

Art that Gives Wholeheartedly

A figure that aided us in finding a point of departure for the discussion of this larger issue is the artist Loranita Theo, an active member of Jatiwangi art Factory (JaF). The inspiration to engage with Loranita came up when I was browsing through pictures of JaF on the web (Figure 1), and suddenly realizing that the collective has always been portrayed in the media through colossal, large-scale arts events involving hundreds of local residents: from the bodybuilding competition for workers of local roof tile factories to the triannual ceramic music festival. The impression left by seeing these pictures encouraged me to consider the position and agencies of small-scale individual artistic practices that have been abundant in Jatiwangi, and their relation to the practice of JaF as a larger arts collective — including what Loranita herself, as an artist, has done.



Figure 1

For brief context, JaF is an arts community located in Jatiwangi, West Java. They are renowned for their artistic works in an area that houses Indonesia's largest roof tile industry. In 2005, the couple Arief Yudi and Loranita Theo returned to Arief's hometown in Jatiwangi after previously working in Bandung and Jakarta. In the same year, they decided to start JaF.

Previously, Jatiwangi itself was a blind spot in Indonesia's fine arts landscape. Arief once mentioned that what propelled him to return to Jatiwangi was his fascination in Joseph Beuys' adage: Everyone is an artist — words that, at the time, echoed throughout Bandung's art scene. However, for Arief, these words meant very little when merely applied to a community of artists, and would rather only find its depth when practiced in a local community among ordinary people. Thus, Arief and Loranita

returned to the small village of Jatiwangi, and started to engage with its people in order to give life to Beuys' words.

When it was established in 2005, the collective immediately called themselves Jatiwangi art Factory (in English) with the word “art” written entirely in lower case. The seeming relevance of Beuys' idea, along with Jatiwangi being devoid of an arts infrastructure, compelled me to explore what was meant by “art” during JaF's inception. How do they introduce themselves as an arts collective without any “art” as normally perceived by the local residents? On one hand, Jatiwangi was completely devoid of “arts,” particularly in what is currently designated as “contemporary arts” that normally dabbles in concepts and ideas. At that time, contemporary art — in its limited definition, of course — is a form of art far from the lives of the people in Jatiwangi. They were more accustomed to the art forms of sculpture, painting, traditional arts, and, of course, handicrafts. How then did the residents of Jatisura² get themselves accustomed to art forms beyond those that they are accustomed to?

Of course, JaF invited plenty of artists from outside of Jatiwangi to create “art” projects and events in the village. They then utilized these series of arts events, particularly performance art, to provide a surprise or shock for residents who are primarily roof tile factory workers. In the words of Ginggi S. Hasyim, Arief Yudi's younger brother who once acted as Jatisura's village head, “creativity in society thrives from what is seen.” It was, therefore, JaF's main role back then to provide a decent show for people to watch. Ginggi emphasized that Jatiwangi's former social landscape, consisting mainly of the working class, focuses mostly on the economy, which often-times led to discussions and ideas on how to generate more money for the people. The form of arts provided by JaF was initially intended to interrupt such money-oriented routines.

2. Jatisura is a village in Jatiwangi where JaF is located.

Consequently, events-based art remains ultimately temporary — ending when the artists leave. Who, then, will assume the role of keeping the arts alive when the event is over? How do the arts manifest themselves in the daily lives of the people? Eventually, the people of Jatiwangi acknowledged JaF as an arts collective, and recognized the arts as part of a new social landscape in their village.

This photo (Figure 2) is what art in JaF looked like during their early years. It is a project initiated by Loranita with the children of Kelompok Bermain (playgroup), Daun Salambar. The children assumed the role of garbage-collector police, where they patrolled the village's waste disposal system wearing bright-colored costumes that Loranita hand-crafted herself.

Loranita Theo was born in Jakarta, and completed her higher education at Bandung Institute of Technology's Fine Arts program. This made her the only JaF member that

had a formal arts education, and also the only member at the time that had the skill of creating craftsmanship-based art forms. She then applied the skills she learned to conduct multiple activities and projects with local residents. The practices she engaged herself in during JaF's early years were intimate and small in scale but carried out with militancy.



Figure 2



Figure 3

The boy holding out a stick in the photo (Figure 3) is Loranita's only child with Arief Yudi, Nyanyah. In its preparation process, I asked Loranita: what compelled you to do these projects? Was it JaF's collective vision that influenced your practice? Unexpectedly, Loranita's answer was simple: she just wanted to follow and spend time with Nyanyah. In the multiple art projects Loranita has engaged in, she was clear in dedicating them for Nyanyah, who as a child needs to have access to a different set of life experiences that school or any typical conservative neighborhood cannot offer. Nyanyah spent a lot of time with other children in the playgroup doing arts. When Nyanyah finally entered primary school, Loranita was with him — even establishing a rapport with headmistress Bu Entur. The children of Jatisura village would then draw murals, paint, create crafts, batik, write songs and radio dramas, and make costumes with her. All the craftsmanship that Loranita acquired as an arts student was developed and applied for practical tasks that she encountered through her life in Jatiwangi.

For Loranita, art has a specific role to play, which, for her, was to provide Nyanyah and his friends, then called “Jatiwangi Kids,” an imaginative and enjoyable life. Through arts, the children of Jatiwangi were provided contextual education that they can apply and carry with them throughout their lives.

(Below is an excerpt from the “Children’s Anthem” of the Jatiwangi Kids)

*We are Jatiwangi Kids, always happy.
We will grow up like the Jati Tree.
We always open our hands to everybody.
Because Jatiwangi Kids are friendly.*

*Reff :
Running. Running. Running.
Jumping. Jumping. Jumping.
Rolling. Rolling. Rolling.
Spinning. Spinning. Spinning.
Running. Jumping. Rolling. Spinning.*

Besides children, Loranita also engaged with Jatiwangi’s women from different backgrounds. She held an open studio in JaF’s kitchen, where local families and neighbors could paint with her or simply experience art. In Jatisura, Loranita is renowned as “jago gambar” or someone especially adept in painting. People would ask for her help to do all sorts of things involving art and craftsmanship – from decorating the village bazaar to creating batik motifs for the elementary school’s student uniform. During the early days of JaF, these arts projects took simple forms and were done ceaselessly one after the other. They were treated as part of daily life, instead of “events” such as exhibitions and festivals.

As people who live together in the same area for a long period of time, whether it be as families, friends, partners or collaborators, relationships are continuously forged through intimate, small-scale and daily encounters that go beyond grand art events with durational constraints. This created the trust that Jatiwangi’s people finally put in each other, and the impression that art is not something distant from their bodies or understanding – how it was here, immediate, and meaningful as it was created through familiar forms of relations. Thus, the idea to “engage”, which is usually referred to in sophisticated terms as “participatory art”, “relational aesthetics”, “engaged art” etc., became commonsensical for JaF. This kind of art practice that manifests itself in the day-to-day lives of people definitely takes endurance to deliver.

The particular curiosity that I have about Loranita’s practice is the courage in consistently doing art without any need for images or documentation. This thought came up

when I was asking Loranita to chronologically outline her practice. While her memory was not able to lay it out linearly, and while we thought photos would provide some sort of visual resonance, she was only able to provide several images after digging them out of her Facebook photo archive. Indeed, Loranita herself does not treat what she has been doing as art that has to be communicated to a larger public. It is art that takes place in one's mundane everyday (neighborhood gatherings or routine prayer groups) rather than one that is created with the goal of being seen by an arts audience. She does them because she simply has to, devoid of any sophisticated narratives and with no proper documentation. She does them because she wants to spend time with her child, and to educate him and his fellow peers in Jatisura. It's deeply personal, and sincere in its motive — one that has nothing to do with the question of how long a practice aims to be. It is similar to why people do their own 'artistic practices' every day, driven by concrete needs rooted in various local contexts that are all distinct.

Reading into what Loranita has done is akin to exploring the numerous practices that happen in collective creation. This allows us, for example, to imagine how to enable women — batik artisans, garment workers, policewomen, and housewives — to be engaged in Loranita's work. These are practices that are far from colossal, short in duration, unstructured, and, ultimately, still unable to challenge the hierarchical structure of our society. Can't we imagine that these kinds of miniscule events, such as women gatherings and doing common activities, have taken place countless times in the past as an initial contribution, a context, and a possibility? Can't we perhaps see it as a collective creation of an underlying social structure that ultimately enables feminist movements to take an even more solid form in the present, and also in the future?

The Ambiguity of Practice: Architecture Without Buildings?

Another friend we thought of is LabTanya. Initiated by architect Adi Wibowo and his partner Wilma Cryisanti, LabTanya is a studio for design and ecology that develops research methods and experiments along with the local urban community in South Tangerang.³ Adi dubs what they do as "architecture without buildings." As an architect himself, Adi has been critical towards Indonesia's dominant approach to the discipline that prioritizes aesthetic, as in the physical, attractive features of constructions, while being largely oblivious to the contexts, histories, and processes within the space itself. Thus, LabTanya holds firm to the approach that architecture is, first and foremost, the design and aesthetics of understanding a space before it can

3. Tangerang is a city located on the western border of Jakarta. The city where Soekarno-Hatta airport is located is the third largest urban city after Jakarta and Bekasi in the greater Jakarta area.

be translated into a visualized construction. This insight to architecture eventually developed into their main experiment, “Kota Tanpa Sampah” (loosely translated as “Zero Trash City”), that seeks to address the problem of household waste faced by the urban community. If architecture is indeed just a discipline that dabbles in physical construction, then the contribution of design would probably be limited to the design of garbage dumps or landfills. However, LabTanya’s approach to architecture enables them to comprehensively look into the social and spatial construction of the day-to-day lives of local residents, and even actively contribute to fostering dialogue and critical practice towards daily matters.

When they initiated the program, LabTanya’s fellows invited the local residents of their housing complex – mostly middle-aged mothers – to reflect on a question: is it possible for a city to achieve zero trash? And if yes, how? This program provided an insight to household waste: from the production process to how they end up in the hands of consumers. To this day, their program keeps expanding through collaborations with other parties from private institutions to government officials, and has been presented in the form of exhibitions and community festivals.

Although, at a glance, their practice might closely resemble the works of social design labs or community activism of the NGO kind, our first encounter with LabTanya actually happened in an arts setting. At that time, they were involved in an exhibition curated by Ade Darmawan called “Campur Sari,” held at Gudang Sarinah Ekosistem, Jakarta. Subsequently, we realized how art is utilized as a tool or method to help understand and communicate critical questions about the people’s neighborhood and daily life, which are the main focus of LabTanya’s design practice. One example is how art is utilized and taken as part of their other programs such as Fraktal City, Harta Karun Kampung Kota Kita (Our Urban Kampung Treasure), Kota dan Seni (The City and Art), and Jalan Milik Kita (The Streets We Own). In Harta Karun Kampung Kota Kita, LabTanya encouraged the local community to reflect on the value chain of food supplies that has formed people into consumer societies within a capitalistic system. The program was done through organizing a cooking competition among middle-aged mothers. This challenged the mothers to cook without purchasing anything. In other words, they had to rely on the ingredients they could find within their neighborhoods. Initially, the mothers objected to this seemingly absurd requirement as they have already been too used to rely upon the conventional food supply chain. After exploring their neighborhood together for half a day, however, they were able to map dozens of edible plants that they have never known of. Some of these ingredients were eventually used as ingredients in five-star hotels and restaurants.

LabTanya occupies a truly interesting position by purposely sidelining the visual aspects of their work, while simultaneously operating in a discipline that usually prioritizes it. If we were to apply the mainstream definition of an “art collective,” then we would be compelled to ask LabTanya: which part of their practices is art? And what

do they consider to be artistic output? At the same time, in architecture, they are also hammered with the question: where is the construction? These definitive questions about the arts and their forms are inevitable, even though it may indeed be a nearly obsolete point of view. This is especially true in Indonesia where the practices of art communities and collectives are evolving rapidly in multi-disciplinary and flexible social settings, while aiming to be more grounded in their own local contexts. Moreover, there also exists an ethical imperative not to formulate singular definitions of arts, especially if these definitions come from the “centers” of contemporary arts – such as Java (for Indonesian context), or the West (in more general terms).

For us, the questions public ask surrounding the aesthetic and architectural dimension of LabTanya’s works come as a consequence of their practice that resides in an “in-between zone,” or an area that is yet to be cognitively mapped or defined. In other words, they might not be sure of, or even care about, in what parts they actually take part in. And this “in-between” position can actually be liberating.

In the field of arts, for example, the ambiguity of their practice frees them from the need to partake in the numerous issues and debates of the arts community, such as: when does one’s practice qualify as art? How does one communicate one’s practice to the larger arts public in order to gain recognition from the field, especially in the classic debate of “centers” versus “peripheries”? All these can be set aside, however, as long as art – in its sense of being a result, method, or adopted system – is able to be a space for experimentation, a space that fosters the imagination to engage with the intricacies of daily life, similar to what LabTanya has always done.



The flexibility of this “in-between zone,” which enables LabTanya to experiment and which enables Loranita’s practice to occur with sincerity, serves as our gateway to discuss and ponder upon experimentation in creation processes, and the dissemination of knowledge and values through exhibitions and other platforms. This zone carries with it the potential for a sincere arts discourse with citizens, as well as its practical applications in communal life. These works by numerous grassroots and arts collectives all across Indonesia have genuinely fostered knowledge; provided critical reflections on the values of their living spaces; have encouraged a sense of collectivism and creativity as a society especially in the preservation and activation of their cultures; and have safeguarded the sustainability of life within their daily acts. These are all efforts to collectively imagine and realize a sustainable future, which has become even more relevant during this pandemic.

Another discourse that has been repeatedly brought up in imagining sustainable living is a return to old values that are lived by traditional/indigenous peoples. This way of life posits nature as the center or fulcrum of the lived universe, and, therefore, has to be catered to, preserved, and protected in order to achieve a sustainable future. Of course, efforts to adopt traditional values do have its challenges, especially when these values are romanticized and treated as fixed, arbitrary, "given" or "natural". Such perspective actually trivializes the complexities of cultural progress, and the human agency involved in creating one's own values. To explore this notion, we engage ourselves in a dialogue with Dicky Senda, a cultural activist and initiator of the Lakoat.Kujawas, a cultural community in East Nusa Tenggara. Lakota.Kujawas lives, grows, and thrives in the middle of an indigenous society while simultaneously engaging themselves with the development of values, sciences, and the contemporary cultural landscape.



A Conversation



Bunga Siagian: I find it more interesting to broaden the discussion of artistic practices by also talking about ecosystems because, for me, there is not a single movement or institution that has not played a role in what we are currently experiencing. Some of these entities, for example, might have only lasted for five years; but they may also have been formative for you [Dicky] as a place to stop by and learn before creating Lakoas.Kujawas. They have actually already been part of the larger ecosystem despite not being particularly long-lasting themselves. This is our point of departure: how can we read artistic practices in a non-centralized manner? It means not to attribute a work of art to a certain figure, but to also assert the contexts and ecosystems that have shaped it. This, in practice, is various and dispersed in a number of places.

At the same time, talking about ecosystems also leads to several questions that seek to set a limit and draw boundaries: is this an artistic practice? An arts community? If so, where is the artistic expression? Why does this look more similar to activism or a social movement? And so on and on. What's interesting for me is that there are a lot of, say, "ambiguous practices" that do not 100% identify themselves as part of the larger fine arts ecosystem, ones that work within the rooted contexts and needs of their particular spaces, yet end up playing a very serious and impactful role within their local communities. Especially during this current time of pandemic, I rather

4. Lakota.Kujawas is located in Taifrob Village, a mountain landscapes in Mollo district, East Nusa Tenggara province.

find these practices relevant in providing a picture of what a post-pandemic future would look like.

Ismal Muntaha: I agree. What we do here in Jatiwangi is similarly moved by our very real needs. It is difficult to talk of or follow the larger trends that are happening. We're preoccupied with constantly engaging in day-to-day activities and being a part of the local community.

Dicky Senda: I'm going to share some notes of the introductory writing previously sent to me, which, of course, is still within my limited insights on contemporary arts. For me, talking about the longevity of a movement or of endurance itself is talking about how much we are actually connected to many other people — be it the ones we have or have not noticed. Personally, Lakoat.Kujawas was only established after engaging with a lot of people, either through residencies or other ways. So, I agree that ecosystems shape and have a huge role in the process of creation.

Firstly, the writing that Bunga sent me brought up the topic of personal connections and friendships: how Bunga started reading into the practices of and friendships with of LabTanya and Loranita due to situations that arose during the pandemic, which enables you to better understand the contexts they are living in. I also find these connections and friendships important when incubating a movement, which usually starts from a smaller social environment.

Not long ago, I got together in Labuan Bajo with several acquaintances from different regions. Some of them came from communities that did not delve in literature. While they did not comprehend the contexts within Labuan Bajo, they also did not use the time at their disposal to try to get a better understanding of it. This led them to take a very judgemental stance against Labuan Bajo. By the end of the program, they came up with the conclusion that there are no noteworthy artistic practices in town. This judgement might have arisen due to them coming from a very large and very detached social circle, and it made me pay more attention to the friendships and smaller circles we have here. This also has something to do with how we involve other people in our programs, and how some fail to acknowledge what we already have. For me, art is always everywhere, whatever form it may take. This is what we should look for.

5. New Order is a term coined by Soeharto. It features the "New Order" established from the late 1960s that had a strong political role for the military, the bureaucratisation and corporatisation of political and societal organisations, and selective but effective repression of opponents. Strident anti-communist doctrine remained a hallmark of the regime for its subsequent 32 years, with Islamism becoming prevalent in the early 1990s.

Now we get to the second point of talking about arts in our everyday lives. Personally, I tend to be very careful talking about this because, for me, art should not only be seen as something for the present. For instance, when I returned to Mollo, I did not position myself to see the arts in Mollo⁴ as something that I can only see from the vantage point of the present. I also have to see or connect it with what is beyond the foreground or the past, something that exists in the collective memory of the local. I believe that there might be a time when some art forms or traditions might be lost due to a number of factors, yet will still quietly reside within the memory or mundane actions of the people. Thus, the arts are not only what we see in the present, but also something that leaves an imprint and is related to experiences in the past. For instance, in the context of Mollo, a lot of arts were lost due to Dutch colonialism, to the spread and adoption of new religions, to the New Order⁵ regime that has forced people to adopt one of five official religions, or to the aftermath of the events of 1965.⁶

This being said, art still remains related to the present context. For example, we will find Labuan Bajo, a place that I mentioned before as a town that has grown very rapidly. However, it might be good to ask: do our friends there see themselves as people who produce or engage in art? And how do they see their own art as the city has only started to "develop"? Furthermore, it is important to add that these are people coming from different backgrounds and traditions. So, for me, there is a merging of the different cultures and traditions, creating dialogues in the process, and generating new artistic practices.

Those are what I reflect on in the process of involving other people or in inviting fellow artists to come through an arts residency program in Lakoat. Kujawas, which is somehow linked to how we started out by doing archival works. We are a new generation of Timorese who were detached from our own histories, identities, and cultures that it felt arduous to learn our own local knowledge when we went to Leiden or the National Museum. The question was how to bring back that knowledge to the most local level possible, so our movement started by archiving. This is where the need to invite fellow researchers and artists came up, in hopes of receiving help with these archival works. At that time, there was a concern that the people who come to Mollo from the outside will be judgemental with what they find: what if this residency program, this activity that invites fellow artists, would end up with the impression that does not acknowledge the arts and traditions of the local people? There is the fear that we are bringing something from the outside that might end up belittling what is here. This threat, that the new knowledge or contemporary art in general would just end up muddying what is already here, made us vigilant.

6. The 1965 event is a large-scale killings and civil unrest that occurred in Indonesia over several months targeting Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) party members, and Communist sympathisers. It began as an anti-communist purge following a controversial attempted coup d'état by the 30 September Movement. This event brought a shift from Soekarno's Guided Democracy to Soeharto's New Order militaristic regime.

The third point is that the entire activity of Lakoat.Kujawas is more of a movement to revitalize the village. It is initiated by the local people. These efforts are not art projects. They are not realized by receiving grants, but are actually derived from the needs, concerns, and questions raised by the residents themselves. Arts in Mollo is part of daily life. When people sow, they do the bonet dance in a circle. When they harvest, they do the dance again. When someone dies, or is celebrating marriage, the bonet dance is always present. For me, art is how we passionately see these rituals, how they compel us to imagine, reflect, and think. There is some kind of encounter involved, and that's art. I don't want to be confined by something that was defined from the outside, which only becomes a necessity if one wants to be a part of a circle or a system that is built that way.

This is why I have faith in traditional arts. They have a longstanding record that what is done has actual impacts on local society. This is why revitalization is needed. It feels, for us the younger generation of the indigenous folk, that we're living in this grey area that is perhaps a turbulent place. When talking about local traditions or identity, we are rootless, but we are also unable to take root in the face of modernity, globalization, or the new knowledge that comes with contemporary art. I also believe that traditional arts is anything but stagnant. It is, instead, a process that finds new values and new ends, something that can be done and seen with the contexts of today.

B.S.: I'm fascinated with Lakoat.Kujawas' commitment to traditional arts, and what you said that arts need to remain connected to the past. I recall Hilmar Farid⁷ and the Law on the Advancement of Culture on traditional arts. One challenge of maintaining or preserving traditional arts is that, alright, there are people who still remember the form of the art, the rituals, dances, and outfits, but the context surrounding the art itself is lost. For example, there are harvest rituals here in Jatiwangi, but cultivated lands keep dwindling in size to make way for housing projects, factories, and other infrastructures. Jatiwangi is currently in the trajectory of becoming urbanized, at the expense of agrarian culture slowly becoming a memory of our past. These developments will eventually lead to what we currently call as traditional culture, which includes the aforementioned harvest rituals, to completely disappear maybe within 50 years as it will have already lost its context. We can imagine a plethora of traditional arts that we aim to preserve, but whose context is already lost, will cease to exist, and will merely become a spectacle for museum collections. What makes Lakoat.Kujawas interesting is that as you are attempting to revitalize these traditional arts, you are also trying to conjure those lost contexts into the present. For us, these daily practices, the ones that are connected to the past

7. Hilmar Farid is the Director General for Culture, Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia. Hilmar's background is that of a historian, activist and lecturer. In 2002, Hilmar founded and led the Indonesian Institute of Social History until 2007.

and have the capacity to revive contexts, are important. This is because we're also facing the same danger of simply exalting traditional arts and romanticising the past, especially that we've grown up with such a modern culture.

During the pandemic, we have collectively come to this realization that the values and ways of life that we have been living are not nature-friendly nor sustainable. This made us start to refer to the ideal values lived by indigenous communities such as, say, Cipta Gelar, but whose meaning and practices we still find hard to grasp because our context is lost. Once again, what we can learn from Lakoat.Kujawas is how you revive those contexts into the present — be it by re-establishing and catering the community garden, putting together local ingredients, or creating a market by selling them in contemporary forms such as sourdough bread and fermented drinks. I interpret how you relate to the past as not simply taking elements from it, but also bringing them back in a performative manner. It is, indeed, not an easy endeavor but rather a challenging one, and you managed to find a way to navigate it. As I have said earlier, viewing traditional arts devoid of the contexts will only create new problems.

I.M.: In my opinion, how our friends in Lakoat.Kujawas' attempt to present or renew a certain context does fall under the banner of artistic practice. When you folks try to look into the past, due to the need of documenting local knowledge instead of bringing in new things that could baffle the local residents, it is actually a method of dialogue that caters to the specific regional context and needs that you have — by tracing the past, and reconnecting a cultural identity with the regional context that it generates.

Here, in Jatiwangi, we employ a completely different method of dialogue, a complete opposite. Jatiwangi has a long history of being an industrial society. In general, it is devoid of tradition, and we're completely scattered as a community. So what we do is to introduce the residents with new things that they don't find in their daily lives via contemporary art. Previously, the people that would come to Jatiwangi were only brokers that tried tapping into the roof market or labourers looking to work. Through the introduction of contemporary art, residents now engage with all types of new people: artists, researchers, filmmakers, architects, etc. Providing them with this kind of novelty or surprise is how we start a dialogue. Quite similar to what has been employed by LabTanya who dwell in an urban setting and live in a housing complex. Their background as architects and designers also determine how they engage with the local populace. For me, these ways of initiating dialogue are relevant when we talk about the difference between artistic practices. How extraneous a specific art is to the daily lives of people in a specific geographical setting, and how they unravel the encounter are actually artistic strategies employed by the artist themselves.

B.S.: Yes, it is intriguing to see both Lakoat.Kujawas and Jatiwangi art Factory employing completely different artistic strategies. What has been done in Jatiwangi is creating new traditions by creating new musical instruments, new festivals, new rituals, etc. On the other hand, Lakoat recontextualizes traditions that have already taken place in the day-to-day life of local people, or, in Dicky's terms, revitalizes them. It's not only preservation in the sense of merely documenting, but by giving them a new expression that is currently not only meaningful to the people of Mollo, but also to society at large. I see this as a cultural strategy.

I am still curious about these strategies, because you did mention that bringing in something new can lead to a clash with the arts that already exist in daily life. This requires a more open strategy. Dwelling in our shells without trying to widen access, networks, and experiences will eventually be detrimental to the progress of what has already been initiated. So, what is the strategy?

D.S.: The answer to that is related to the strategy of recontextualizing traditions that we've been talking about by providing a new context or space. In terms of art and the traditions here in Mollo, many were lost due to, for example, the conversion of community forests for industrial cultivation, or to human trafficking that is actually a direct ramification of the state seizing communal lands. A lot of these developments have a direct impact on the loss of Mollo's heritage, as both their arts and traditions are highly intertwined with ecology. The traditions that flourished here stem from how they inscribe meaning to their lands, rocks, and water. So, the art forms that come out are also closely related to the elements of nature. It's true that we have to establish a strong foothold. We have to possess strong roots, yet also be able to respond to whatever comes from the outside.

For example, we have the Skol Tamolok program. If you see it using the vantage point of the present, it's like a school where people learn about their culture but it actually also comes from the past. Previously, the people of Mollo already had these spaces to learn, which usually happens during harvest season and eventually disappears. These spaces have now reappeared with a new approach, very much faithful to the vigor of tradition that persists in the memory of Mollo's people. So, the residents do not see it as something foreign. They don't see learning their culture as something NGOs approached them to do, or some cultural project by the government, but as something they once did when they were children by gathering together and sharing stories.

Another example is our archival space. We try to bridge this with the tradition of Ma'fefa, or what we would currently call as Mollo people's own journalists back in the day. This person acts as a messenger who remembers stories and would share them everywhere, informing people of the events that occurred in the village within a year. This figure obviously does not exist anymore; but it is the spirit of Ma'fefa that we try to revitalize in our archiving work. In the end, we symbolize our archiving work as one that the Ma'fefa would do themselves. We borrow the names that the people can remember as something familiar. This is also what we are currently trying to do as we are establishing our archive of local seeds after documenting folklores, legends, and fables that we write down and keep in our library. The concept underlying this archive/library of local seeds is also derived by the granaries and practices of food preservation that have been around for quite some time within the Mollo community. The building itself looks like a circular hut, similar to the honai in Papua, and it houses all the local knowledge of food preservation. We are trying to build this traditional hut, but this hut does not function as it was typically used back then. We have, instead, adjusted it to the present, so that it serves as some kind of library not only for keeping books but also for keeping a variety of seeds. This might be seen as an artistic or cultural strategy that we must employ. It might also be part of the creation of a new culture. It's like what we talked about earlier. It's our response, as a generation in Mollo, to see and understand our own times.

(The conversation was cut short due to a power outage on Dicky's end in East Nusa Tenggara.)



● Willy

● Wok The Rock

DIY Ethos and Collective as an Organizational Structure

Wok The Rock

Wok The Rock is an artist active across the fields of contemporary art, design and music. He is a member of artist collective Ruang MES 56 in Yogyakarta, runs the music label Yes No Wave Music, initiated the Indonesia Netaudio Forum and co-curator of Nusasonic, a platform for experimental music and sound in Southeast Asia, Europe and beyond. He was the curator of Biennale Jogja XIII in 2015. He is interested in developing an experimentation of collective platform, interdisciplinary works, contemporary cultural intervention using curatorial aesthetic and speculative approach as his artistic practice.

Willy Chen Wei-Lun

Chen Wei-Lun is the member of Trapped Citizen, a collective organizing events such as music performance, movie screening, and discussion based on Do-It-Together ethos. He is also the member of a woodcut print collective

called Print & Carve Dept.. He organizes punk gigs and events under the pseudonym Suck Glue Boys. His main interest is in collective creating and how democracy and equality are realized through that process.

Trapped Citizen

Trapped Citizen is a collective that celebrates and promotes DIY & DIT (Do It Together) ethos in Taipei, Taiwan. As a fledgeling collective starting in 2015, Trapped Citizen has organized guerrilla outdoor music performance, and collaborated with evicted community to hold exhibitions. In 2017, Trapped Citizen started to run a collective space in Dazhi, Taipei, and organize events such as film screenings, discussions and workshops there.

Trapped Citizen believes that one can make solidarity through similarity and learn from difference, and always aims to respond to the reality through art and music.



Willy Chen Wei-Lun

Date: December 2, 2020

As a member of Trapped Citizen, an artist and music group based in Taipei, I consider the concept of collective not only as a way of mutual aid by which creators share the rent and support each other but also as a way of creating. Members get inspiration in the collective space by everyday idle talk or through formal meetings. I discuss with Wok, member of Mes 56 and Yes No Music, about how punk culture and DIY ethos influence both of us, and how to generate ideas via seemingly pointless hangouts.

1. Gonlishe is a punk collective based in Taipei and disbanded in 2011. Gonlishe aimed to realize the ethos of punk in Taiwan through mutual-aid and collaboration.

Prologue: Punk Scene and the Do-It-Together Ethos

WOK: So, have you been to Jogja before?

Willy: Yes. In 2017, I took a trip to Indonesia. By that time, my purpose was to make interviews with collectives of artists and punk houses. I wanted to interview collectives because I also organize a collective in Taipei, which is known as Trapped Citizen. It is a collective of punks, musicians, and visual artists. We rent a two-story house as our collective space. Trapped Citizen is my second collective, and the previous one was called Gonlishe,¹ which means “Do it Together” in Mandarin.

I started this punk collective ten years ago after I went to Jakarta and Medan. By that time, the punk community relied on a social media platform called Myspace to interact with international friends. You could use Myspace to get to know many punks around the world. I met some punks in Indonesia and got a job as a Mandarin teacher in Medan, though my main purpose was really to visit punk friends there.

In Medan, I explored the local street punk scene and met friends from CK-CK collective, which was a more political and activist punk collective. CK-CK organized gigs in rural areas, such as Food Not Bomb, wherein they provided free vegan food to the poor, and had a solidarity event on May Day to support workers. Then, I went to Jakarta and stayed in Institut-A, an anarchist collective. I also met friends from Ponti,² a DIY punk collective. I was inspired by their DIY ethos and decided to organize a collective in Taiwan.

In 2017, I co-authored a zine called Bersama (Figure 1),³ which means “together” in Bahasa Indonesia. It is a visual and text log including interviews with collectives, such as punk collectives Ponti and Taring Babi in Jakarta, and Rumah Pirata⁴ in Bandung, as well as woodcut print artist collective Taring Padi, and also art spaces like Survive! in Jogja.

WOK: How is the punk scene in Taipei?

Willy: Compared to Indonesia, Taiwan is a relatively small island with a population of 23 million. The local punk scene is small — friends know each other. In Indonesia, there are many punk scenes in the city, such as the street punk scene, Oi! scene, or crust scene etc. The punk scenes are diverse, with Jogja having the biggest noise and experimental music scene in Asia. Friends in the noise scene were primarily influenced by punk and metal music.

Last October, we organized a guerilla gig under a bridge, where we invited friends from the noise scene and punk bands to play together. We don't have that many bands nor a big scene. So, we said: why don't we make a gig together, and it doesn't matter if you are a punk or a noise fan.

WOK: I like small scenes, because people know and support each other. How are the noise artists in Taipei? Did they come from the punk or metal scene?



2. <https://youtu.be/GfiZKz4DFyqs>

3. <https://hardcash0917.wixsite.com/bersama>

4. <https://youtu.be/eFOeLeF57Vw>

5. Berserk is a harsh noise artist from Taipei, Taiwan
 (<https://youtu.be/CNf1oq3j59pY>)

Willy: Some of them did. There is an artist called Berserk⁵ who listened to punk music when he was young. He makes harsh noise with the spirit of punk.



Figure 1

WOK: In Indonesia, most experimental musicians came from punk, death metal, or hardcore scene. This is why there is a close connection between the noise and punk scenes; but things are changing now. Some bands only play punk music, and nothing else. People used to know each other: experimental musicians went to punk gigs, and vice versa. It was in the early 2000^s, when the situation was similar to the one in Taipei: the scene was small and music genres were intertwined. Kids played different kinds of music.

From 2002 to 2004, the experimental music scene was rather small, even in Jogja, but the punk scene was already quite big in Indonesia. It started in the early 90^s, got bigger in the late 90^s, and finally expanded to many cities in the 2000^s.

As you say, there are so many styles and subcultures in punk. Some are open to other kinds of music, while others keep their traditions in terms of music.

In 2004, I hung out in the punk scene. Then, I started to want something more. I met some people who were just like me. Together with them, we went to explore something beyond punk. That's why we started to play experimental music. It started with post-punk, of course, then to noise and elsewhere.

Willy: In 2004, you started to make experimental music. It was more than 15 years ago. When I met you in 2017, it was my first time in Jogja. Then, the noise scene in Jogja was already very big with many artists. Maybe you can give me a brief introduction of the scene you belong to? For example, Mes 56 and Jogja Noise Bombing. Maybe you can also give me details about your role in these communities.

WOK: I came from a small city in East Java, which is three hours away from Jogja. After graduation, I moved to Jogja to study art. In 1994, at the time that punk had just started in Jogja, I began to learn about DIY and punk as a movement; before that, punk was just fashion and music. We wanted to turn punk into a political movement, a way of life, and to be more concerned with culture.

So, we started a collective, which also ended up being a hangout place. We made zines, organized gigs, and started a record label that released Oi! and punk music.

Then, in 2002 or 2003, I got bored with the scene. I wanted more. In the early 2000s, there was another group who was into subcultures, and had particular interest in Thrash metal and other kinds of music. More and more people started to make experimental music and harsh noise — Senyawa⁶ was also part of it.

Eventually, my friend and I made the movie “Running to Nowhere,” which was my final contribution to the punk scene. After which, I then moved forward and jumped into the art scene. This is why we started Mes 56: an art collective with DIY and punk attitudes and ideologies.

By then, I was more into art than the music scene. In 2007, I went back to the music scene and started Yes No Wave Music,⁷ which is a label that distributes music via free download at a time when the internet first became very popular.

In Indonesia, no one who is into music bought CDs; they just exchanged MP3s — I got inspired by this phenomenon. We supported bands by sharing their music. That’s why I started this label of sharing culture: free to share and free to mix, a way of democratizing the music industry. From Yes No Wave Music², I wanted to continue my punk label and release punk music. However, almost every band I wanted to release didn’t agree with the concept of free downloads, which made me upset and disappointed at punk. Only one band wanted to join our label and they were Marjinal.

6. <https://senyawaofficial.bandcamp.com/>

7. <http://yesnowave.com/>

I then decided to get over punk, and, instead, release all kinds of music as long as the musician agrees with the free download principle. So, there are not that many noise musicians on my label.

By 2007 and 2008, I got a lot of submissions from experimental musicians, even though the scene was actually dying because there weren't that many artists, and many bands had split up.

In 2010, my friend and I wanted to activate the experimental music scene again because we thought everything that came from Jogja was shit — this was nothing new. In 2010 as well, I started a monthly experimental music event called Yes No Klub. Its aim was to trigger people to experiment with a new style of music.

In Yes/No Klub, there were not only experimental bands and noise musicians, but also became a space for anyone interested in experimentation. For example, I got a pop band who wanted to experiment with something new. The event at the beginning was very small — only 10 people came — but they were very open-minded. They created their own bands, and started a new collective — this is where Jogja Noise Bombing came from. They were my primary audience at the beginning.

Senyawa's first performance also happened at my event. First, I invited Wukir to play, then I asked Rully to join on stage. Right when Wukir played and I was preparing the mic for Rully, I said, "You can do anything you want." Rully came on stage and did his crazy vocals. After that, they made Senyawa.

Many new bands eventually came up, and the event is now bigger. That's my relationship with the experimental music scene in Jogja.

Willy: How many events has Yes No Klub organized?

WOK: About 40.

Willy: Where and how did Yes No Klub events happen?

WOK: One time, we collaborated with the Jogja National Museum. I knew the director, and asked him if I could organize an event there. There was an underground space, which was very small but which I really liked. So, I asked the director if I can use that place — crazy music happened there once a month!

I organized a Yes No Klub with another friend. There are only two of us. We used our own money to rent the PA, and pay for the electricity. Until now, we still

organize events this way. Of course, we did some paid projects. For example, we collaborated with an Australian organization, and organized an event for them once a year where experimental artists were invited to Jogja for a residency. We used that money to organize more shows and workshops.

Inspiration from Everyday Hangouts, and Having a Collective Working Structure

Willy: How many members are there in Yes No Klub?

WOK: 5.

Willy: How do you work together?

WOK: It's very simple. It was like working in a team. Tim and I curate the program: we come up with the ideas and curate the bands. Sometimes Tim has his own idea and, other times, I have mine — so it will be Tim's or my own curation. Sometimes we ask volunteers to help. Then, I make the graphic design for posters, and Tim helps post them on social media and the website.

In my opinion, Yes No Klub is not a collective; instead, it is more like a group of organizers. It is not a formal organization: we don't have an office, a structure, or a working schedule. We are just a group of people with similar interests. We gather when we want to make an event — everyone is a volunteer.

The way we split the ticket sales is that it first goes to the group, because it is them who make this happen; then to the artists/musicians. Tim and I don't get any profit. Sometimes, when we got sponsors, we split the money more equally and formally. It was all very organic.

Willy: In your opinion, what's the difference between a collective, and a group like Yes No Klub?

WOK: For me, in a collective, work is the main theme. You work and decide everything together, which can be very rigid even if the sense of collaboration is strong. A group is more of individuals in a space. You don't have to work collaboratively, and there is no structure — it's more direct.

A group of individuals work individually that sometimes work together.

For example, Mes 56 as a collective manages everything together: from conception of ideas to how we want to do events and art projects. We have to discuss everything together. When we organize events, everyone has to be there. We also have to collectively take care of the house, where some of us also reside in.

Willy: So, do you consider Mes 56 a collective?

WOK: Yes.

In Mes 56, we have a structure and directors. We have an exhibition director, and a commercial director. We have a system of working that is more collaborative and horizontal. We need directors because none of us is good at organization. We also like to drink everyday — we are wild people — so we need individuals to direct and organize everyone.

Willy: How many people are there in Mes 56 now?

WOK: 20.

Willy: That's a lot. How often do you meet?

WOK: Almost everyday. Some members even live in the house. Even though some people have their own families, Mes 56 is still their main home. Sometimes our wives complain about this: we spend more time in Mes 56 than at home.

Everyday there are around a dozen people in Mes 56, hanging out or doing their own work.

Willy: You do seem to spend a lot of time in the space. So, how do you work together in Mes 56? You don't really rely on formal meetings, do you? When you want to organize a project, how do you manage to do it? How do you realize an idea after it comes up?

WOK: In Mes 56, 60% of the ideas come from hanging out. The space is like a cafe or a bar. We get ideas when we get drunk, when we just say, "Yes! Let's do it."

Every Friday is our weekly meeting, where we present to each other ideas we got during the week. These meetings are more formal. We present our ideas, and then decide how to make it, including asking who will be responsible for each project.

During this weekly meeting, we also evaluate our ongoing projects. The person-in-charge needs to present how the project has been doing and what's next — it's actually as simple as that.

People need to understand that initiative is a priority, as we are not going to appoint someone and say, "You have to do this." Everyone does it from the bottom of their hearts. The decision is made collectively, and not by directors whose job is just to make things more organized. Directors are not decision makers. In 2020, we had 3 directors because no one wants to be the sole director.

It's never easy. Since 2002 up until now, we have always thought about how we work. Every two years, we change the way we work, changing our organizational methods in the process. At first, we adopted a very organized and formal method, but it did not work. We change our processes over and over until it's no longer working. Our current module is that there is someone who's responsible for every section and program, but we don't know what will happen in the next two years.

There has been no fee since the beginning — everyone just works because they want to do it. We made this collective to pursue our own practices, and have a place to work with friends — that's the intention. It's not an office; we just all work voluntarily.

Willy: You have 20 members. Do all members have their daily jobs to make a living?

WOK: We have 7 formal officers, such as program directors and co-directors. The rest of us just work for certain programs. If there's no program, people work as artists and use Mes 56 as their studio or a place to hang out.

Willy: What are the programs that Mes 56 are running?

WOK: We have a cinema, commercial projects, exhibitions, workshops, and merchandise.

Willy: What's the workshop program?

WOK: It is related to photography and video. We have a dark room. Sometimes it will be a theory workshop, where people give lectures about aesthetics, theories, politics, economy etc.

Willy: I am amazed that nobody gets paid in Mes 56.

WOK: Not only in Mes 56. In Jogja, it's very common. You sometimes even have to pay for the electricity.

It's like social work, you know? It's your social intention: everyone has their own job. For example, I work as a designer, and also receive some money from music curation. For me, it's my social contribution to society.

Willy: In Taiwan, artists sometimes apply for government or private funding. But that's not the situation in Jogja, am I right?

WOK: Not only in Jogja, but for the entirety of Indonesia. There is no government funding, and artists have to find money on their own. Even as a painter, he or she has to find another day job.

Actually, the situation has changed. We now have a Creative Art Industry Department, which is a government body. It provides some grants for artists. That's why we have money to rent the house. We have applied for that funding, but it's not that a lot. Also, the officers working in the department don't really know what they are doing — it's always a disaster.

For example, two months ago, there was an open call for artists, and the money was quite big. Artists only have two months to finish the project, including the final report — it's crazy. They don't know how to organize exhibitions. They don't come from the arts nor do they have cultural backgrounds. It's just people who work for the government.

Jogja as a City of Happening

Willy: You have obviously lived in Jogja for many years. Why do so many things happen in Jogja?

WOK: Jogja has a very strong culture. In Jogja, there is still a monarchy. We have a king (sultan). The governor of Jogja is the king. There are no elections. In Indonesia, Jogja is the only place that does not elect their governor.

We still have this monarchy that keeps the tradition going, which is why traditional art and culture is very strong. Food and housing are also affordable, even though rent is rising. And there's also an art university, Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta, considered to be one of the best in Indonesia, and many other universities. That's why people all over Indonesia come to Jogja to study.

15 years ago, Jogja was very nice: it's a big city with the culture of villages. That's why people are more open to talk, always smiling and generous. I moved to Jogja because of the generosity. And, of course, culture and art is super strong here. Even the divide between juniors and seniors is not strong; it's more equal.

Now, it has changed. People are now questioning the basics, such as why the minimum wage here is the lowest in Indonesia. The government is also doing tourism, which has caused a lot of problems. For example: to build the new international airport, the government had to evict people. Many houses were removed, and their lands were sold to investors who are building hotels with swimming pools. The communities in the area cannot get water because of this. Jogja, I will say, is at its worst now — a lot of demonstrations have happened in the past two years.

Solidarity During a Pandemic

Willy: I want to discuss the COVID-19 pandemic. Since January 2020, Taiwan has been going through this. Consequently, foreign bands and international artists cannot get into Taiwan. We are starting to see its impacts with, for example, some musical venues barely surviving.

In Mes 56 and Jogja, there used to be many foreign artists and bands. How has this been affected by the pandemic?

WOK: Of course, there are no international artists coming to Jogja because they are not allowed to. People are instead doing online events on Instagram, Facebook, Zoom, or Youtube.

But since the beginning of the pandemic, the government has just wanted to save the economy — to the point that they have forgotten about healthcare. There's actually no lockdown in Indonesia. We have measures similar to a

lockdown, but which only applies for people working in offices or schools. In Jogja, we have a lockdown, but it's initiated by the communities, and not by the government.

We have to do it on our own, because the government does not have a lockdown policy. They don't support the people. For example: when the government said that restaurants cannot open, they are supposed to give people basic support, like providing free electricity or distributing rice. When the government isn't doing anything, people get angry because they cannot run the businesses nor do they get financial support. That's why the restaurants still remain open regardless, and people still work. It has been 8 months, and people are living in precarity. Now, people don't really care about COVID-19 any longer.

Since the beginning, my family and friends have been doing "Food Solidarity" — a program of giving food to lower class communities. This way, we also get to support the people running restaurants, as we pay for their food and distribute it to people who are really in need, people working on the streets.

Friends in other collectives are also doing similar initiatives that provide free distribution of food. A funny instance was when the police came and raided us. They said, "You have to stop because what you are doing is communist practice." They made up their own stories, but we fought against it, and still continue doing it.

We understood why the police raided us; it's because they are doing nothing.

Many artists' spaces have been doing solidarity projects, such as distributing free masks, free food, and free education since the start of the pandemic. Up until now, Mes 56 has an open kitchen that runs everyday. This is so that if people need food, they can come and eat.

I will say the pandemic made us busier. We've had so many programs since it started.

After two months of working on our own projects in the height of the pandemic, Wok and I decided to catch up via whatsapp to share our past practices and how they relate to DIY Ethos and collectivism.

[2021/1/21]

Willy Chen: morning

I am ready.

we can start whenever you are ready 12:10

wok the rock: yo

I'm a bit hangover XD 12:11

Willy Chen: hahaha

12:11

wok the rock: I had an annual meeting for Mes 56 yesterday long meeting during the day, then drinking party the whole night 12:12**Willy Chen:** sounds fun 12:13**wok the rock:** yup 12:13**Willy Chen:** miss the time when I was at Mes 56.

really nice space 12:14

wok the rock: do you consider your self an artist? XD 12:19**Willy Chen:** Actually, no. XD 12:19

My production is not considered art, in my opinion. 12:20

What I'm involved in and dedicate myself to is organizing collectives 12:21

wok the rock: but in most of your events, what you organize are art activities 12:22**Willy Chen:** I want to create a space and an atmosphere that every member can take part in. 12:22

Yes. In that sense, maybe I am an artist. XD 12:23

Willy Chen: My production is the events I've organized. 12:24

wok the rock: organizing people's activities, and creating an atmosphere is artistic practice in my opinion. 12:24

wok the rock: most of my latest works since 2010 are like that 12:24

like how I made a bar for my residence in Yokohama 12:25

Willy Chen: How was that project? What was your aim? 12:26

wok the rock: the idea was to create a social hub in the community where people who live in a super small flat can come to meet up, bring their own meal/drinks, or even cook for free. 12:25

you can check some of my works here: <https://www.woktherock.net> 12:27

<https://www.woktherock.net/post/620165794938175489/yoyo-art-bar> 12:30

<https://youtu.be/QSbYscwWBOg> 12:31

Willy Chen: The idea of a Social Bar is excellent — to create a temporary space where people can interact. It's like you moved the courtyard of Mes 56 to Japan. On the other hand, it is not a typical bar — interaction of all walks of life is the point. 12:40

It reminds me of the Nantoka Bar in Tokyo. https://www.instagram.com/nantoka_bar/ 12:40

Though it is close now. It was created by the members of Amateur's Riot, a community based in Koenji, Tokyo. 12:41

wok the rock: the guy who made Nantoka came to my bar before they made their bar. 12:41

we talked a lot about social hubs. 12:41

I was very happy that they then made the bar 12:41

with a similar concept, but they added business value to extend their existence 12:42

Willy Chen: They would have a different host (bartender) every night. The hosts come from different backgrounds — no profession all bartenders. And all kinds of people come there to chat. 12:43

wok the rock: I went to meet them again in Koenji in 2018 12:43

Willy Chen: I remember that they went to Indonesia the same year? 12:45

wok the rock: yes 12:45

Willy Chen: Some of our members were also with them at the time. 12:45

wok the rock: in my opinion, an alternative to or a speculation in doing social works is an artistic practice 12:46

in this way, art can be closer to the people

12:46

Willy Chen: Agree.

wok the rock: even though the people can be confused when we say it's art hahahaha 12:47

Willy Chen: true. 12:47

Willy Chen: You achieved your aim though
— to let art be closer to the people. 12:51

Willy Chen: Yes. They also have a system
to sustain the bar: a person needs to pay

wok the rock: so, my bar was intended
to be an art project because I'm
working for an art institution 12:48

while Nantoka transformed it into
one that is more "accessible" to people
12:48

my bar has 0 income. everything is
free. but I only had 3 months to run it,
and I got money to run it through a
commission. that's why it's all very
loose, if we talk about continuing
without funding 12:50

wok the rock: Nantoka learned about
this when they visited my bar. because
Nantoka has no external funding, they
had to add the commercial aspect to
make it sustainable 12:51

that's why when I visited Nantoka in
2018, I was very excited 12:52

i'm very happy that the idea of pushing
for social relations in a super individu-
alized society worked out 12:53

while keeping the business as well
12:53

i think your space is in the same
situation 12:54

compared to Mes 56 where Indonesian
people are more communal 12:54

the rent of the day, to be the host. The host prepares the drinks and the food. Then income belongs to the host. So, it is a mutual-aid project, I think. 12:55

wok the rock: exactly 12:55

Willy Chen: Yes. And in a certain way, I think the current practices of a collective or a community here was influenced by Amateur's Riot. 12:57

i.e. the importance of space as a social hub. The horizontal structure of a collective. The intention of creating an event (art) to interrupt the normal state of a society. 12:59

wok the rock: yup 13:00

Willy Chen: The community that Trapped Citizen belongs to met Amateur's Riot in 2011 when the Fukushima Nuclear Disaster happened. 13:00

wok the rock: what is Amateur's Riot? ah the Shiroto-no-ran collective? 13:03

Willy Chen: Amateur's Riot is a community in Tokyo. They are a group of owners of a secondhand shop, host of an infoshop, musicians etc. 13:03

Yes. 13:04

wok the rock: I didn't know their English name hahaha 13:04

Willy Chen: :D 13:04

wok the rock: how did you meet them? in Japan? 13:05

Willy Chen: In 2011, after the disaster,

Amateur's Riot organized a demonstration in Koenji. They put a sound system on a truck and invited DJs and punk bands to perform on the truck. Tens of thousands of people joined the demo. It was like a carnival, instead of a traditional march organized by NGOs. 13:07

<http://www.timeout.jp/en/tokyo/event/1492/Anti-Nuclear-Power-Plants-Super-Huge-Demo> 13:08

wok the rock: you joined the event?

13:08

Willy Chen: <https://vimeo.com/27484408> 13:11

At the same time, here in Taiwan, NGOs also organized a series of demos. Young friends gathered in a cafe called G Straight to discuss the demo. It was when members of Amateur Riot came to Taiwan. 13:14

wok the rock: ah I see 13:14

Willy Chen: That's when the connection between two communities started. 13:14

So, friends in G straight, musicians, artists etc. organized sound system trucks for the demo, and invited bands and DJs to play on the truck. Gonlishe, my collective then, also partook in the demo. 13:16

wok the rock: demo is not easy to do in Japan; but if you make it in cultural or artistic way, it can work out 13:18

[2021/1/21 13:18:58]

Willy Chen: <https://youtu.be/wPHzfFCzQK8>

wok the rock: like what Shiroto-noran did. they do protests through an artistic-cultural way, and even in

business way 13:19
for me, it's very smart 13:19

Willy Chen: True.13:19
<https://youtu.be/P8ejcmyrKEU> 13:19

wok the rock: this reminds me of my project for the Jakarta Biennale, where I invited some punks to clean up a convenience store and raise an anarchy flag <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZYxstnmJud8&t=16s>
13:24

Willy Chen: Looks very interesting! 13:26

wok the rock: the idea is to rethink punk as a political movement, and the position of activist and artist within labor practice

<https://trashsquad.tumblr.com> 13:27

some shops were very happy, but some were mad because we took over their duties 13:28

some anarcho punks were against it because this project was funded by the cultural ministry (government) and they didn't want to 'work' for corporation (the shop) 13:30

Willy Chen: So, this happened in 2011 when a series of demos politicalized a young generation of artists and musicians. When they came to the streets and realized that the traditional march wasn't very useful, they tried to take part in protests and the social movement in their own way. 13:30

wok the rock: what about now? I mean, when your practice became

Willy Chen: Yes. 13:31

common way for the punks 13:31

wok the rock: are there any new challenges? 13:33

Willy Chen: By that time, there was a tension in the punk community. Gonlishe represented the punk-as-a-movement aspect, while others were not comfortable with punk being involved in the social movement. Those punks became apolitical. So, at the time, it was a period of divergence and split. 13:34

Then, it became a fight even in Gonlishe itself. Some members felt the burden of political correctness and didn't want to create art of propaganda. X'D 13:37

By art of propaganda, I mean, art with direct political messages. 13:38

then Gonlishe split... 13:38

That was in 2011. 13:38

So Trapped Citizen (TC) started in 2015. I am not an original member. I joined TC in 2017. 13:39

wok the rock: does TC have a different direction than Gonlsihe? 13:40

Willy Chen: Yes. 13:40

wok the rock: what's the difference? 13:40

Willy Chen: First, TC has a collective space as a social hub. That is important to maintain a community. 13:41

wok the rock: sure 13:43

Willy Chen: Second, it became less rigid. TC is a collective of ten to twenty persons; not just punks but also musicians, artists and friends. 13:45

Instead of promoting a certain kind of political art of punk, I will say TC now is more flexible. 13:49



Image from 2017 “Do it Together!”: a forum sharing the experiences of Do it Together in four places: Tokyo, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Taiwan.

The event took place right after a two-day free for all music festival “Trapped Citizen Riot”, which took place at a newly rented space of Trapped Citizen in Dazhi, Taipei. We invited D.I.Y. activists that traveled from elsewhere to Taipei together with the music bands to organize a forum and share their practices.

The initial wish is not to simply host interesting underground gigs. What we truly care and anticipate is to enable friends practicing D.I.Y. to have an in-depth conversation regarding their respective experiences in the music scenes. By sharing these local perspectives, we can then explore the limitations and challenges together, ultimately opening-up and connecting possibilities of the notion of D.I.T. (Do It Together) between D.I.Y. music collectives across East Asia nations.

wok the rock: is TC doing more direct political protests or are they doing it in a cultural manner? 13:49

for example, my works in Trash Squad is an indirect political act 13:52

Willy Chen: Not really, though I still think that is important. TC now takes more time to discuss how art and music really works. Sometimes art with a direct message is powerful but not really useful. So, it needs to consider its context. 13:53

Willy Chen: <https://daguanghomeless101.wixsite.com/home/blog> 13:55

wok the rock: agree 13:53

wok the rock: after ten years of doing socially engaged art projects, I think social movement in art is not sustainable since it has a particular time frame 13:55

I prefer to do a social movement in a very informal and slow process. I'm an artist. I mean, a person with imagination and experimental ideas, so anything I do would be artistic 13:57

In March, 2020, Trapped Citizen organized "Scream for the City! In solidarity with Wuhan"

2018 Trapped Citizen invited Chinese punk band SMZB for the first time to Taiwan for a tour. "This song is for you. Hope you can visit Wuhan some time!" was what the vocalist of SMZB Wu Wei said, offering an invitation to his fans waving passionately at him before he sang the song "Big Wuhan."

In January, 2020, the pandemic resulted in the Wuhan lockdown. During that period, through internet and friends' Wechat, we learned about the pain and uncertainty of our friends and the local citizens. We wanted to do something for friends in Wuhan regardless if we know them or not.

During the event, we prepared woodcuts with the slogan "Scream for the City! In solidarity with Wuhan" for people to print on site. We also did a video chat with the members of SMZB to learn about the situation in Wuhan. (image courtesy: Trapped Citizen)



Willy Chen: For example, TC organizes a fest with an evicted community. The aim was not

to make an art project to accuse the government; instead, we were thinking about making connections. How to create events to make ordinary people come to the community. We organized music gigs, woodcut print exhibitions, movie screening etc. in the community. 13:58

<https://www.facebook.com/trappedcitizen/videos/2253893307970847> 13:59



In August, 2020, Trapped Citizen invited June & Lenny, the members of legendary Hong Kong band Black Bird, to give a performance. In February, 2020, Trapped Citizen renovated their existing space and re-debuted as Trapped Citizen 2.0. The ground floor is designed for screening and lectures. The basement can be used for rehearsals or unplugged shows.

Since 2020, the cost and managing of the space is partially shared between Trapped Citizen, No-nonsense Collective and Print & Carve Dept. (image courtesy: Thomas Pang)

wok the rock: true! 14:00
and how is it now? 14:01

Willy Chen: Now, the community is evicted and demolished. :(14:02

wok the rock: damn 14:02
what is the plan then? 14:03

Willy Chen: The people had to move to other places. The community no longer exists, I think. 14:04

The other project TC did is dB Tests. 14:04

<https://www.facebook.com/1211738852186303/videos/2212112255482286> 14:06

Willy Chen: It was a series of guerilla outdoor music performances without permission. 14:07

yes. 14:07

Daguan residents singing during the “Battle Song Against Eviction” during the “dB Test Vol.2.”

Daguan Community was a former welfare center consisting of mostly retired military veterans and their family members. It formed as a non-official residence area during the time of developmental state. The people lived here for more than sixty years. The community has successfully built up its own security network by taking care of each other.

Daguan Community has been taking care of countless political and city immigrants due to the inability of the government. Such a historical settlement that enables the marginalized to take shelter are nonetheless subject to demolition and oblivion. Since 2016, Daguan Self-Help Association has been consistently fighting and sending petitions to countless agencies. However, what they had to face was an official order for enforcement. (image courtesy: Daguan Homeless)



wok the rock: what is this?
a street gig? 14:07

wok the rock: did you have to face the
security/police? 14:08

Willy Chen: Not really. It was at the
riverside park. 14:09
People ride bicycles and take a walk here.

wok the rock: what if they come to you?
14:09

Willy Chen: We will make an excuse, haha. 14:10
Actually, we were prepared to argue with
authorities. To say it was a public space,
so everyone should have the right to use
it, including organizing a free music gig.

It is not about laws and rules, but about communication. If other people also wanted to use the space and thought we were causing a problem, we were willing to discuss things with these people to find a solution. To make a consensus. 14:12

That's the intention of the project. People tend to follow the rules; and when something happens and seems to interrupt the rules, people usually call the police. But we wanted to challenge that. 14:14

Willy Chen: There is no need for the police to interrupt. We can discuss and find a solution. That's the autonomous spirit. 14:15



In June, 2018, Trapped Citizen co-organized dB Test Vol.2 with Daguang Community who were subjected to forced eviction.

Event description of dB Test Vol.2: Just as the desire to voice up cannot be limited to a formal music stage, the will to survive does not simply retreat due to the oppression covered by so-called governmental law and ownership. We still believe in this: everyone has the right to imagine and make use of the urban space. Hence we firmly refuse to let the state apparatus and capital powers decide for us on what our city should look like. Through this dB Test, we invite everyone to come to Daguang Community on June 23 to wander around the community and listen. (image courtesy: Daguang Homeless)



In December, 2018, after the crisis temporarily paused, we reorganized "Resist from the Cracks: Daguang Festival" in order to sustain the energy of the resistance movement. With a series of music performances, talks, documentary screenings and wood-block print exhibits, we wish to invite ordinary people to visit the community and understand the historical context of the controversies of Daguang's forced eviction. (image courtesy: Daguang Homeless)

Willy Chen: hahaha 14:22

In 2018, Trapped Citizen organized “dB Test Vol.1” at Riverside Park under Yongfu Bridge. Noise Test is a guerrilla performance which aims to loosen the order of our public space. We moved our music equipment to Riverside Park, where the public spend their leisure time during the holidays, in order to stimulate dialogue. The intervention seeks to remind us that in face of different opinions with regards to how to use the space, we should discuss a solution together instead of handing our rights to the authorities. (image courtesy: Trapped Citizen)



wok the rock: or bribe them easily
hahh 14:21

wok the rock: it’s interesting that the
issue was addressed in an actual event
14:22

this is something that i’m doing now.
14:23

making changes is a must — but no
hard feeling when it fails haha 14:24

Willy Chen: Yes. 14:24

wok the rock: just keep doing it 14:24
that’s how we face the problem 14:24

Willy Chen: Thanks for the encouragement! 14:25

wok the rock: small but intense 14:25

Willy Chen: “One is the positioning of an
artist practice from both of you — if Willy
sees himself as an artist, and how you feel

about your own production and the other things you do. Maybe it's doubts or joy. Maybe through some specific projects" 14:26

Emily sent me this. 14:26

wok the rock: yup 14:26

that's what we talk about now, right?
haha 14:27

Willy Chen: yes. I think. 14:27

wok the rock: I need to go for
lunch 14:28

we can copy this conversation including the links we shared and send it to Emily 14:29

Willy Chen: Finally, I want to say that I always believe that every person has an impulse to create at a certain point. Art is not a privilege or something that belongs to artists with professional backgrounds. I didn't graduate from an art school, but I also have a desire to create. That's my ideal form of art: to create something together (art, event, music etc.), and that I think is the core of a collective. 14:30

Blooming

Afternote

After our conversation, I tried to answer two additional questions raised (by Emily), which I have also sent to Wok. The first is about the need for a punk community in contemporary Taipei, especially with a whole younger generation that are living in precarious conditions, and envision little future perspectives under a partly Chinese and neoliberal society.

I would say that the necessity of a punk or DIY community, such as Trapped Citizen, in contemporary Taipei is to provide an example of the possibility of Creating Together, which by itself is something radical. The punk aspect is to challenge the professionalism of the creative process in contemporary art. People always want to express, but not always through words. The DIY ethos of punk provides a way and confidence for people like me to create.

The collective aspect is to create together with friends, and with people. It is through the collective creating process that people can learn to collaborate with others. The experienced and the inexperienced must find a way to create together, instead of following traditional hierarchical methods. It is an experiment of democracy in the artistic/creative process. Trapped Citizen aims to provide a space for fighting against discrimination; especially in the context of the rivalry between Taiwan and China authorities, discrimination against people from China is obvious. During the pandemic, people from China were easily targeted as a threat. In March 2020, Trapped Citizen organized “Scream for Wuhan” event⁸, aiming to destigmatize Wuhan and show solidarity with people in Wuhan. The second question is how Trapped Citizen is related to other communities in Taipei, and how these communities deal with the present more commercial structure.

Some of the members of Trapped Citizen are in the underground music scene in Taipei, which might be the community we interact with the most. Right now, Trapped Citizen is sharing the rent with Print & Carve Dept., a woodcut collective that has collaborated with migrant workers and foreign students’ groups. Some members also run a cafe called Beifunshe in Taipei that holds screening events and performances from time to time. It is difficult to hold a collective space in Taipei these days. Making profit by organizing events is not our aim. Right now, we have 10 to 20 members, and we share the rent together. We also invite other artist groups or bands with similar interests to share and rent the space. By mutual aid, we get to sustain this collective space.

This brings me to an end with *The Opening Song* created and performed by No-nonsense Collective.

無妄合作社

開店歌

作詞：無妄合作社

作曲：無妄合作社

日子一天天過 路慢慢走 荒廢的日子還那麼多
藤椅上的狗啊 嚮往自由 卻看著他菸不離手
醉倒在沙漠 看似綠洲 卻躲在暗處盡情展現醜陋
日子一天天過 路慢慢走 荒廢的日子還那麼多

喔喔 喔喔喔 只剩下寂寞它陪著我
喔喔 喔喔喔 只剩下寂寞它陪著我

快走吧 快走吧
走的時候記得帶上心愛的狗啊
全部都煙消雲散石沉大海
浪費 歲月 詭譎 多變

快走吧 快走吧
走的時候記得解放時間的鎖啊
全部都煙消雲散石沉大海
浪費 歲月 詭譎 多變

繞遍郊區 見到黝黑的臉
終究回到啟程的地
穿過鬧區 見到緊握的拳
終究回到啟程的地

In my opinion, No-nonsense Collective's *The Opening Song* captured Trapped Citizen's initial stage in 2017, when we rented our collective space in Dazhi. You can see in their music video the empty basement and the clamorous surroundings. Since then, members have built up and furnished the space on their own, and organized all kinds of events in the space. The space is in constant change, in order to figure out a way for its survival, and at the same time to satisfy our need for creating. Since we didn't receive any funds from institutions, Do-It-Together becomes the most economical and natural way to maintain the space.



sig pecho

Mayumi

We Need a Title for This Conversation, Don't You Think?

Mayumi Hirano

Mayumi Hirano is a freelance curator based in Manila and Osaka. She runs a mobile art project, Load na Dito project since 2016. Her practice and research explore various curatorial approaches that question the binary thinking and habitual categorizations. She is part of the planning team of Curating in Local Contexts workshop series with researchers and educators Tessa Maria Guazon and Louise Salas. She was a project manager of Gwangju Biennale 2018 in South Korea, Asian Public Intellectual Fellow (2013-2014), curator of Koganecho Area Management Center (2008-2013), Researcher of Asia Art Archive (2006-2008) and curatorial assistant of Yokohama Triennale 2005. She completed her Master's studies at Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College. She is a senior lecturer at Art Studies Department, University of the Philippines Dilliman.

Sig Pecho

Sig Pecho is a performance-maker whose works interweave in the cultural ecology of storytelling, theatre, shadowplay, puppetry, education, and community engagement. He is a founding member and the Executive Duwende of KOMUNIDAD X (KX), an anti-disciplinary* collective of Sipat Lawin Inc. In the Philippine wrestling scene, Sig introduced matches as the official Ring Announcer of the Manila Wrestling Federation, a Pinoy pop culture driven pro-wrestling promotion. He performed and collaborated as a junior puppeteer at the UP Teatrong Mulat ng Pilipinas (UPTMP), and as an alumnus-artist of the Dulaang Unibersidad ng Pilipinas (DUP) and the UP Playwrights Theater (UPPT). He pursues a degree in BA Theatre Arts at the University of the Philippines - Diliman. sig pecho teaches Technical Theatre and Management as a visiting faculty at the Philippine High School for the Arts.

Backstory:

Mayumi and Sig have been briefly and occasionally encountering each other in numerous art gatherings since 2017. Mayumi is a visual arts curator, while Sig is a performance-maker. They practice independently and produce works inside and outside institutions in the Philippines and abroad while forging connections with like-minded artists.

This document is a relic of a collaboration — an interactive online exchange between the two. The methods of conversation are unique in that it was developed into four ways of exchanging ideas about life and practice.

Method 1: Letter

Method 2: Video meeting plus simultaneous transcription

Method 3: Annotating the transcript

Method 4: Reflecting on the exchange

We hope you won't get lost in this thread of exchanges. Introductions and primers are provided after each method for better navigation of this “conversation.”

Ganbatte! Good luck!

Method 1: Letter

In Metro Manila, individual capacity to travel has been restricted due to the government's response to the COVID-19 virus. Due to these circumstances, it remains challenging to meet in person. We, therefore, decided to respond to this invitation by writing to each other on *Google Docs*.



Dear Sig,

>> Sep. 13, 2020

How are you?

I'm sorry for the long silence since our first meeting with Reinaart and Emily last August. Preparing course packs is literally hijacking my life!

I have been practicing as a curator/manager but have recently started teaching. I'm new to all this, and also a complete stranger to the traditions of the University of the Philippines (UP) - Diliman. On top of that, I am clueless on how to prepare materials for remote learning. I'm currently teaching two classes: one for graduate students in the Curatorial Studies track, and the other is a General Education course in the Arts for undergraduate students.

I just recorded a video for the class — the worst part is hearing my own voice and seeing my clumsy self in the video as I'm so used to working backstage. How may I overcome this fear of seeing and hearing myself? Since you make performance pieces and perform on stage, will you please advise me?

Maraming salamat!

best,
Mayumi

P.S. There are several questions that we need to address, and I also remember that we have to find creative ways to do so, veering away from the usual Q&A style. I have a feeling that this is going to be a challenge. I wonder how we can do this.

Should we, perhaps, start our exchange here?

Dear Mayumi,

>> Sep. 16, 2020

Hontoni arigato for this *tegami* — that means “letter,” right? I, too, apologise for that long silence and distance. Yes, we can definitely start with this letter, and maybe eventually find more creative ways to proceed. I hope I can help answer your question on how to perform in class, but I am also new to creating additional learning materials for this online learning set-up.

Before anything, if you would indulge me, I think it would be best to first share about my practice as a performance-maker. This has led me to many activities even in the context of this pandemic. Although my background springboards from conventional theatre practice, my university training — same as where you are teaching — has allowed me to meet many artists and understand how to thrive in and be nurtured by collaborations outside of its traditions.

Anyway, I’m getting ahead of myself. Let’s go back to the silence...



THE SILENCE

(Haha. Fair warning, this may get textbook-ish, lol)

This *silence* I had to accommodate gave me space and time to develop my devices for engagement.

Devices, as you know, take root from devised-theatre practice. This is a type of theatre production developed through processes that are cultivated from the use of key theatrical elements (music, sound, set, costumes, props, lights, movement) instead of simply basing everything on the dramatic text and its stage directions. Devising is exemplified by its consultative characteristic. It promotes a more horizontal mode of theatre collaboration, where each member of the creating company is an important creator, each has a voice, and each has agency to collaborate and contribute to the conversation. It comes with the belief that beyond the drama is the potent position of theatre to facilitate conversation.

In the book “Moment Work” by the Tectonic Theatre in the United States, the company shared a chart of how they approach theatre-making from something hierarchical into something more horizontal-in-making. The horizontal chart I am referring to shows how props, set pieces/stage design, costume, make-up, lights, sound, music and text create a harmonious connection and relationship with each other. All theatrical elements are seen collaborating with each other, and not solely constrained to the idea of serving the dramatic text or the play itself. All elements are unique but are, at the same time, equally important. In a nutshell, think of devices as a pocket performance, or a scene in the grander form of the performance.

Devising can also be seen in Komunidad X performances. This idea, however, was further developed by our collaborator, JK Anicoche, who reframed our devices into four components: Landscape, Soundscape, Thoughtscape, and Feelscape.

Landscape is everything visual that one encounters in the device created. Soundscape is the curation of sound, music, noise, and silence. Thoughtscape are our guides or objectives in creating a particular device — pointing out our questions and proposals by problematizing the values, culture, thoughts, and ideas being provoked. Feelscape is the journey one goes through in the beginning, middle or end of the engagement. When these were applied to “The Gobyerno Project” by Sipat Lawin Inc. (the mother company of Komunidad X), it allowed us to embrace that *Feeling is also a way of Thinking* — validating the journey of emotions evoked in each of our engagements.

In Komunidad X, we always attempt to form a consensus in our creative processes. We proceed with this by following what JK has constantly said: being in a consensus can be achieved if we have a shared understanding, a shared ethos, and a shared vocabulary-in-making. This also extends to a continuous rehearsal of knowing and understanding the community of artists you are working with, as it perpetuates the horizontality in devising.

Let me give you an example.

As you know, we recently concluded our work online for a festival in Singapore organised by theatre friends from Dramabox — cousins to our collective, Komunidad X. We were part of this year’s “SCENES: Participatory Practices,” one of Singapore’s theatre festivals.

Of course, we initially wanted to have this live in Singapore. It was meant to be similar to a community gathering, camping or mini feast where we can ask about the quality of being and creating together — so yes, we have been thinking about long durational performance engagements.

The pandemic, however, hit us hard. We had to migrate the work online and adapt it to the pressing concerns of individuals from both Singapore and the Philippines. Although originally intended to be a gathering through invitation, we shifted our focus to non-Singaporean citizens stranded in Singapore because of the crisis. However, as the work started to take form and as we drew closer to its activation date, we were convinced that “KXMOBA” had the potential to cater to a wider public. We aimed for it to be as inclusive as possible but in constant consideration of our own capabilities and limitations.

In the end, we decided to create a 72-hour Zoom community room where anyone in the world can just drop by and be present with us. We have friends from Europe who

were able to visit like our friend, Iris Ferrer, herself.

Our work for the festival called “KXMOBA” is a play on the initials KX (Komunidad X), and MOBA (Mutli-player Online Battle Arena in internet slang). There is, however, no battle in our performance. Instead, the idea was borrowed from how most gamers from different time zones gather on the internet. “KXMOBA” — a 72-hour online participatory performance on Zoom and other satellite websites — became the Landscape for our project. We aimed to understand how to make a gathering space where people may come and go, where they can lurk, interact, listen, or even contribute to what’s happening. This was considered to be our Thoughtscape. And don’t worry! We had sleep and eating shifts! Zoom turned into a safe space to share togetherness online. This became the Feelscape for the project, as its conditions were forgiving to us as we expressed our limitations as artists and as humans in the gathering (i.e. allowing ourselves to sleep while Zoom was on).

Doing this project led us to question how encounters are made to last; how it can carve on participants (punning on Shadowplay hehe...to be explained in the next part); and what our own positions are as agents of this meeting point — be it as artists, as audience in different degrees of participation, or as festival organizers. This makes apparent the powerfulness and/or efficacy of the simple act of forging connections.

On Puppetry

As we realized, we can only prepare the conditions of the project. It is, however, dependent on the participating communities or audience, in a technical sense, on how engagements or activations can happen within the conditions created.

In a sense, I relate this to puppetry, where one crafts the tools or contraptions for movement — a way to let the viewer go into a suspension of disbelief that the puppet is alive. While we see puppetry as the art of manipulation in performance, life, on the other hand, is all about the engagement, the encounter, and the exchange. Particularly for this context, the conditions for interaction and the tools in Zoom turn into these “contraptions for manipulation”.

It sounds weird, but I hope the image I will be describing can make things clearer. In puppetry, we work with inanimate objects as it is the art of manipulation. A puppeteer skilfully masters how to “transfer-soul,” or in Filipino “*salin-kaluluwa*”

(Source: Teatrang Mulat ng Pilipinas), wherein the energy of oneself is transferred to the inanimate object or puppet. Puppets in different cultures have been performed since ancient times. They take the forms of humans, monsters, gods, and other roles in the stories being shared – forms that vary depending on what this soul transfer symbolically manifests. There are various forms of puppetry around the world: string puppetry (Marionette) in Europe; Stick or Rod Puppets in many parts of the world, such as *Wayang Golek* in Indonesia; Muppets or Mouth Puppets which is popular to our generation because of Sesame Street; *Bunraku* from Japan; and my own practice of Shadowplay, which took flight from traditional Shadow Puppetry in many parts of the world (i.e. *Wayang Kulit* in Indonesia).

Shadowplay is my base in puppetry, Mayumi-san. This is perhaps my comfort zone in sharing performances and stories, and even in my device creation. It was introduced to me by my good friend and mentor, the late Don Salubayba, a visual artist and Shadowplay artist in the Philippines. On the other hand, it was through my teacher in Theatre Directing, José Estrella, that Don was able to collaborate with us for a production that we were mounting in UP. I was amazed at how pieces of paper that interacted with light became sources of magic and wonder. Estrella and Salubayba repeatedly collaborated in multimedia theatrical productions that conjured magic through actors, production design, music, playful texts, songs, and, of course, Shadowplay. I was a student who appreciated all the learning curves from these productions.

At the same time, in 2012, I enlisted to become a member of Teatrang Mulat ng Pilipinas as I was also a student of puppeteer extraordinaire of the Philippines Amihan Bonifacio-Ramolete or Ami Ramolete, for short. She works best with Rod Puppets and contemporary Bunraku and has allowed me to explore and master my craft in Shadowplay in Mulat Theatre.

Mulat, which means “to awaken” in Filipino, became my safe place, my playground, and my laboratory with other young puppeteers. The puppet theatre for children, established and founded by Ami Ramolete’s mother, National Artist Amelia Lapeña-Bonifacio, enabled me to interact with many puppeteers across the regions. I have to acknowledge how my visit to Bali and Surakarta in Indonesia have influenced my own practice in Shadowplay – the *Wayang Kulit* inspired my own attention to detail, and my fascination with solo performances by a Dalang (master-puppeteer).

It was through these learning relationships with Ami Ramolete of Teatrang Mulat, José Estrella of UP, and my good friend, Don Salubayba that I was able to grow as a Shadowplay artist.

On My Musings About Puppetry and the Grander Scale of Life and Performance

As I went into a deeper understanding of collaborative performances with audience participation, or, simply put, participatory performance with a consultative process of making, I began to ask how “time” and “space” has also become characters, act-ors, and even puppeteers. These were important questions that took inspiration from my devising experiences in Komunidad X. Does that sound odd? Something inside of me believes that time and space can be characters.

A basic example is from our collective experience of having 12NN and 7PM as markers for eating in most cultures. These time elements can be characterized as a “contraption” or a “mechanism” for action. This is similar to the “contraptions” or “mechanisms” that permit puppetry to become dynamic in its movement, gestures and action. In this pairing, time markers such as 12NN and 7PM both perform a “maneuvering of collective social practice” through eating together. The performance (eating) is also a ritual in reference to time. Perhaps this culture/ritual is now the soul that is transferred to every human being, or maybe even any being – like how a puppeteer transfers his/her soul to a puppet.

The same is true with spaces. Aspects of space manipulate how we conduct ourselves through movement, gestures, speech, breathing rhythms, and how we respond to architecture – a collective consciousness or soul that is transferred through spatial characters. In both cases, humans may be influenced and dictated by time and spatial markers.

Let us not forget how humans are also puppeteers even outside the context of a conventional theatre with our agency to think, move, act individually and collectively with a grander system of living beings. We humans, in fact, are capable of going against this transference of souls with agents such as time and space. Humans can maneuver time and space. Humans can transform how time and space can affect our actions; and in turn, time and space can also transform humans. There can be an innate synergy and harmony with time, space, and humans in action, which, in this sharing, can be attributed to the act of gathering. Humans come together to share, to interact, to exchange, and to encounter. With this, I just realized how puppetry can be an understanding of empathy.

Within Komunidad X, we call this merging of time, space and action as time-x-space, where “x” becomes a point of intersection and interaction.

Time-x-Space Gatherings

In “KXMOBA,” we called our devices *happenings*. We offered time-x-space for gathering and engagement. We had *happenings* like a radio program with a DJ; role-playing games (RPG); online games like skribbl, kahoots, and codename; karaoke; a fashion runway; cook off; Shadowplay crafting, and what have you. (Schedule of activities for KXMOBA: KXMOBA Time map)

This idea extended not only to immediate artists who partook in the collaborations, but also to the participants (or audience) who ended up co-creating with us. Below are some photos for KXMOBA (Figure 1):

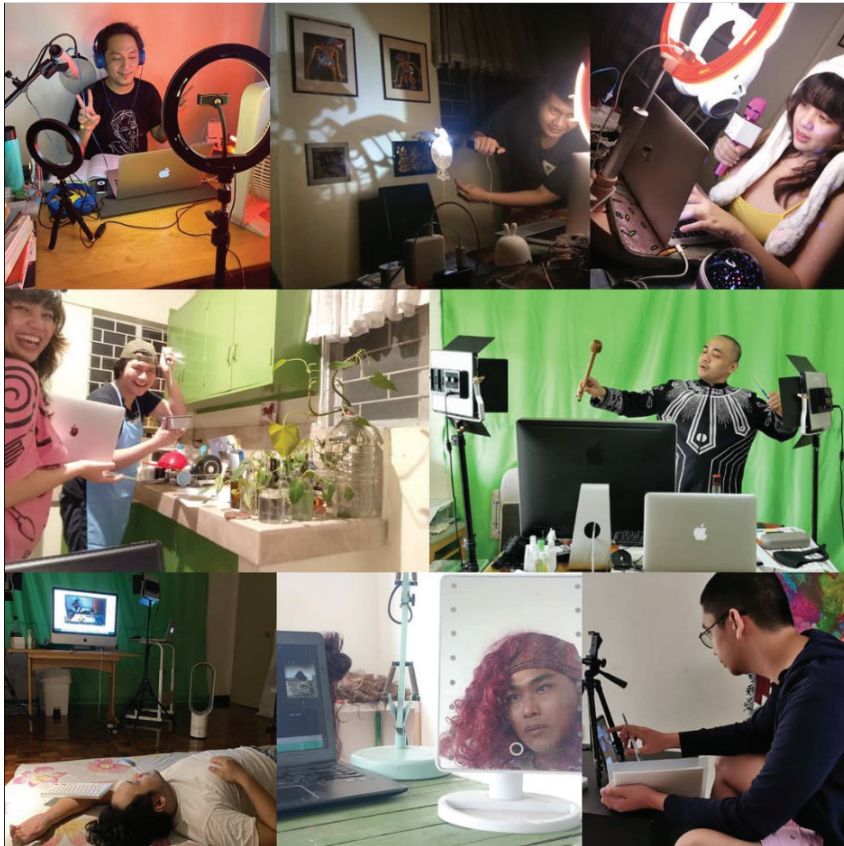


Figure 1

Figure 2 is what I refer to as “Talanyo | New Constellations,” a performance that we usually do in all KOMUNIDAD Projects – the umbrella name for all Komunidad X Projects. In other on-ground community iterations of the *Talanyo* device, I would ask people to create new zodiacs to be included in a map of stars that will later on be cut as a negative image – similar to shadow puppets and stencils. We would then use light sources (our flashlights or phone lights) to project an image upwards as we simultaneously held up the physical map of gathered zodiacs and new constellations. In KOMUNIDAD, *Talanyo* has become one of our devices to share this sense of wonder. It’s our moment to stargaze collectively using what we, as artist or participant, created together. In that moment, we are co-creators who forged not only creations, but, more meaningfully, moments

KOMUNIDAD Project has had two major iterations: the “KOMUNIDAD: Community Wellness” and “KOMUNIDAD: Bangsa Salam (Nation of Peace).” “KXMOBA” was an iteration that became virtual, asking how else we can share togetherness online and on ground. “KXMOBA” revealed to us the power of having points of connections, interactions, and, of course, the time-x-space for encounters. Despite the limitations online, it became apparent how online exchanges can also be very inspiring, respectful and welcoming.

I hope I have not been that indulgent sharing my side of the *silence*.
I hope to hear your side of the *silence* too.

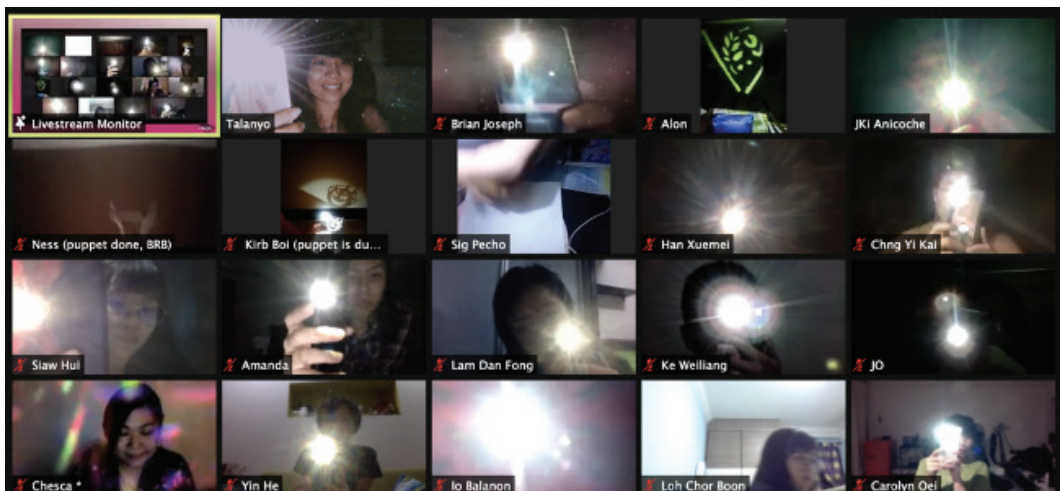


Figure 2

OKAY. Now, back to the letter! Hehe.

Ooh. I have been in UP as a student so I know how troublesome preparing course packs can get especially now that we have moved to online and remote learning. An element that we, teachers, must consider is how these asynchronous and synchronous learnings fit in the realities of our students at home. It actually makes me feel uneasy to continue teaching at this time because of the difficulties of some students to have access to better internet connection, high performing gadgets, etc. Sometimes the only point of continuing these difficult processes is that, at least, teachers can still continue to earn. This is obviously part of the reality we need to face. We are, after all, all citizens of this world; but right now, we also need to survive.

As you mentioned, you are teaching two subjects. Good to hear that, especially because it sounds close to your work as a curator/manager – something I’d love to know more about. I have to admit that despite these many little moments, I have never really been in touch with your practice, except that I now know that you are teaching art at UP. Forgive me for that, but I hope to know more through this conversation.

When it comes to performance as teaching, I think being yourself is a good way to keep the course very interesting and engaging. Think of yourself as someone giving surprises to students in comparison to teaching as spoon-feeding – that’s my rule for myself. I try my best to be accommodating to their questions and thoughts, and eventually make the “surprising” conclusions from their own realisations. It’s letting them discover the gift of learning through their own strengths and capacities of comprehension. Of course, when I refer to students, I refer to high school students of the Philippine High School for the Arts (PHSA), where I am a visiting faculty for theatre.

Speaking of the course packs, I think I’d be starting my own now for the coming semester at PHSA. I have a new subject to teach, which will deal with reading and analysing plays, and eventually introducing them as tools for theatre directing. I’m nervous and excited at the same time.

To share some strategies for it, I am currently using the website, Padlet. There, you can create your own account and have a premium one at the very affordable price of 149.00 pesos per month – just like having a Spotify premium subscription! On Padlet, you can post anything: photos, gifs, videos, sketches, audio files, and even links. It is also collaborative as a platform. I actually used it as a satellite website for one of my performance devices in “KXMOBA” – here is a link to the device “Dream Building.” I can help you learn about Padlet via Zoom or through Jitsi.

I hope to hear from you, again, Mayumi-san!

In light,
Sig

SHARE

Dear Sig,

>> Sep. 18, 2020

Maraming salamat for your letter!

I shared my nervous feeling about talking to the class because I somehow imagined that you, practicing in the field of performing arts, might have a magical bullet to conquer the fear of public speaking. So, it was eye-opening for me to receive your advice of “just be yourself and surprise the class.”

However, reading what you wrote about your practice, I understand where this advice comes from. Your theatre practice is not about performing on the stage to tell the story, but is instead about applying the theatre devices to alter the relationships among the agents involved in the production, presentation and reception of a theatre work. I see that your practice is an effort to turn the theatrical space into a social sphere of encounters, interactions and conversations.

Speaking of conversation, I would like to suggest that we meet virtually and have more interactive exchanges? What do you think?

To reply to your letter, I would also like to briefly share about myself.

After I finished my graduate study on contemporary art curatorship, I continued to initiate my own projects – mostly outside the white cube. At the same time, I also had work as a freelance art manager, which is mostly situated within the larger systems of art and creative industries. I have engaged in a wide range of sites of exhibition making; but my curatorial thinking was largely formed while working as a curator/manager of the art festival and artist-in-residency program, Koganecho Bazaar, in Yokohama, Japan.

This project was part of the urban revitalization efforts at a former Red Light District, which was jointly initiated by an association of local residents, the city government, the police department, urban planners, architects, and curators. A few years prior to the conception of the art project, the illegal businesses that occupied the area had been cracked down, emptying more than 200 tiny bars used for sex and drug trades.

The Koganecho Bazaar was criticized by women’s rights organizations as a revisionist program to suppress the issues of human trafficking, while our office was constantly harassed by the local mafia groups who had lost their business in the area. We were, however, greatly welcomed by the local residents who wished to make the district safe for children.

The curatorial team’s first work was to clean the abandoned brothels. Thirteen years have passed since then, but I can still vividly remember the peculiar smell,

the artificial colors, the suffocating air in the tiny brothels, and the sense of fear that haunted me. While cleaning the rooms, I began to form a sense of responsibility to make the district a safe place for female workers to revisit. This project was about eight years ago.

I now find myself living in the Philippines. However, the drive for me to continue my practice still comes from the moment of realization while cleaning the rooms. Ultimately, I still carry the same sense of mission with me.

In the past few years, I was fortunate to meet some female art managers and cultural practitioners who uphold the same mission with me. Although we work in different social, cultural and economic contexts, we share the experience of working in large-scale international art exhibitions, and share the questions about the values promoted by the global art industry and its links with the mechanism of global capitalism (i.e. unequal distribution of resources and power).

I also find it ironic that artistic "collaboration" has become the trend in the global contemporary art discourse. Working as managers and mediators, we often face the problematic hierarchical minds of those who initiate these "collaborations."

Do you think perfectly fair collaboration is possible? I would love to hear more about how you explore the problems of collaboration in your practice.

Talk soon, Sig. Shall we try to find time to meet virtually?

best,
Mayumi

*Method 2&3:
Video meeting, simultaneous transcription
and Annotating the transcript by
using the comment box*

Since writing letters on *Google Docs* took too much time, we decided to meet and talk via *Zoom*. While we talked, we used the chat box to transcribe each other's words. "From" then means the listener who is transcribing what the other person is sharing.

Ex. "M (from S):" means Sig is transcribing what Mayumi says.

Here is a legend:

M - Mayumi Hirano

S - Sig Pecho

We uploaded the transcript of the video meeting on *Google Docs* and added some annotations to the transcript. This exercise allowed us to do active listening, as we had to take note of what the other is saying in real time.

A TITLE

METHOD 2: TRANSCRIPTIONS
ON ZOOM (OCT 18, 2020)

18:18:24

M (from S): The first time we met we were at the production site of a dance performance directed by a Japanese theatre director. For that project, I worked as an interpreter (not really my job). Then, I learned you were a shadow puppeteer from our previous correspondence.

I wish to know more about your works, Sig.

18:18:58

S (from M): In my letter, I have already shared the story of how I became a shadow puppeteer. Through my teachers and my own exposure in production, I realized how shadow puppetry can be a tool for collaborative performances, and for community engagements. Any art for that matter can be a tool for collaboration.

18:19:41

M (from S): Can you tell me more about how collaboration works in theatre?

18:20:44

S (from M): That's an interesting question. I relate this to the main topic on the *ambiguity* of practice: What is ambiguous in my practice as a theatre practitioner?

For this, it might be useful to start with the practice of Sipat Lawin, my very first collective which eventually evolved into **Komunidad X**.

An example of collaboration in theatre is

METHOD 3:
ANNOTATIONS

KOMUNIDAD X (KX) is an anti-disciplinary* collective committed to creating “life” performances for civic engagement and social development. Composed of social act-ors working at the intersection of art, culture and development, it is the collective arm of **Sipat Lawin Inc. (SLI)**, an edge-work contemporary cultural laboratory. KX is primarily based in Manila and is focused on cultivating a social ecology of performance development platforms with different communities across the Philippines and around the world.

(Shared by Sig Pecho from the artist profile of Komunidad X)

—

From Sipat to Komunidad X, the main motivation for the shift was that we understood Sipat was already catering to art practices — not just for people in the theatre but also for non-theatre people. Sipat Lawin was an alumni group of theatre majors from PHSA. When Sipat happened, their performances were inclusive in nature. This eventually proceeded to working with actors of the societies from different disciplines like lawyers, architects, urban planners, teachers, etc.

(Sig Pecho)

Actors: In theatre practice, it is usually spelled as actors, not hyphenated. An actor gives soul to the characters who

the engagement among actors, designers, managers, and directors. Sipat Lawin, on the other hand, was more of an actors' ensemble. This means actors also work as the designers, co-directors, and co-managers of their scenes — a multiplicity of roles.

As for Komunidad X as a collective, there was a shift from a more artist-centric group to an inter-field kind of dynamic. Here, we get to continue our own practices while gathering together to work on larger projects.

18:27:47

S (from M): Komunidad X is a community, which means it is a meeting point of different practices and professionals.

At the same time, performance can be seen as a tool for development, a method to affect change. We see that **Performance** can be a powerful and effective way to form a better society.

18:30:22

M (from M): Wow, that's interesting to know. So, collaboration in theatre, especially in your collective, Komunidad X, looks like a real life community — from members to the participants. With that, do you consider whoever comes to participate as members?

18:31:44

S (from M): Yes, this idea of community itself as members is important. There are, of course, core members in Komunidad X who manage the inner system of the collective. But when we have projects, we decide for whom we create value for and who we want to engage in the perfor-

are agents of actions in theatre. In our practice in Komunidad X, we think of anyone who will be part of the performance as an active contributor of action; thus, even the conventional audience becomes an agent of action or an act-or.

(Sig Pecho)

Collaborative Tools: Each of our practices has become helpful in offering a dynamic process of performance with our audiences. Since Komunidad X is a collective, we are aware that we are working with non-artist collaborators but who are also aware and appreciative of artistic processes in its way of engaging communities. We have on board Artists (Performance Makers, Theatre Artists, Dramaturgs, Curators) Development Workers, Teachers, Urban Planners, and Community Organizers. We multitask as performers, researchers, facilitators, and managers for the project. We maintain a small group, and continuously learn together and from each other in the process.

(Sig Pecho)

Performance: In conventional performances, the bodies necessary for the main action (performance) to happen are actors (performers) and audiences (spectators). KX follows the emergent ideas from the field of Performance Studies but, at the same time, transcend this delineation. Performance...is seen as Social Action, an act of coming together in peace and solidarity, both artists and audiences (all partners and involved communities), all bodies within the given space are considered Social Act-ors.

mance. We also gather our networks in the process.

Historically, Sipat Lawin Inc. also gave importance to this deep sense of network and connection in local and international performance art fields. This is where we can also think about how communities can participate and join us.

It's interesting to note that our projects lean towards providing a sense of gathering. Theatre is a form of gathering, a social function — this is what people think. This is essential in our way of looking at gatherings. That's why we wanted to have the "co" as in co-creator, co-actor etc.

It's like the idea of **Third Space** — an operative word that we explore and is part of our ethos as a collective. We think of this **Third Space** as some kind of Safe Space — a co-shared space of making as part social practice.

And I am happy about my involvement in the collective. It informs my individual practice directly as it has become more interdependent and more inclusive. This is one of the ways to generate this **Safe Space**.

How about you, Mayumi? How do you see this reflecting on your practice? Is there also a possibility of this kind of collaboration in your field? Or is it different?

18:35:22

M (from S): Right now, I'm reflecting on my curatorial practice. I curate art projects (& exhibitions) in public spaces. My work involves so much non-theoretical, hands-on work in order to prepare

Artists facilitate the action, guiding everyone to participate within the event; and the rest of the community by simply coming to join the Action. Social Act-ors within the performance are Social Act-ors in real life.

(Salazar, 2019. "Komunidad: Bangsa Salam Final Report." Manila, Philippines)

Komunidad X is a community: At this point in our practice as a collective, Komunidad X sees the importance of "x" as a point of encounter, exchange, and transformation. We curate performances based on this idea of encounter. Most of our works have been consultative and participatory with social act-ors.

An example of this is the work we did in Marawi, Lanao del Sur, Mindanao, during the inaugural year for the passage and ratification of the Bangsamoro Basic Law. It was titled "Komunidad: Bangsa Salam," loosely translating to "Nation/Community of Peace." In this participatory performance, we had a moment when we performed this Nation of Peace with the participants (again, seen as act-ors as well). It was magical to hear feedback later on: Peace is possible if we perform well as a community and uphold values we all want to foster.

<http://komunidadbangsasalam.com/>

(Sig Pecho)

Third Space: It is a postcolonial sociolinguistic theory of identity and community realized through language or education by Homi Bhabha. [In KX performances], it becomes synonymous with [third space] as it is a place of gathering and inclusion

the platform — like how farming requires a tilling of the **soil**. I also play the role of an interpreter/translator.

I am also organising a gathering of **art managers**. In the conventional practice of art making that is ingrained in a globalized and capitalist mode of system, roles are compartmentalized to the point that people stop caring about what others are doing. So, for me, the **horizontal collaboration** among different actors through the projects of Komunidad X is inspiring.

This idea of “gathering” is sometimes missing in the actual practice of exhibition making. We tend to gather amongst ourselves that it’s difficult for other people to come in. Right now, it’s so divisive.

So, one may ask: given the stereotypes and the hierarchy among these positions, what are the conventional differences between art manager, curator and facilitator? How do we not make a space that pushes back different ideas?

18:38:31

S (from M): I think divisions of roles in art making is for practicality and formality’s sake alone. And, you know what, the politics of these roles are sometimes too complicated and confusing. It makes it difficult for practitioners to jump in and know how much we can share.

Actually, we have a lot of pro- and anti- in this capitalistic world. We are so used to the definite lines with no particular sense of discourse, no proper understanding of these divisions.

of/for people coming from different and often polarised political, social and/or economic backgrounds.

(Salazar, 2019. “Komunidad: Bangsa Salam Final Report”: Manila, Philippines)

Safe Space: A shared space among people who are gathered together based on the ethos of respect for human life, agency and expression.

(Sig Pecho)

Soil: Pointing to the platforms created. In curatorial work, this means preparing the ground with everything needed — from cleaning to talking to people in the community — for things to grow and for art projects to happen. This is also connected to my role as a translator — not just literal translation of language but of ideas and emotions — where I mediate among different aspects of the platform.

(Mayumi Hirano)

Art managers: Curatorial roles and managerial roles are often separated within the global institutions of contemporary art, putting the former on the frontstage and the latter on the backstage. Such division of roles and functions behind the exhibition/project making practice should be reconsidered to find more sustainable and more gentle approaches to exhibition making.

(Mayumi Hirano)

Horizontal Collaboration: A structure that exists in exhibition making. It is

You mentioned as well how some projects are sometimes very transactional and contract-based. With this, I feel a certain disconnect with the root word of curate which means “to care.” We should have a responsibility to take care and not just to manage or divide roles but to accommodate spaces for exchanges.

18:40:43

M (from M): Yes, I agree. So, I think, the challenge is how to create a shared space where we can gather as a community.

18:41:46

S (from M): Well, lots of things are going on in Komunidad X when we talk about gathering or providing an opening for gathering. I was wondering, however, about a project of yours that I recently heard about: Pasa Load residency. Isn't your process in that project also an interesting open point?

18:45:09

M (from S): Pasa Load is a project of **Load na Dito**. We started Load na Dito because we come from different backgrounds and places. We wanted to unlearn the social roles that we have been told to perform. So, along this line of thinking, we developed projects to shuffle these social positions/roles and its definitions. For the Pasa Load residency, we reverse the roles of the artist and the residency organizer, the guest and host. We let the artists hijack our space through our Instagram account! With this, we are also at **risk** because we don't know what they will post.

generally invisible and is only made visible when you are in it. This hierarchy is often headed by the curator/director, while managers/coordinators remain beneath them. Because of this structure, it's inspiring to see how horizontal and more process-based practice are realized.

(Mayumi Hirano)

Load na Dito and Pasa Load: Since 2016, Mark Salvatus and I have been running an independent platform called Load na Dito. Load na dito is a Filipino phrase that means “Load here now” which reflects the vernacular way of tapping up the credits for mobile data without the need for a contract with a telecom company. In reference to that, we decided not to have a space (no contract) but create temporal spots where people can join, charge and exchange energies.

Load na Dito began when we started living together with our newborn baby. It was a way for us to rethink the conventional division of roles within the family, so we don't drain our energies.

“Pasa Load” means to “pass the load”. This is also a vernacular system in which you can transfer the load you have on your phone to someone else's phone. In Pasa Load residency, we shift the power dynamics of organizer/host to the participants to this artist-in-residency program.

(Mayumi Hirano)

We have a line up for the year, but we are thinking of how this may continue. Maybe for the next Pasa Load, we can let the artists choose who will continue the Pasa Load.

18:46:01

S (from M): Hijacking is an interesting idea: the reversal of **roles** between you and Mark as well as the reversal of roles between organisers and the artists you are working with.

18:47:00

S (from M): And I think we share this idea: we treat participants as co-creators and the audience as act-ors. We can only control the prompts and the setting but the whole experience is what is shared, wherein audience reactions or their ways of responding always vary. Performance then, in essence, allows many **gaps** and can foster co-creation between artist and audience.

Going back to what you mentioned about Pasa Load, I'm amazed how you reversed roles and the hierarchy.

18:49:43

M (from S): Speaking of roles and hierarchy. There are mentors and mentees in art systems. Mentors and teachers (sensei in Japan) are usually older, have been practicing longer, and supposedly have more knowledge. Maybe, similar to Pasa Load, we can reverse roles and learn from someone who is younger than us – younger people do have a better sense of communication today especially with this sudden reliance on the internet. Maybe we need to shift relationships and our ideas of teaching.

Risk: By giving our IG account and password to resident artists, we thought we may be put at risk depending on the content the artist will post.

(Mayumi Hirano)

Hijacking: We initially thought 'hijacking' might be the word that would articulate the project. However, giving the password to the artist turned out to be more about the act of "taking care" in that we feel we are taken care of by the artists themselves

(Mayumi Hirano)

Roles: We perform based on the roles we are supposed to play, whether it be in a performance, institution, family, community, nation, relationship, ecosystem etc.

(Sig Pecho)

Gaps: Audience can fill in these gaps in performances and create a dynamic relationship within the exchange or encounter.

(Sig Pecho)

Going back to Load na Dito, we don't really plan the whole thing but we initiate. We call our curatorial strategy "almost curating." We try to keep many gaps to allow many people to enter the process. In the art world, we usually tend to value completion and perfection. I think we need to counter such values and question productivity.

18:52:27

S (from M): Following that, I think I can share about **Sleeping Duwende**.

Duwende is loosely translated as Dwarf. Duwende, as an idea, is taken from the revolutionary Spanish Playwright and Poet Federico Garcia Lorca who sees the creature as more than just a dwarf but one's internal muse or inner spirit. Duwende is a word that is used in both Spain and the Philippines. Although Filipinos already had the idea of dwarf even before the Spaniards colonized the country, the term remained in Spanish with duwende.

The Sleeping Duwende, however, is not a literal dwarf in slumberland. It is an Interactive moonlight midnight radio. When we used Zoom to develop a program of 72-hour performances, this was a program that made an impression on me. It made me realize that song-sharing and listening are both great ways to gather.

The whole idea of **Sleeping Duwende** is to make a space where people join and share their favourite music in Zoom. I play the role of a DJ and share the music. Then people eventually start conversations on Zoom chat. In this

Sleeping Duwende is an interactive moonlight midnight radio. Hosted by duwende jock sigmooned with hendrix the kahel (orange) fox, this playlist~building, song~sharing and time-x-space gathering takes flight with our sharing of songs x poems x curiosities from midnight to four in the morning. The portal opens minutes before midnight while bathing under every full moon and new moon.

Eventually, it was revealed that perhaps the openness of gatherings offered to its community of "listeners" can only be "opened" so much. This idea of the DJ/gatherer is a valuable encounter-making mode; yet, the fullness, or rather the constant filling and growing of the engagement and exchange, is being pollinated by every listener who enters the Zoom room. Here, we subconsciously collaborate on creating a culture and community together.

To reflect on the recent flights (a play of being "on air") of this interactive moon-

manner, the space is shared.

Sometimes I don't even have to chat about anything. Someone asks a question and someone else answers it. Those who join it share not only songs but also their presences. It's interesting to see how the space becomes a place to talk to each other. They are just there. They can join and leave anytime. It becomes a point of connection, even if some are complete strangers.

Of course, before participants enter, they need to know that it's a Safe Space for everyone, so I prepared a form for them. (bit.ly/sleepingduwende)

Sleeping Duwende happens during **full moons** and new moons of each month. What started as part of the KXMOBA has become regular as a twice-a-month gathering.

We are having the next one on Oct 31, a full moon.

19:01:52

M (from S): We act in online spaces and are often exposed to judgement. But in Sleeping Duwende, the participants are not judged.

19:02:45

S (from M): There is, of course, a feeling out of who is present and what music is played by those who enter the space. It also depends on how they understand Safe Spaces where people no longer become self-conscious.

In this project (Sleeping Duwende), I learned that we have our own power

light midnight radio, Sleeping Duwende has grown beyond a playlist-building and song sharing platform. It has now become a nesting point for contemporary culture-making.

(Anicoche, 2018)

It's interesting to see how this time-x-space gathering has opened a point of encounter, and exchange — which may be as poetic or as ordinary as can be. In these points of gathering, each life crosses paths, exchanges energies, and remains alive together.

(Sig Pecho)

Full Moons: We have become arrogant and have forgotten how to listen to the wisdom of the universe. Thinking about the moon re-situates us back into the universe.

(Mayumi Hirano)

to create a space. We have those conventional spaces that are defined by art but we should also question those outside of it.

How do we create a space of gathering and meeting points outside of traditional lines? How do we find the agency to initiate, build and contribute to making new platforms?

19:06:37

M (from S): I wonder: do you think the word Art is still important in this type of work/practice? For instance, with what you're doing with Sleeping Duwende.

19:06:53

S (from M): To answer personally, I don't think it is important to mention this as art. What is more important to me is the value that we share during our encounters.

In not calling it art, people can enter easily. At the same time, of course, for me who prepares the space, I ask myself: is what I'm creating part of my artistic practice? Is it an artwork? What are the differences and nuances compared to normal DJing? For whom am I making the value for? What are considered to be meaningful exchanges for them?

To be honest, I just thought of doing this.

19:10:50

M & S (from S): WHAT IS DEFINITION OF ART?

GATHERING

19:13:16

M (from S): My definition of Art is very different. Institutional discourse may have its own framework to define the meanings of art; but there is also a participative way of creating value and meaning of art. I believe there is a way for people to come in and participate in the process of creating value for expressions and spaces.

The “white cube” or spaces made to be “seen” can be intimidating. What you see – the art works – are already finished, complete and untouchable. For me, it is more exciting outside of the white cube, to not know about the demarcation lines of what is art and what is not. It gets me excited and makes me learn more about myself. I like the idea of the grey space.

19:16:34

S (from M): Grey spaces – it’s an opening, or portal not only to people but to the whole idea of art. It is in this idea of greyness that we are able to let the art grow.

The shift of dynamics comes when we do something outside of the conventional Safe Spaces – outside of the space of institutions, of the creator of the work, or of the people who experience it for the first time. They get surprised with the experience that is about to happen. There are a lot of possibilities and elements that can only happen when the grey space is activated. In fact, in this openness, more meaning and values may surface. In this case, maybe we don’t have to care if these happenings are still art.

19:20:56

M (from S): ...and government interventions always try to get rid of the grey spaces that work hand in hand with the capitalist and neoliberal mechanism.

19:21:20

S (from M): But grey spaces are sometimes not safe spaces. It means taking risks too.

In theatre, there was a non-dramatic theatre movement. It was not story driven, but more visual and sensorial. For those who love stories or that kind of theatre experience, they will end up looking for the story and will find it risky to watch a piece that doesn't follow a storyline.

That's the moment when the grey spaces are activated.

19:23:57

M (from S): Yes, I think so too. But exchanges, such as during artist talks, allow artists to listen to what the audience thinks.

19:24:14

S (from M): I think these exchanges are important for the artists because they make the work to share it.

19:25:52

M (from S): This official setup, however, sometimes makes it difficult for shy audiences or viewers to share their thoughts.

Mark and I used to host artist talks in our house. We hoped that the homely setting would make the gathering more

casual, but oftentimes it (the procedure) still remains too similar to conventional platforms, such formal panel discussions despite the setting. We thought that was strange.

Now, in the time of the pandemic, things have shifted again.

Interestingly, now that we keep using platforms like Zoom, even if you are conversing with someone, it feels like you are talking to yourself.

19:29:36

S (from M): This resonates with me when you say that Zoom allows you to speak to others but, at the same time, you are speaking alone.

19:29:43

M (from S): An example of this shift to Zoom is a talking game that we do called **Flex***. There is no moderator and instead uses spin-the-bottle to decide who speaks next. You can talk about anything. Then, we spin the bottle again. The next speaker chooses a word from the sharing of the previous speaker and starts his/her talk from that word. The process repeats.

During COVID-19, **Flex*** continued on an online video platform and we were surprised with how well it worked. Zoom is actually a good platform for sharing while being alone. I think **Flex*** is a good match with Zoom.

The words are archived, and we make cards with it. The cards can now be used to draw a word to start the story.

19:30:14



[image courtesy Rej Natalia]

Flex*, as with the internet-speak/slang “to flex,” means to show and tell or to show off but it also refers to flexing words, to stretch it and to use it like clay. It is about careful listening because you need to choose a word from other people’s talks without the need to respond directly. So, it weaves a very loose thread of words. Because of this looseness in exchange that does not necessarily have to be a conversation, **Flex*** continues to work fine even in an online setting.

Image of Flex* at Kamias Triennale 2 months ago.

S (from M): Oh wow, I also archive the music from the Sleeping Duwende.

19:30:51

M (from S): Sleeping Duwende sounds similar to Flex*.

19:32:26

S (from M): I'm reminded of other curators who work outside of white cube. Is it inherent in the nature of curation to create communal gatherings?

19:34:56

M (from S): There is a term community-based; but the concept of community can be tricky for my practice because it tends to become territorial. In an effort to revitalize some communities, we unintentionally kick out other communities.

We need to be careful about how art and communities can be used under the large umbrella of creative city projects.

19:36:16

S (from M): Yes, I agree. When you revitalize one community, then you exclude other communities...not just people but also animals and spirits.

At the same time, the moment we involve city governments and institutions, they themselves also become stakeholders in our projects. For Komunidad X, these projects focus mainly on issues of the quality of citizenship and community engagements. Working with and for communities entails activities that allow people to come in, perform with us, and ask questions on participation. In this way, we allow everyone to simulate ways of participating in civil concerns.

Urban Development: In the name of progress, development has been geared towards urbanization. This creates an impact on communities. Some anthropocentric communities are revitalised, while others are pushed outside of this development. In some cases, it has been biased and unfair to exclude and marginalized communities for the sake of development. This has been true for indigenous communities that have been pushed back and far from the cities that are being developed.

(Sig Pecho)

Digital space as another grey space:

This year, we had the festival for new plays with the Virgin Labfest, where I was one of the programmed theatre directors. Because it migrated online, many adjustments had to be made.

After this, several other engagements also moved online. This includes: an online series for psychosocial and arts-based educational weekly webisodes courtesy of Komunidad X and the Dept. of Education - PH; KXMOBA; the dance film festival, Neo Filipino 2020; and other workshop series online both as

We do this in hopes that both the institutions and the communities we engage join together in policy making. Policies, however, have much to do with “isms,” even if in reality it affects how we live our lives.

19:39:34

M (from S): All this talk about policy reminds me of the current state of affairs. News is depressing lately — the news about the world driven by egoistic powers.

You and Komunidad are also about gathering, and now this government does not allow gathering. How do you talk about this political violence, and still follow your core values in this difficult political situation?

19:40:06

S (from M): What kinds of art can we make in a depressing time like this?

19:42:06

S (from M): When we formed as a collective, we agreed on an ethos of caring and being careful. This was magnified when the pandemic hit, especially since the digital space is vulnerable to political violence (trolls, hacking etc.) as it is a grey space. Here, we had to quickly find an inclusive way to let people come in despite the limitations of the times. This specifically meant facilitating differences and commonalities to avoid falling into the usual traps of judging people online.

19:45:56

M (from S): Digital space is becoming a

an individual and as a collective.

In these projects, we questioned the idea of meaningful encounters in this time, especially when we can't be together physically but still need collective strength-sharing from each other. As these things are in “grey,” we wanted to see how we can still come together virtually and exchange our energies together.

Honestly, with KXMOBA for instance, we knew we could do away with doing the project but we realized its potential for greater things than just sitting and consuming whatever the internet offers. Of course, there are a lot of critics who ask about the legitimacy of an online space as a theatrical space for gathering. I think, however, that this judgment comes from not seeing the value of a “space,” especially a shared one.

Through these experiences, we discovered how performance-making has hacked the idea of a singular physical space. We morphed time zones to accommodate a dedicated time for premiere and engagement. We were in multiple manifestations on screens while keeping our home set-ups. We were present in infinite ways possible but, at the same time, still transient.

(Sig Pecho)

new platform where we need to intervene wisely as artists and citizens.

S (from M): I hope that we do not become hopeless, especially with the pandemic that has led us to gather only through digital or virtual spaces.

Maybe we can always find a place to hope and continue no matter what the spaces of meeting and gathering are.

Method 4: Reflection

The fourth method was an exchange of learnings and reflections from a conversation that was conducted in three different methods.

>>

Hi Mayumi!

A day after our Zoom conversation, I continued to think about grey spaces and how it resonates with my beliefs as an artist. Below is a post I did on Facebook:

Musings on Value Making for the “x”

In conversations about the greyscapes (grey spaces, the liminal, the nascent), we inquire what “art” is about “gatherings” that are prepared, designed, dramaturged, curated, and organised by social act-ors (artists/curators/managers/performance-makers).

Allow me to unpack.

This maybe, almost, the ambiguous (*doppelbödigkeit*), the uncertain, the undefined, the queer (all in their plurality) are all in that nascent realm, all in this “sense of becoming” (borrowing from the international human rights

lawyers). Perhaps the “gatherings” are also in this “neither/nor,” “either/or,” or “aliens” of the universe from earlier writings and criticisms that we may be still ignorant of.

In this interstice, we struggle — punning on Miura’s cosmos in rupture in Berserk — yet we persist to exist.

The “gatherings” outside the institutions, galleries or theatres are also in danger of its relevance especially in these trying times. The resilience that we have shown these days is a catalyst to those that are yet to arrive — be it in terms of forms, expressions or articulations.

So, the question becomes: how do we gather in these times? What is the act of togetherness, or simply co-existence(s)? In the age of social distancing, what is the role of “gatherings?” Where do we allow all social act-ors to enter, to gather, to exchange whatever and how-ever to create new cultures? How do we unpack the natures of time, space and action in these opportunities for the “yet to arrive”?

Ah, forgive me, I’m rambling, and I hope they don’t end up sounding like platitudes.

A way perhaps to answer these questions is to resist and to appreciate this ancient sense of “gathering” (i.e. how people gather in one space for theatre as in Aristotle’s Poetics). As we know during the pandemic, gathering in one space and time is impossible yet we continue to find ways to get together. Despite the restrictive nature of the current situation, these times, spaces and actions have actually multiplied — bringing new possibilities of solidarity. So, it might be beneficial to allow the time, space and action to flourish in these grey spaces instead of obsessing over what we thought gatherings should be. Only then can we allow “x,” the point where the gathering exists, can happen.

The fostering of the “x” is at the same time a risky act. Act-ors cannot measure fully how to prepare for this point of interaction — meaning it can be generous and regenerative or selfish and limiting. Although it is important to note the motivation among act-ors when they create communities and unpack the dynamics of relationships, there is a lot of uncertainty in order for “x” to be a point of a meaningful exchange, a poetic encounter.

All the act-ors can do is merely facilitate the creation of this “x” — an act that can be seen as ritualistic sending off of the visitors, a padayon (an expression that means to continue with well wishes), a pagpapatúloy (entrusting another

to continue one's actions). In this send-off, does an act-or remain in the "x"? Is it an impasse, a deadlock for the caretakers of the "x"? Or has "x" been passed on as an omiyage, a souvenir, an inheritance, a mana, a parting gift?

I don't know where these musings can lead me. If this is a train of thought, I may have been lost in its own grey tracks. Help. Keep it going? Continue and contribute?

I learned a lot in our exchange!

Kampai,
Sig²

>>

Hi Sig!

Thanks for sending me your reflections. I also read them on your Facebook!

Through our exchanges what struck me was the way in which you formulate your practice by inventing new words and adding layers of meanings to them. This relates to my interest in unpacking the way in which a language shapes our perspectives and behaviors. Through my practice and projects, I am trying to temporarily suspend the meanings conventionally embedded in words (i.e. definition of "x" and act-ors) and keep the words open for various interpretations, which may let us imagine altered social relationships.

One example is the Load na Dito's project, Flex* that I mentioned to you in our Zoom conversation. In this simple talking game, the participants are invited to attach personal meanings to words. There is no pressure to talk logically and correctly. They can share any thoughts floating in their mind by choosing a word from other people's talks, so they need to listen to each other.

I just said that Flex* is a project of Load na Dito but it can be held without our presence. For instance, a group of artists in Kyoto used it as a tool to develop a group exhibition. More recently, a poet played it with a group of farmers who are facing the threat of land grabbing. It was such an inspiring instance for me to learn that the project gained its own life by leaving our hands and traveling beyond the small art world that we inhabit. The poet forwarded us a feedback from one of the mothers who participated in Flex*. She said "*Ang mga salita ay mahalagang marinig.* (Words are important to hear)." Though the participants came from the same community and worked in solidarity, they didn't have the time to share the unformed thoughts and emotions. It was thrilling to learn that Flex* created a space to do so.

We grow ourselves to fit in society by learning the right definitions and correct usage of the language. We also learn the social convention to discriminate between what is worth listening from what is not worth the attention.

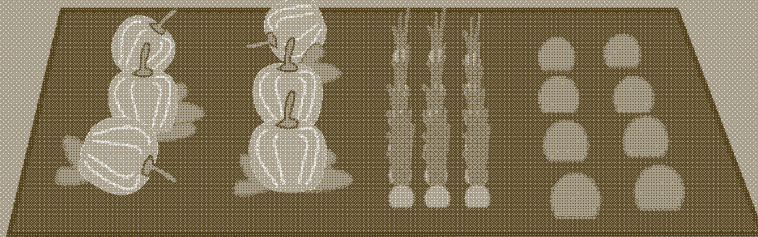
While working in the field of art for quite a bit of time, I have witnessed those who take roles of multitasking have the deepest listening ears and keen looking eyes to spot the problems generated by the uncritical social and cultural habits. Needless to say, it takes will to care.

Being able to see and creatively find ways to take care of the things made invisible or simply ignored is the very capacity that I am trying to hone, and I am also trying to convey its importance to people through my practice. I believe flexing our mind and thinking out of the box are necessary processes for us to realize an honest and meaningful cultural work that goes beyond individual ego and territorial thinking. This may also allow us to attach different meanings to the word “art.”

Best,
Mayumi

Happenings

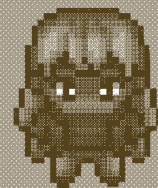
FLUID ROLES



gita



Rieneke



We sell reality? Who are “we” and what do we mean by “reality”?

Rieneke de Vries

Rieneke de Vries is a social and creative worker from the Netherlands, currently based in Rotterdam. Her visual practice revolves around the question: "Why does one person succeed in building a life and another not?". Rieneke works in different contexts and in different functions. At this moment she works 3 days in a week in a shelter with people with an addiction and psychiatric background. Rieneke was co-founder and member of the social rebellious label We Sell Reality. Because of an issue with positioning and context, which is an important element in this practice, Rieneke is preparing for a new chapter of her practice under the name ---> Take ---> A ---> Way --->. Her wish is to start a real open-source environment in which people of all kind of backgrounds can take action and make products and installations to raise awareness and speak out about vulnerable aspects of life. Think for example about the migration policies of the European Union and the lousy conditions in the Youth Care system in the Netherlands.

Brigitta Isabella

Brigitta Isabella (Yogyakarta, Indonesia) navigates her encounters with people, objects and discourses through different knowledge production platforms that operate at the intersection of art history, critical theory, and cultural activism. She is affiliated with the Yogyakarta-based interdisciplinary research group KUNCI Study Forum & Collective; the feminist art-workers network PERETAS (Perempuan Lintas Batas, "Women Crossing Boundaries"); and a member of the editorial collective for the journal 'Southeast of Now: New Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art' (published by NUS Press, Singapore). In 2014, she initiated 'From Bandung To Berlin', a curatorial endeavor that revolves around the speculative interplay between the 1955 Bandung Conference and the 1989 Fall of the Berlin Wall.

From: Brigitta Isabella [REDACTED]@[REDACTED].com>
Sent: Monday, October 19, 2020 7:19:01 AM
To: [REDACTED]@[REDACTED].com <[REDACTED]@[REDACTED].com>
Cc: reinaart vanhoe <[REDACTED]@gmail.[REDACTED]>; [REDACTED]@[REDACTED].nl
<[REDACTED].nl>
Subject: We sell reality?

Dear Rieneke,

This is Brigitta Isabella, but please call me Gita if you'd like.

Assuming that reinaart and Emily notified you about their idea on how to start our conversation, I'd like to begin our penpalling with an inquiry into the somehow clever irony you bear in the phrase "We Sell Reality," which I saw on your website.

Your work is irresistibly becoming more and more relevant as it revolves around questions of borders and solidarity, not to mention the way our world currently evolves through the course of the pandemic — which I hope you're surviving well! The phrase actually strikes and haunts me as a critical reflection to my own (collective) practice when I add a question mark to it: We sell reality?

Are we selling reality?

Who are "we" here?

A few years ago, I read, wrote, researched, and organized projects (e.g. publications, exhibitions, discussion groups) with and about Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong — which is why, I think, Emily and reinaart thought of connecting us in the first place. These artistic activities assembled individuals and institutions into a "we:" me, also as part of the collective KUNCI Study Forum and Collective; Para Site, a contemporary art gallery in Hong Kong; and a group of around 10 Indonesian female migrant domestic workers-writers who live in Hong Kong. Although the friendships built in the process still persist, this "we" inevitably dissolved after the exhibition was opened and the book was published.

As someone who makes a living as a writer, there have only been a few occasions when I was able to write or make presentations about Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong based on that project. However, it brought many opportunities for me and my collective over the years, particularly being invited to exhibitions and symposiums about art, migration, politics of borders etc. While I took those opportunities happily (because I got to meet people with similar concerns while being inspired by their

works), and sometimes pragmatically (because I need money to survive), I could not help but question whether or not I am selling reality when this “we” has partially been turned into “me” writing about “them”?

The critical gap between making projects “with” and “about” is perhaps what connects, as well as disconnects, the artist/writer/activist with “vulnerable” groups in long-term collaborative/socially engaged/community-based artistic endeavors.

It feels like a subtle question. I know that most artists/writers/activists who make projects with/about “vulnerable” groups — a term which I also found in your website’s artist statement — wouldn’t suddenly become infamous millionaires simply by exploiting or gaining profit (financially or socially) from their works. I think, however, the question is worthwhile asking in order for us to navigate our own positions: the fact that artists/writers/activists are, unfortunately, still dependent on the economy of the art market/funding for their survival.

What do you think about this, Rieneke? Do you also ask yourself this question? Do you have any reflections that might help me engage with and resolve this aesthetical/ethical reservation?

I’m also interested to learn about the relationship between the art objects that you create, and the social relationship that you nurture through the projects that you develop with other people.

I’d love to learn more from and with you!

Cheers and warmest regards,

Gita

being an amateur

On Fri, Oct 23, 2020 at 9:00 PM
rieneke de vries <[redacted]@[redacted].com> wrote:

Hello Gita,

The best way to answer your question about “WE” is to tell you a part of my life story and art practice as to how the “I” evolved through the years.

I remember a moment during an art residency in Curacao, one of the islands that was a former Dutch colony in the Caribbean. By then, I have worked for about eight

years as a visual artist with most of my works made by myself in my studio. I also did some social care for homeless people — work that was slightly connected to my visual work. I also did a lot of "Social Art" projects with minorities. Most of these were about identity and were short-term projects in neighborhoods. So, during those times, I did a lot of different art forms with and without people.

The thing was I was always in a state of reflection. One specific and vital moment that I remember was when I realized: "I don't want to stand on the sideline. I want to live." From that moment on, I stopped reflecting excessively: I started to make expressive work; I broke off a long-term relationship; I became a single mother of a girl that has 50% of her roots in Curacao; and I started to work part time as a social worker without worrying if it was connected to art or not — this part time work gave me and my daughter security but also space for us to dream.

I met some refugees that just arrived in Holland, and I started dreaming about "We Sell Reality." I was so amazed by all the life stories of my refugee friends that it became very important to me to tell all these realities to all inhabitants of the Netherlands. "Don't take anything for granted!!!," I wanted to tell the people. With this, the reflections started again, but now more rooted in my heart and soul. It came from my love for life and people.

One year later, I met a woman — an artist with a different story but with the same situation. Together with her and some refugee friends, we started "We Sell Reality."

We Sell Reality is an open-source collective of undocumented and documented artists that create products and art projects. It aims to raise awareness for questions they themselves are confronted with on a daily basis: how do you create equal relationships in your team when your position in this world is fundamentally unequal? This question is extremely challenging as society makes it impossible to create equal relationships.

In our team, only the documented members can apply for funding, sign contracts, receive the payments, and, therefore, are always put in the position of contact person. In this regard, documented members become mediators between the real world and our parallel reality. This can easily become grounds for distrust, misunderstanding, abuse, and further denial of someone else's existence. It creates a major imbalance, whether you like it or not. So, what we try to do is to constantly question this imbalance in hopes of achieving relationships of mutuality.

When your starting point is fundamentally unequal, care can become very violent for the receiver. Care can be very paternalizing. Emphasizing this inequality, care can create a dependency that feels very uncomfortable. This, in fact, can be humiliating or triggering to one's pride as the need to always be thankful can make one feel weak.

So, in a situation of fundamental inequality, how can you, as a caregiver that was automatically pushed into the role being documented, make sure you do not violate your team members or the ones you try to stand up for?

As you can see, the “WE” in WE SELL REALITY is always complicated; but the love for life, the struggle, and the passion make the “WE” sometimes very WE. For me, it is very clear that We Sell Reality will be long-term. It is not a project but a way of living.

Next email, I will have some questions for you!

warmest regards,
Rieneke de Vries

On Sat, Oct 24, 2020 at 11:00 AM

Brigitta Isabella <[REDACTED]@[REDACTED].com> wrote:

Hi Rieneke,

Thanks so much for such an uplifting and intimate response!

I just want you to know that I have received your message, and I think you’ve set a good rhythm for our correspondence. I’ll take my time to reply to you in the next few days. Let’s keep the rhythm like that, shall we?

In the meantime, if you want to send me another email to reciprocate questions, please kindly do.

Have a great weekend. I hope you have a re-creative time!

Cheers,
Gita

non-
one-
dimensional
practice

On Sat, Oct 31, 2020 at 04:47AM

Brigitta Isabella <[REDACTED]@[REDACTED].com> wrote:

b order

Dear Rieneke,

Thank you for sharing your stories — not only about beautiful dreams and hope but also about the candid dynamics of distrust, anxiety, and misunderstanding that take place over the course of We Sell Reality. And this, I think, can easily be related to different kinds of collaborative works.

Care is, indeed, not always about heartwarming stories. As you said, it can be violently patronizing (or perhaps matronizing??) in suppressing the agency of those who have to keep being the recipient of care. The best political motives or good intentions that help and support these “marginal/minority/vulnerable” groups may turn into further suppression, particularly when the groups are continuously reduced into a single and ready-made representation of “the other” through the eyes/gaze of a “savior.”

Reading your reflection reminded me of one of my main concerns when Kunci was first invited by the Hong Kong based art institution, Para Site. Since the beginning, we knew that we cannot “help” these groups in a conventional manner because we were not coming from the generic NGO ambition/mission to “empower” them. We also knew that we didn’t even have sustainable legal and financial resources to “help” the problems that migrant domestic workers face on a daily basis (i.e. structural impoverishment at home, and serious abuse at the country of their work). Lastly, there is an obvious geographical distance between Yogyakarta and Hong Kong.

So, it was better to admit that the Afterwork Reading Club was a one-time project; even though, at the same time, it created conditions for establishing long-term friendships — however cliché that might sound. It was a project, but it also produced something larger than “art.”

What we wanted and what we could offer was to share our time and resources for studying together. We, too, realized that we are living in a capitalist social structure that maintains the gap between us (the privileged artist/researcher) and them (marginal/minority/vulnerable groups), despite our want to work from equal positions. So, instead, we shifted to the perspective that we are all intellectually equal, and that everyone has a right to think.

In envisioning the Afterwork Reading Club, we deliberately wanted to work with those who pursued their lives as migrant domestic workers-writers. This decision was based on our observation that there are a lot of Indonesian migrant domestic workers-

writers that are already published. Some of them were also active in citizen journalism, working on community news. The production of knowledge among them was so robust — a fact that is often ignored when focus is solely kept on the sad stories of their struggles that paint them as passive victims. This is, of course, not to say that sad stories don't exist, although Hong Kong, a place away from home, had somehow become a possible site for many migrant domestic workers-writers to carve out time and space for reading and writing — activities that remain relatively constricted in their own villages.

This starting point allowed KUNCI to connect with migrant domestic workers as fellow writers, instead of reinforcing the distance between artist/researcher and migrant worker. The shared positioning enabled us to create space and time to read and study together.

At first, Arista Dewi — one of our main contacts who is a writer, photographer and domestic worker — asked whether I could give a writing workshop for her and her friends. I was at first hesitant with the proposal — not only because I, myself, am not convinced of my own writing skill but also because I didn't want to establish a teacher-student relationship with them. So, together, we figured out that the best way to learn writing is by reading. Interestingly, I found out that many migrant domestic workers-writers that I met could actually read up to 3-5 books a week, especially those who are lucky enough to have a “kind/easy” employer. As fellow readers, the act of collective reading created a relational space, and accumulated intersecting points between subjective experiences and collective imaginations within the texts being discussed. It also raised the spectrum of subjectivities in one's life, which is not only about the experience of being a migrant domestic worker but also about being a mother, a lover, a queer person, a traveler, a writer etc.

Perhaps the conditioning of the Afterwork Reading Club was very particular to the context of migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong. I also sense that what you are facing now is quite different. However, this aspiration for creating a non-patronizing relationship seems to relate to the way you perceive your undocumented friends as fellow artists and not as mere informants, participants, or, even worse, as sources of inspiration!

So, what happens or what is the impact when they get the label of “artist”?

I understand labels do not always matter. When it comes to political recodification/resignification, however, I think it is still critical to discuss labels. Perhaps we can also expand our interrogation not only towards “I” but also towards “them” in the complexity of “WE.” Who are these “them”? Who has the power to project social codes such as “marginal,” “minority,” or “vulnerable”? What are the political implications of reinforcing such social codes? And how can we create a space for subjectivities against the

condescending process of othering?

I look forward to hearing more from you, Rieneke! It's been a pleasure to read and relate to your reflections.

Be well,

Brigitta

On Wed, Nov 11, 2020 at 1:55 PM

rieneke de vries <[redacted]@[redacted].com> wrote:

We Sell Reality

Good morning Gita,

Thanks for the email.

I had questions for you, but you answered them all in your last response. I will now react to the last part of your mail.

You wrote: However, this aspiration for creating a non-patronizing relationship seems to relate to the way you perceive your undocumented friends as fellow artists and not as mere informants, participants, or, even worse, as sources of inspiration!

My answer: How I connect to my undocumented friends depends on the situation. When we make a sculpture together, we connect as artists or creative people. When we work with wood, we connect as persons who work with wood and struggle together with its construction. When we talk, we can be a source of inspiration for each other. When there is a problem with the IND (Dutch Immigration Authority), I become the translator or the contact person for someone's lawyer. And being a translator or contact person does not influence our connection when we struggle together with wood, as struggling with wood is in itself a unique kind of struggle.

You wrote: So, what happens/what is the impact when they get the label of "artist"?

My answer: I don't care at all about the label "artist." We (We Sell Reality) use different labels in different situations. Sometimes we call ourselves a design collective; sometimes, an art collective. Sometimes I call myself a social worker; other times, I also call myself a lawyer. Sometimes we say we are a "studio" or a shelter. Sometimes we make ourselves big; sometimes we have to be small.

You wrote: I understand labels do not always matter. When it comes to political record-

ification/resignification, however, I think it is still critical to discuss labels. Perhaps we can also expand our interrogation not only towards “I” but also towards “them” in the complexity of “WE.” Who are these “them”? Who has the power to project social codes such as “marginal,” “minority,” or “vulnerable”? What are the political implications of reinforcing such social codes? And how can we create a space for subjectivities against the condescending process of othering?

This last question holds an interesting point: Who has the power to project social codes such as “marginal,” “minority,” or “vulnerable”?

I think there are different powers and different ways of othering in different layers of society. There are, for example, the funders and NGOs who use their own categories and agendas to help “others.” There is local politics, and there is global politics – both of which have different views. Then, we have all groups of citizens with no specific powers who still call each other “OTHER.”

HUMANS are very good at calling each other THEM. Migrants who live in the Netherlands can have very hard opinions about each other, for example. The same holds true with the art world that now feels more and more like THEM.

It is not always easy to connect with different parts of society.

And what about you? Who are the people that come the closest to your heart? With whom do you connect with the easiest?

Rieneke

On Fri, Nov 20, 2020 at 2:55 PM
Brigitta Isabella <[REDACTED]@[REDACTED].com> wrote:

HOME?

Hi Rieneke,

I like how you proposed that we inhabit multiple roles, positions, and labels strategically. We become a translator, a friend, an artist, a writer, a cook, a gardener, a teacher, a student, or, perhaps, an eternal amateur.

For me, the word “amateur” harnesses the affective side of doing things for collective pleasure/joy while resisting the dull practice of professionalism and business as usual. Being an amateur allows me to learn through the process, instead of assuming that I always know what I am doing or that I know everything about the people I work

with. For me, rethinking roles and labels also implies a process of unlearning my own assumptions about the political truths and personal aspirations of a “marginal” or “minority” group.

Allow me to illustrate my point with a short detour: there’s this fictional film titled “Minggu Pagi di Victoria Park” (Sunday Morning in Victoria Park, 2010) that tells the story of an Indonesian village woman who was trying to find her sister, a domestic worker in Hong Kong who disappeared without contact years back. As the story unfolds following the protagonist’s journey, we get to know about the daily problems faced by migrant domestic workers (e.g. racial discrimination, domestic abuse, and unfair debt business).

I actually quite like the film as it offers an unusual theme for the Indonesian film industry. It was through the film that I got to know about the common “ritual” of gathering among Indonesian migrant workers at Victoria Park every Sunday – a phenomenon that rarely appears in Indonesian popular media as migrant workers usually only make the news when they are abused or dead. Interestingly, when I brought my opinion to my migrant worker-writer friends, none of them shared my sympathy for the film.

The reasons for their disinterest are varied; but, in general, they disagree with the representation of migrant workers’ lives in the film. There was one who felt that the figure of a lesbian migrant worker in the movie is morally harmful and serves as a bad representation for the community. “Why is there no portrayal of the pious Muslim migrant workers in the film?” one asked. Another thought is that there’s not enough focus on the hard struggles of migrant workers in Hong Kong. Conversely, there’s also another who thought the protagonist’s story is too heroic, and that it merely reproduces the migrant workers’ image as a victim.

For me, the problem is not about whether or not the movie had successfully “represented” the Indonesian migrant worker’s life. Instead, I realized how collective representation matters for their political strategy – to advocate for their rights in government policy, to undo stereotypes etc. At the same time, I also recognized the impossibility of affixing a single and stable representation for the migrant workers community because, like all other communities, there’s a plurality of voices inside it.

I think that it is in the field of art where we could have relative freedom (or we, at least, should advocate for that freedom) to open up a pluralist space that would disrupt any stable representation or ideological patronage towards the “marginal/minority.” Fortunately, many migrant workers-writers are already writing their own stories to create their own self-representation, a way of pluralizing and destabilizing this collective representation.

What KUNCI did was to simply amplify and advocate for this kind of artistic-political

space, which requires continued nurturing so that different kinds of subjectivities and representations of the self can be expressed and accounted for. This, of course, cannot be pursued if we continue to paint a valorized and homogenized image for “marginal/minority” groups. We need to keep in mind the potential danger of projecting their identities into a pure proletarian subjectivity (in the artist’s and art world’s fantasy), which actually denies their individual autonomy/agency.

When art practice comfortably follows the logic/strategy of NGOs, political positions and personal aspirations of the “marginal/minority” group are oftentimes reduced to a target or a critical currency. This, then, manufactures a self-fashioning and supposedly critical artistic statement or action under the guise of “social responsibility,” as messy realities are forcibly packaged into regular exhibition-making with its rapid temporal intervals. We continue to see how “participatory,” “community-based,” “socially engaged,” and “relational” arts valorize this cozy/positive social function of art to the point that it becomes a romantic, harmonious cliché. This line of reflection is, of course, not at all new as there have been a lot of criticisms and productive debates about these kinds of art.

Now, I want to try to answer your question about who I connect with the easiest. I don’t see my practice as looking for people who I have the easiest connections with because it would keep me in my comfortable, privileged space. I do have several close friends — my “tribe” and support system — with whom I share my personal life and struggles. At the same time, I also want to be in an environment that allows the risks of knowing people outside of my boundaries and of questioning my own belief system. To connect is also to cross boundaries, and I think it’s becoming more and more urgent to do so in the middle of this polarizing political climate. For instance, in the Indonesian context, today’s distressing polarization is less about left vs. right, and more about the conservative hardlines between Muslim groups and liberals. I may have just made a caricatural depiction of Indonesian politics but, in my opinion, politicization of religion is one of the main sources of social tension today especially with Indonesian elite politicians’ easy exploitation of it.

From my limited knowledge, I feel like there aren’t so many safe spaces that would host (democratic) dissonance and confrontation and would allow sensitive discussions on the risky identities of the marginal/minority, the power dynamic of mutual care, and the violent feature of political correctness etc. (I’m happy to briefly discuss this throughout our exchange.)

How do we talk about encountering an individual from a “marginal” group with different political ideologies? What are the lines that need to be made or unmade during such an encounter? How can we maintain a space for productive conflict while also exercising care? In addition, how can we reflect on our own privilege (and, at the same time, precarity) as art workers to encourage solidarity and nurture support systems

instead of merely performing easy and risk-free cynicism?

These are the ongoing inquiries that I hold on to in my individual and collective practices, which I don't think have fixed answers as it is full of tensions, ambiguities, and contradictions that we will always face as we keep on working and questioning.

You were right when you suggested earlier that we need to balance thinking and doing, that we should not let too much thinking stop us from doing.

Have a good weekend, and best wishes from Jogja,

Brigitta

On Fri, Dec 25, 2020 at 5:48 PM
rieneke de vries <■■■■@■■■■.com> wrote:

Hello dear Brigitta,

Sorry for this long delay. I am writing you from my new home, and I am very happy with the place — a new start with lots of space for my daughter to play in.

Thanks for the story about your assumptions, and the movie you all watched and discussed together. I agree with you that there are many, many voices in one “group” of minorities. And indeed: Fortunately, many migrant workers-writers are already writing about their own stories to create their own self-representation, a way of pluralizing and destabilizing this collective representation. Good representation is one that a person can only do by him or herself — I agree! And when the person does not feel strong enough to do that him/herself, the task of the artist or social worker is to provide some extra energy and power to this person.

Some years ago, I was working in a collective that we called Academie voor Beeldvorming, which can be translated to an “academy for image building/perception.” All our projects were about minorities, particularly on what kind of images or ways of representation were made and propagated by the media and the public. It was nice to work around this topic. It was all about assumptions.

I like that you want to take risks and that you try to connect with people outside of your comfort zone. So, let me ask the question differently: what was your riskiest contact/interaction with a person? How were you touched by this contact? How close did you end up being?



Figure 1

I very much liked how you called it easy and risk-free cynicism!! :) Is there a lot of risk-free art in your country? And what is the riskiest art/social art project that you know of? And is art the place where we can take the biggest risks? Or do we have to choose another field to be less cynical?

How is it to be in contact or to work with the conservative part of Muslim groups? I was raised in a very conservative Christian community: the lack of space for questions and for thinking independently is what I remember.

You also talked about being an eternal amateur at the start of your email — a thing I have ruminated about for some time. I think the moment I decided to become a professional in another field aside from art was the point my practice became less clear, more hybrid, and much more interesting.

Two years ago, I worked in a closed youth care institute that was almost a youth prison. Aggressive and dangerous children lived in this institute. Whenever I entered its building, it felt like I was walking into a very strange, intense, and freaky movie. There were visual stimuli everywhere: people running; a kid trying to escape by climbing the fence; fights; dark rooms with blood; and a beautiful blond girl in a white dress trying to attack everybody with a knife — I have never seen anything so extreme!

When I was just working on the art project — the only reason I was there in the first place — and not learning from the institute, I was stuck in the 3rd layer of interaction with the place and its people. When I finally received professional pedagogical support from the institute, I was able to reach layers 4 and 5.

Let me describe the layers that I go through in my work:

First layer: All the visual aspects.

Second layer: Talking to the kids, interacting with them, and trying to understand them.

Third layer: Trying to create substantive visual content with the kids – images or texts that communicate something about this “vulnerable” group both to themselves and to others.

Fourth layer: Learning about the illnesses and backgrounds of the kids.

Fifth layer: Studying how to act professional and how to be part of their treatment plan.

The last 2 layers were completely new to me. Later on, I tried to put all these layers into an artwork for myself. The experience of all these layers was so intense that I had to find ways of expressing all my feelings about it. I ended up putting this image (Figure 1) on a sculpture.

Do you recognize these layers? Do you perhaps have a different way of experiencing and describing the process of interacting and making?

Do you have goals for the coming year? What are things you want to learn?

Best wishes from Rotterdam!

Rieneke

On Wed, Jan 27, 2021 at 11:33 AM

Brigitta Isabella <[REDACTED]@[REDACTED].com> wrote:

Hi Rieneke,

So sorry for my long silence. The early days of January have been quite intense; thus, I could not keep the pace and rhythm of our correspondence.

First off, congratulations on your new home! It must come with great relief to have more space to play around in during this long quarantine period.

I also liked how you described the layers of your work. From the photo, I imagine your sculpture (is it made of paper?) was made through a flattening and smoothing of surfaces to form a three-dimensional object, which looks rather rough and wrinkly. Perhaps this is an apt visual metaphor for your working process with other people, particularly in the way you transform the flatness of surface representation (layers 1-3) into a messy and vulnerable image that parallels the deep and complex realities of each subject.

Speaking of layers...somehow, by chance, I have also used layers as a platform and metaphor for creating uneasy encounters with people that we assume about or are afraid of as an Other. I hope my story below could answer your questions about the riskiest experience that I have engaged in, also in relation to the issues of conservatism and risk-free cynicism.

A few years ago, I was part of the head artistic team for an event called “Wang Sinawang” (in Javanese, this roughly means “looking at each other”), where we invited six faith-based social organizations in Jogja to show and perform the artistic spectrum of their beliefs. The event happened against the backdrop of this growing religious intolerance in the city and in Indonesia. For brief context, there are only six “official” religions that are legally recognized by the State today. The rest, such as atheism, are either banned or deemed illegal to publicly advocate for.

Our aim for the project was then not to reproduce the routines of banal interfaith dialogues where religious leaders — who are mostly male — shake hands and say some abstract moral message about unity and peace. Instead, we purposefully invited groups that are not commonly included to consolidate the formulaic top-down interfaith dialogues, as there are obvious internal differences within the six official religions themselves. For example, the officially accepted Hinduism here is Balinese Hinduism, while the Hare Khrisna group (whom we invited) has been banned since 1984. We also invited the Jehovah Witness group, who has been banned since 1975 and who, shortly before the exhibition opening, decided to cancel their participation because the central organization did not let them participate — not so surprising!

The groups that we invited were allowed to exhibit anything they wanted in the university gallery. It was important for us to emphasize that this happened in a university gallery — a kind of academic legitimization and institutional back-up that allowed a safe space for these banned groups.

Our only intervention as organizer was adding a thin curtain made from transparent fabrics to create a sense of spatial arrangement with tenuous borders. The audience were also allowed to open or close the curtain. So, upon the act of entering, they have to decide whether they want to see from the outside through the transparent fabric, or to enter the space and see the exhibited ritual more intimately (Figure 2,3,4.).

observe, connect, co-create, being a part of



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

One of the groups that we invited was Khilafah Arts Network (KHAT). It is a group of artists that explicitly stated that they are working to develop a united artistic imagination of a Khilafah future in Indonesia. They are affiliated with Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), which was later banned by the government in 2018. That year, when we held Wang Sinawang in 2016, an art lecturer who was associated with KHAT and HTI was condemned and almost fired by the university. I don't share KHAT's artistic ideology but, at the same time, I don't believe that it is a fair democratic process that they were banned when they did not incite any violent propaganda or action.

Before Wang Sinawang, as skeptical response to the institutional censorship against the art lecturer, I worked on an in-depth interview with the same art lecturer to listen

to his perspective, where he came from, and what his beliefs were on Islam and Aniconism. Interestingly, he apparently became a devoted HTI member after he felt that he lost his sense of purpose upon becoming a successful commercial artist. He felt that mainstream art has lost its social function — a point that we can easily agree with, no? And his response to this problem was by using art as a means to learn, express, and teach (dakwah) his version of Islamic belief. In my final writing, I expressed my disagreement with his ideology, not because it is just plain fundamentalism but because, to put it briefly, it is an excess of postmodern identity politics — an ideology that the “art world” actually also often celebrates.

From this encounter, it became a matter of common decency to want to be in contact and to work with those we disagree with. The question is whether we want to hold onto our presupposed judgments, and how, at the same time, not be too apologetic while avoiding tensions or conflicts in nonviolent ways. As I expressed my written criticism to the art lecturer’s ideological view, I imagine that he is in the same room as me, sharing the space of my writing because he is human and not just an avatar of fundamentalism.

In this regard, I think art can still be an arena where we problematize stereotypes should we wish it to be so: valuing subjectivities in each of their deep histories and keeping disagreements as mere hints for open-ended conversations. It’s a utopic space that keeps being co-constructed and de-constructed, which can be very unpragmatic and definitely not a prescription for solving real life problems — alas, such space for acknowledging the messiness of reality is still very much necessary.

Our inclusion of KHAT in Wang Sinawang provoked a small controversy to the point that some people condemned us for dangerously giving KHAT a platform. They didn’t consider that KHAT was actually showing a degree of tolerance by agreeing to inhabit the same exhibition space as other religious groups. We made a lot of negotiations with KHAT and the other participating groups but were also very careful that we were not compromising our non-violent democratic principle.

Interestingly, the harshest criticism came from members of the “art world” who refused to see the process, while many activists of interfaith dialogues gave us huge support and positive feedback for conducting the event. It was a learning experience for me to organize what I would now consider to be a rather risky platform because it involved a lot of uncertain negotiations and disagreements — an open platform where everyone shares vulnerabilities as well as agency to defend themselves.

To address your last questions about future goals, I think the pandemic has made it rather hard to settle on a clear goal given the radical uncertainty and unavoidable mutual entanglement that we all have to face. There’s a lot of contradictions that I think should be dialectically solved together through praxis: between individual

isolation and collective experience of mass scale quarantine; between the lack of scientific certainty of the novel virus and the necessity to hold on scientific expertise; between national borders and the borderless (yet racialized) virus. Collective modes of art practice have allowed me to endure uncertainties and deal with the contradictions of living together. This is, of course, without ignoring the necessity of resisting structural powers that exploit uncertainties in order to accumulate power and wealth for themselves.

My wish is perhaps to simply survive within these modes of collective learning that support the process of making and remaking the borders of “togetherness.” Too abstract, ya?? Hehehe. Well, besides that, I also want to learn how to get better sleep!! ;-))

How about you? What are the layers that you want to delve into, peel out, and play with this year?

Gita

roles & responsibilities

On Sun, Feb 7, 2021 at 12:39 AM
rieneke de vries <■■■■@■■■■.com> wrote:

Dear Gita,

Thank you so much for this story! This sounds like a very good project!!!

I, as a Dutch citizen, cannot really imagine how it is to live in a non-democratic system. Here, we don't have risks with our government...or maybe we do but we are still able to talk about everything. Sometimes, of course, there are problems with power, but we are still allowed to be angry. Risks in the Netherlands are maybe more about things that are going too easy and taking things for granted.

At this very moment, I am waiting for the corona test results. My boyfriend tested positive yesterday and is in quarantine in one of the rooms of our house. We knock on the door to bring him plates with food.

Now, I am thinking what kind of last thoughts I can share with you to make a beautiful end to our conversation.

What kind of goals do I have for 2021? I don't really have anything in mind at the moment, although one of the dreams is for me and my daughter to go together to China.

What layers do I want to play with? I think I would love to re-learn how to use the radio more. :) Feeling and expressing are things I already learned a lot about lately. :)

I hope you have many good nights in 2021!!! I wish you all the best and hope to talk to you soon.

Rieneke

On Tue, Feb 9, 2021 at 5:59 PM

Brigitta Isabella <[REDACTED]@[REDACTED].com> wrote:

Oh dear, what a pitiful way to end our email correspondence. I hope your boyfriend will recover soon, and that you and your daughter are able to cope and stay well.

Take care Rieneke, and thanks so much for this great conversation. I learned a lot from you, and from the opportunity to reflect on myself and my works through your attentive questions.

Stay safe everyone, and cheers from Jogja.
Gita

Van: [REDACTED]@[REDACTED].nl <[REDACTED]@[REDACTED].nl>

Verzonden: donderdag 11 februari 2021 12:37

Aan: Brigitta Isabella <[REDACTED]@[REDACTED].com>

CC: rieneke de vries <[REDACTED]@[REDACTED].com>; reinaart vanhoe <[REDACTED]@gmail.[REDACTED]>

Onderwerp: Re: We sell reality?

Dear Gita and Rieneke,

First of all, I want to thank both of you for this beautiful conversation. I feel really sad to hear about Rieneke's boyfriend in your last email. I sincerely hope that your boyfriend is feeling better now, and that all your loved ones are safe and well.

Recalling the starting point of this conversation, it was back in October, when we were all going through the course of the pandemic, that I began to quietly "listen" to your correspondence. I always felt excited whenever I opened and read your emails. Whether it be on difficult subject matters, or more uplifting and cheerful memories in

your lives, I always imagined myself being in those moments with you while reflecting at the same time how I would act or feel in those particular situations. I appreciate having had the chance to think together with both of you, though mostly as a silent companion.

While it seems that until today, February 11, we are not yet seeing the end of this strange situation, I do think that the pandemic has called for a critical reflection on many fundamental and important aspects of our notions of “we,” which you both have touched upon attentively and extensively.

What I feel strongly about in both your practices is how you try not to only create spaces for yourselves to live and thrive, but also to actively create “a shared time-space” where you can exchange your life experiences with others. This may be a rather simple idea, yet I believe that it is often only through sharing time and space that we start to understand how “we” are, in fact, all interrelated and in need of each other in different levels. These enacted time-spaces — be it KUNCI, Afterwork Reading Club or We Sell Reality — are not necessarily “about” or “for” art. It simply comes with the aim to be “with” others in a space where one could struggle, disagree, love, and dream together, and which eventually nurtures something larger than “art” itself — to borrow from both of your words.

This entangled relational space, as indicated in Gita’s correspondence, enables participants to “inhabit multiple roles, positions, and labels strategically.” It also allows us to notice “the impossibility of affixing a single and stable representation.” The collaborative efforts of We Sell Reality and what Gita facilitated for the project Afterwork Reading Club remind me of the philosophers Deleuze and Guattari when they talked about the affirmative notion of “minors” as an active transversal composition of multiple assemblages aiming to generate new patterns of becoming. The “minors” here are not meant to devalue or simplify people within the group but are seen as vital forces in making connections among various subjects. This forges a new collectiveness that moves toward the border of the dominant discourse while ultimately affecting and drawing others into the same space so “we” merges with “them.”

This leads me to another notion that struck me following your conversation: the idea of identity. During the pandemic, we witness the ways in which our identity is often brutally reduced to an ID, a passport or an “official” religion, without which we cannot gain access to certain fundamental rights. This, of course, is most obvious with the migrant workers, refugees, or undocumented people.

As the publication we are making together is titled “Art for a Citizenscene,” I often question myself not only about the problematic “artworld” nowadays — which sadly looks like a replica of the geopolitical reality and capitalistic structures of our times — but also the notion of “citizen” whose definition seems to be in the hands of the nation

state, granting only certain kinds of people the rights to be entitled as such.

Is it possible to break away from the “we” and “them,” the “us” and “others”? How can we work towards a different citizen scenery where our multiple identities and voices can be equally represented and heard with dignity and respect? While these questions feel extremely difficult and unlikely to be resolved in the near future, I nevertheless feel hopeful and agree with what Gita advocates for: to continue to “practice modes of collective learning,” and to constantly confront, imagine and experiment with the idea of “togetherness.”

I remember an artist once said that, in a sense, we are (and should declare that we are) all stateless because it is hard to identify with a single nation ideologically, culturally, artistically, or intellectually. Rather, we often find ourselves identifying and aligning with certain human (or non-human) beings who have enlightened or provided inspiration through their thinking or being. Following this line of thought, I think that your conversation directs us hopefully towards an emerging state of citizen scene, where artistic and cultural practitioners play a crucial role, taking into account the structure of the recognized state, while actively enacting a collective condition that transcends the symbols that define our current identity and citizenship.

To end my mail, I wanted to share that today happens to be Lunar New Year’s Eve! Thus, I would like to wish everyone a Happy New Year! May we move steady and strong towards the future together in the Year of Ox. :-)

P.S I would love to meet-up and have a chat with you all; but, indeed, maybe it is better to have Rieneke decide as I understand this should be a difficult time for you. In any case, thank you all again, and take care.

art
is everywhere

warm greetings from freezing Amsterdam,
Emily

Julia Wilhelm

Julia Wilhelm is enthusiastic about writing, interdisciplinary research and creating platforms and infrastructures for coming together. Next to her long-term research project on sleep, she is interested in collectivity and self-organising, for example as part of the student-led climate collective SPIN. With SPIN she is working on a magazine about the climate crisis and building up a rooftop garden and student-led curriculum at WdKA in Rotterdam. She is part of the group project Cooking Something Up, that explores reproductive work, non-institutional ways of studying, and embodied knowledge through cooking and eating together. As a student assistant at WdKA's Research Station she organized reading and writing clubs. She was an intern at Framer Framed from February to July 2021.



Workshop Report by Julia Wilhelm

The publication process of this book was accompanied by a series of online workshops in which we invited participants to gain insights into the dialogues, engage with the contributors, and co-develop design frameworks for the publication prior to its physical manifestation. To facilitate the workshops, participants received booklets with excerpts from the publication in advance.

The workshops took place on [gather.town](#), a digital platform often referred to as a mix between Pokémon and Zoom. The interface is designed as an archipelago consisting of different islands connected through pebbles. Inspired by the landscape of Southeast Asia, from where many of the contributors originate, the virtual space functions as a metaphor for fluidity between land and water, thought and practice, while being an environment that invites playfulness. Participants can walk around the islands with a personalised avatar. In the space visitors can find objects that contain videos, images, hyperlinks and quotes related to the publication. This allows the platform to serve not only as an interactive space, but also an ever-growing archive.

Workshop: Hybrid eXperience 1 & 2

28 MARCH & 4 APRIL, 11:00 – 13:00

The first two workshops **Hybrid eXperience** were facilitated by Sig Pecho. Sig is part of the performance collective *Komunidad X*, which sees “X” as a point of encounter, exchange, and transformation. The “X” functions as a meeting point, and “X” is also the key that participants need to press to interact with objects on *gather.town*. The main intention of the workshops was to offer “time-X-space” for encounter and exchange, discuss topics addressed in the publication, and harvest doodles and scribbles which could be integrated in the publication.

Dream Catcher

After gathering around the fireplace, Sig welcomed the participants with a short introduction. We then walked to the first site of encounter on the North-East of the archipelago, a fisher net hanging from a tree, referring to the common association between the sea, the unconscious, and dreams. Through pressing “X”, a whiteboard embedded in the net appeared, people could take notes and make sketches. Once all avatars found their way to the cozy spot, Sig shared some thoughts on the dialogue he had with curator Mayumi Hirano for the publication.

“When this project started out, Mayumi and I shared our hopes of being together in a better place where we can commit to the exchange of ideas, practices, and experiences. The pandemic, however, led us to become resilient with our virtual gatherings. We had our processes or methods that were both new to us. In this exchange, we learned a lot, we shared so much, but we also expressed how we dreamed of better conditions in the future. What are the values of dreams, of collectively dreaming together?”

In line with his reflections, he invited the participants to dream up a post-pandemic future and presented the notion of landscape, thoughtscape and feelscape that are relevant both in the context of his theatre-practice and as tools for collective imagination¹.

To make this collective dreaming more playful, Sig proposed to play the game "Bring Me", in which participants had 30 seconds to look for an object in their immediate environment that connects to their dream(s). The participants were invited to share the stories of the objects they brought.

One of the participants brought a Bialetti percolator, referring to the act of sharing a cup of coffee, but also to the fact that much coffee is still produced in neo-colonial frameworks in exploitative working situations, which he would like to see changed in the landscape of the future. Another person brought her small silver cigarette rolling box that often catches the curiosity of passers-by on the street, enabling her to engage in conversations with strangers while sharing a cigarette. Still another participant brought their phone, a medium through which they connect to their close-ones from far away and through which they experience intimacy.

Some participants brought living beings such as a plant, or a sour-dough culture, beings that need to be maintained and taken care of to thrive and remind us of our interdependencies to other species. A participant shared a glass of water, which served as a metaphor for fluidity, for futures as malleable landscapes, which connects to another person who shared a non-object, the absence of an object, inspired by the story of the king of "No-Form" by Chinese philosopher Chuang Tzu.² While one person was talking, the others were drawing, noting, writing down comments and questions, or reacting on other people's sketches and thoughts, resulting in a growing web of interconnected images and texts.

1. In this context, the term *landscape* refers to the physical build-up of the imaginative scenery, and the ecosystems that form it; *feelscape* is an invitation to think the emotional journey that gets you there; *thoughtscape* is connected to the shared values and the culture of this imaginative future. See the dialogue

2. "The South Sea King was Act-on-your-Hunch. The North Sea King was Act-in-a-Flash. The king of the place between them was No-Form. Now South Sea King and North Sea King used to go together often to the land of No-Form and he treated them well. So the two consulted together. They thought up a good turn, a pleasant surprise to No-Form, in token of their appreciation. 'Men', they said, 'have seven openings: for seeing, for breathing, for hearing and so on. But No-Form has no openings. Let us make him a few holes.' As so they put holes in No-Form, one a day for seven days. And when they finished the seventh opening, their friend lay dead. It is then said: 'To organize is to destroy.'"

Fruits for Thought

After our intimate conversations, participants had time to roam around to find some “Fruits for Thought” scattered around the island, which contained small excerpts, images, or video clips related to the publication. We reconvened in our next meeting point – a fruit-bearing tree in the South-West of the islands and shared the fruits we found. Many participants could relate to a quote by Brigitta Isabella, embedded in a lemon. In her dialogue with Rieneke de Vries, Brigitta describes how she connects with the word amateur in her practice:

“We become a translator, a friend, an artist, a writer, a cook, a gardener, a teacher, a student perhaps as an eternal amateur. To me the word amateur harnesses the affective side of doing things together for collective pleasure/joy and resist the dulling practice of “professionalism” or “business as usual.” Being an amateur also allows me to learning through the process instead of assuming I always know exactly what am I doing or about the people who I work with.”

This quote connects to the multiplicity of roles many participants inhabit in their own work. As Brigitta’s correspondent Rieneke wrote in one of her emails:

“What happens/what is the implication when they have the label of “artist”? My answer: ” I don’t care about the label artist at all. We, (We Sell Reality), use different labels in different situations. Sometimes we call ourselves a design collective, sometimes an art collective, sometimes I call myself a social worker (when I call a lawyer for example), sometimes we say we are a ‘studio’ or a shelter. Sometimes we make ourselves big, sometimes we have to be small.”

In line with this quote, the participants considered artistic practices rather as tools for social change than as end-goals and agreed that the label of "artist" could also function as a tool to apply for funding or to get access to certain infrastructures. Many participants were also interested in the idea of "adapting" one’s practice and the labels one uses to specific contexts. It is also true that different contexts require different approaches, different responses — this resonates with the notion of ecosystems brought forward by Bunga Siagian, which underlies

“a context of creation that, in its process, is not autonomous or isolated — inseparable from its relations with others or from its social and political nuances. An awareness of such interdependency reveals a new perspective on the different roles and dynamics of different subjects within the context of creation”

Another participant reflected on a banana that contained an image that Willy Chen Wei-lun, shared in his conversation with Wok the Rock. The photo depicts a protest called dB Test Vol. 2, organised with the Dagan Community that had built a network of mutual aid in New Taipei city, yet ended up being forcefully evicted. Here again, art and music function as tools not only to achieve a specific goal, but also to create joy and solidarity among those present.

Many participants were also interested in Elaine W. Ho's proposal to think of art as 'the practice of giving attention':

"I recently had a meeting with members of the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination, and they describe art as the practice of giving attention. This struck a chord with me, because it shifts the relations between artworks as objects of contemplation, and the processes between theory and praxis that we may call creation. It also begs the question of who it is we are giving our attention to, and who it is that might deserve more attention."

Speculations about Infrastructures

The sharing of our fruits resulted in a conversation on whether the concept of art is already too entangled with the speculative art market, institutional infrastructures and the idea of the solitary genius. Can we come up with our own infrastructures based on collectivity and solidarity, as opposed to the institutional art-world?

Both institutions and collectives are ultimately composed of people, but the concepts and ideologies after which they operate are radically different. We also discussed the possibilities of online platforms like gather.town as tools for collective organisation, to work and live together despite being physically distanced. But those platforms are often in private ownership, the devices through which we access them are made and tailored by private companies. What alternatives are there?

We ended our adventure with a moment of reflection around the fireplace and shared what we took from the space. For many of us the exchange was valuable and the discussion under the fruit-bearing-tree spread seeds in our minds. To say goodbye and honor each other's presence, Sig led a short closing-of-ritual, during which we were invited to shine into the camera with the torch from our phones, creating a starry sky of frames and faces floating over the landscape of the archipelago.

Workshop 3: Doodle Lecture

In the beginning of the third workshop **Doodle Lecture**, we walked into a small wooden house located in the West of the archipelago. Between sofas, games, and a kitchen, the participants could find a table with a huge chocolate cake surrounded by balloons, prepared for our first speaker Rieneke de Vries's birthday. After singing birthday songs in different languages, everyone grabbed their own drawing materials at home or used the digital whiteboard embedded in the virtual space to document their thoughts on Rieneke's talk.

11 April, 11:00 – 13:00

We Sell Reality

In her talk, Rieneke de Vries traced her path from the art academy to her present situation. She explained that after graduating from art school, she started to work with homeless people. While she first saw this work as something separated from her practice, she later brought them into her art by drawing and taking photographs of them. At the same time, she became more and more reflective of the social structures she was confronted with, a dissatisfaction that finally led her to make more expressive artworks and take her first job as a social worker.

Due to the war in Syria and the overcrowded asylum centers, the Dutch government started building tents to house arriving refugees. Rieneke soon began visiting and working in the camp. There, she met people from a multitude of backgrounds and built close friendships with several of them. The asylum procedures had very different outcomes for her friends, some were able to get a permit, while others encountered problems. For Rieneke, this resulted in a moment of reflection: **What could she, as an artist, do in such a situation?** That was when she first had the idea of a label called 'We Sell Reality', a label that would 'sell' the reality of European migration and the stories her refugee friends brought with them. To communicate their message to people outside the artworld, she thought about creating objects of everyday use with her undocumented friends. After Rieneke met Elke Uitentuis, they founded We Sell Reality together.

Treatment Plans and the Notion of Care

Next to her work for *We Sell Reality*, Rieneke also started to work in a youth care institute as a social worker. The situation in the institute was overwhelming: some kids were in difficult mental states and she was lacking the tools to deal with the situation. As part of a treatment plan, Rieneke started to realise that her background as an artist made her look at the institutional framework in a more critical way.

Reflecting on her practice as an artist and a social worker, she noticed that there are usually four layers in her work. The first is observation. The second is connecting with the people. The third layer involves a phase of co-creation. The fourth and final layer means to come up with a treatment plan that considers the psychological and social aspects of those involved and to come up with a solution. To her, the fourth layer is vital and something that is often missing in artistic engagements. Rieneke admitted that being part of a treatment plan is a complex task that she does not always succeed in.

After quitting her job at the youth care institute, Rieneke continued as a social worker in a community house in Rotterdam. As the funding for the project was to end in September, 2021, she wasn't sure if she should continue the social work path, or the art/applying for funding path. She ended her talk asking the participants for advice.

One participant said she appreciated Rieneke's honesty, not pretending to be the perfect artist, but acknowledging her insecurities and struggles. Another participant noted that while the term 'care' seems rather popular in the current art discourse, to the extent that it risks becoming shallow, Rieneke practiced real 'care'. Eventually, there was no resolution for Rieneke's dilemma, but many participants could relate to it.

Non-Oppositional Criticality

Our next meeting point was a boat decorated with shells at the East of the archipelago. There, Zoénie Liwen Deng first introduced her recent PhD project on non-oppositional criticality in Southern China, and later highlighted some aspects of her dialogue with Elaine W. Ho. In her PhD project, Zoénie was interested in the notion of the Flowing and the Unstable as a political act, the main title of the thesis *Be Water, my friend* stems from a quote by Bruce Lee:

“Empty your mind, be formless, shapeless — like water.

Now you put water in a cup, it becomes the cup; You put water into a bottle it becomes the bottle; You put it in a teapot it becomes the teapot. Now water can flow or it can crash. Be water, my friend.” In line with his reflections, he invited the participants to dream up a post-pandemic future and presented the notion of landscape, thoughtscape and feelscape that are relevant both in the context of his theatre-practice and as tools for collective imagination¹.

Zoénie worked out four different forms of criticality practiced among artists and communities in southern China. The first one, *Reconfigurative Criticality*, refers to the reconfiguration of the public space. *Connective Criticality* is interested in forging connections between people and actively counter-forcing competitiveness. For *Uneasy Criticality*, Zoénie uses the theatre project Home (2016) about migrant workers in Beijing as an example. Here, theatre is used to reflect on and deal with social issues while raising questions that make the audience uneasy. The goal of this form of criticality is to educate the public. The fourth form is *Quotidien Criticality*, which refers to engaging people on a daily basis.

Also-Dialogue⁴

Afterwards, Zoénie talked about her conversation with Elaine for the publication and how it influenced her own research and thinking. In the beginning of their dialogue, they shared some experiences with mansplaining and the fact that people who are better at articulating themselves are usually given more attention. Some of Elaine’s remarks led Zoénie to question her own research and how these power relations influence her work.

She went on to introduce some of Elaine’s projects, like *HomeShop* (2008 – 2013), a place where connecting, living, and eating together was central, or *WaoBao*, a swap event in which not only materials, but also stories were exchanged. In Elaine’s ongoing project *Light Logistics*, people volunteer to create otherwise infrastructures for publications to travel. **These Infrastructures are not based on efficiency and money, and often initiate new friendships and collaborations amongst the contributors.**

3. Zoénie’s thesis can be found here: <https://pure.uva.nl/ws/files/52347198/Thesis.pdf>

Collectivity and Otherwise Futures

In the discussion following Zoénie's presentation, one participant noted that the art system is in a legitimacy crisis. Other participants took up the question of how to navigate the ruined art world, for instance through creating bonds and effecting change on a small scale, or by hijacking the system and redistributing resources. How can art help us manifest a better future?

Zoénie addressed the question of how to form a collective, a question that she had also asked Elaine in their dialogue. Nobody could give a concrete answer, but the participants figured out that collectives are always arising from a common goal or interest, and that in many cases collectivity is more a means than a goal. This recalls Elaine's attempted answer in the publication:

"[...] there is no precision to the hows when there are so many different modes and intentions for organising. I was recently watching Agnes Chow's YouTube channel, and in one episode a netizen asked her precisely, 'How is a political party created?' [...] I guess it's not really something to create. It's more when a group of people gather, there's a really important question that you should be able to answer: what's the difference between you versus the parties that already exist in Hong Kong right now? In other words, you should be possessing a very unique philosophy. Also this philosophy that you're believing in should be a benefit to the future.

What is striking here is how the mandate for the new and unique, something of course so embedded within the arts, is also imbricated within the administration of politics and social change. We are all, always, looking for new ways to deal with the same old problems which have plagued societies since the dawn of humankind."

4. Zoénie and Elaine decided to call their dialogue also dialogue, after the initiator Reinaart's project also space.

Workshop 4: Musical Hangout

25 April, 11:00 – 13:00

During our fourth and final session of the series of the workshop, we went on a tour through the virtual archipelago in search for pineapples and chilis that contained videos contributed by Willy Chen Wei-Lun, and Wok The Rock. Willy and Wok gave insights into their practices, talked about Guerilla gigs, music as a means of protest, the importance of collectivism, and their reactions to the pandemic.

Introduction to their Practices

We first walked to the North-East of the archipelago where Wok led us to a red chili that contained a recorded live performance of his band ‘The Spektakuler’. Wok introduced his collective Mes 56 and talked about how they figure problems out together just like a family. He added that a general attitude against institutional structures brought the members together. The next video he shared showed recordings of an after-party at Mes 56 where female DJs were at the center. He explained how in the music scene female DJs are often marginalised, so Mes 56 saw it as a necessity to create a stage for them.

Next on, Willy led us to a pineapple that contained a music video by the Taiwanese indie band No-nonsense Collective and introduced his collective Trapped Citizen. Trapped Citizen was founded in 2016 as a study group on Das Kapital by artists and musicians who met during the Sunflower Movement and protests against forced eviction. In another pineapple, participants could find a documentary about the punk collective Ponti, which Willy visited in Jakarta. Ponti shares many similarities with Trapped Citizen: both depart from punk ethos, favor horizontal organisation, and are located at the periphery of cities.



Workshop 4: Introduction to their Practices

Music-Art-Society

Together we walked to the second spot on the island further south, where Wok shared a video about his project *Trash Squad* commissioned by the Jakarta Biennale. In this work, Wok wanted to raise questions such as: **What is capitalism? What is labour?** He created a cleaning company composed of punks that would pick up trash around 7/11s in Jakarta, a common place for punks to hang out. For Wok, *Trash Squad* was a way to redistribute the money he received from the Jakarta Biennale and a reaction to the bad image punks often have in public discourse. Wok also shared a video about his project *Yoyo Art Bar*, a social bar created in 2013 in Yokohama's Koganecho neighbourhood. He conceived it as a temporary space for gathering, sharing and encounters.

Willy shared videos of Guerilla gigs that he started a decade ago as a reaction against the industrialised music scene. **Those gigs were organised in public parks and other accessible spaces to challenge the institutional structures and the classical venues in the music scene.** He then led us to a pineapple containing a recording of a performance that took place during the activist fest *No Limit Tokyo Autonomous Zone* organised by the Japanese group *Amateur Riot*. *Trapped Citizen* connected with *Amateur Riot* after the nuclear catastrophe in Fukushima in 2011, which, with the following anti-nuclear demonstrations, marked a turning point for many social movements.

In Face of the Pandemic

At the next stop, Wok showed a video of a concert organised by Mes 56 on Rabu, a virtual platform especially suitable for parties and online gigs. For Mes 56, it was crucial to find ways of spending time together and organising events despite the pandemic. The next chili contained a feature-film long documentary called *Pandemic Improvisation* co-created by Wok. The film shows how Indonesian artists respond to the pandemic by performing on the streets for passers-by when they cannot perform at concerts.

Willy's next video showed a performance of the Wuhan based punk band SMZB in Taiwan organised by Trapped Citizen in 2018. After the outbreak of the pandemic, politically-driven discourses of the 'China-', or 'Wuhan-virus' generated anxiety and xenophobia. To show solidarity, Trapped Citizen held a wood print workshop and organised discussions with friends from Wuhan. Willy also shared a video of a set by DJ Lala, a student from Hong Kong and member of the Taiwan International Student Movement. The movement fights for the rights of international students accused of bringing the virus to Taiwan.

As a response to the discrimination, Willy's collective Print & Carve Dept., a group of amateurs invested in making woodprints, created a woodcut showing a poker game as a metaphor of how non-citizens were discarded in moments of crisis. Print & Carve Dept also made works to support the occupation of the floor of Taipei main station in 2020 as a reaction to a ban issued by the government that prohibited gathering on the station floor, a popular space for migrant workers to hang out.

moments
to KEEP

On Collectivism

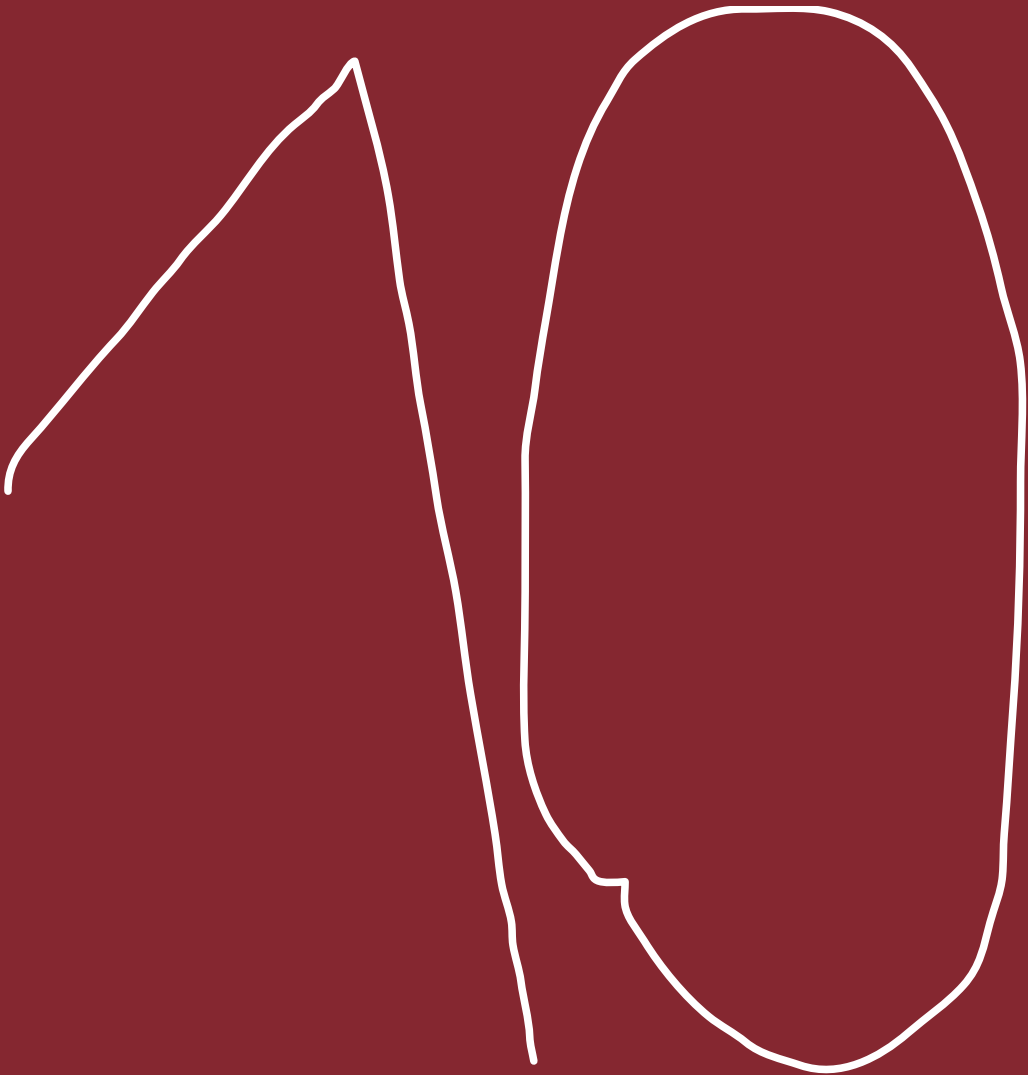
On our last stop, Wowo shared a music video he worked on with the experimental music group Senyawa. Wok and Senyawa share an interest in decentralisation and accessibility, Senyawa's album was released by several independent labels. Akin to that, Wok's Label Yes No Wave Music publishes tracks on their website which can be downloaded for free. **For Wowo, sharing music is a way to support friends, and the label is an aspiration for "the democratization of the music industry."**

The last pineapple shared by Willy contained the movie *Youth* (2017) by Feng Xiaogang, which follows idealistic adolescents who are part of a military art troupe during the Cultural Revolution in China. Willy referenced this film because he thinks collectivism in Taiwan needs to be understood in relation to the past; it is important to be aware of the historical and geopolitical context to understand the connotations of collectivism for Taiwanese citizens.

After the musical stroll came to an end, the initiator of the publication reinaart vanhoe concluded that the aim of the project was to offer younger generations examples of otherwise ways of practicing art, and to highlight how artistic practices always need to be understood as part of complex ecosystems. Together we walked to a small island in the south-east to exchange some last thoughts on music, art, and activism. We ended the session with a collective experimental piano improvisation.



Art as Holistic Practice:



Notes from Terracotta Universe City

By Kristy Ilyas, Múz Spaans, repelsteeltje,
Elena Kolesnikova, Chellysia Christen, Naomi de Wit.

HOLISTIC PRACTICE

1. Mother City: How do Children Grow up in This City (from now until 20 years).
2. Anarchist Archipelago (Philippines): Connecting to Each Other and One's Roots.
3. Actively Creating a Space You Want to Live in: Development vs. Personalisation.
4. KITA as an Understanding.
5. Soil Strategy for Development.

List of Subjects

6. How to Use Established Art Infrastructure as Tools to Do Something Else.
7. Role of the Artist within Political Structures.
8. Making a Song is Making Friends.
9. Rituals and Spirituality.
10. Art as Holistic Practice.

Introduction

In October 2020, a group of young professional artists from also class (related to the Willem de Kooning Academy Rotterdam) had the opportunity to participate in a two week online lecture and workshop program with Jatiwangi art Factory (JaF). The program was hosted by MA Fine Arts at Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK) under the name *Terracotta Universe City*. By collectively taking notes and exploring ideas during the intensive two weeks, a text of shared insights came out. In other words, the text you are reading is written in a collective manner which we consider fitting to the ideas of JaF.

In the Netherlands we are usually trained - as individual artists - to be as unique as possible, groomed for exhibition spaces. However, our artistic interests are directed at community making, sustainability, local vs. global, social positioning as art practice, education platforms, art as a tool for making life collectively more enjoyable. Thus, we wanted to explore, how does it work when (art) projects are located outside the field of art spaces? For "who" is the space/the work meant to be? The way in which JaF uses art as a tool for community building is of great value for us. Through this program, we gained insights on how to relate to one another through making and how making supports thinking. Another aspect was how one can go around documenting their "artistic practices" in the way we are asked to do at an art academy.



According to JaF, everyone can make "Art". Art is not an exclusive niche practiced by professionals in Europe. It appears to us that Jatiwangi culture is based on different values. One can wonder if their approach would work in our context. They found their own way of creating a community through art practices, so maybe we need to find our own way based on our own culture, values and rituals - something that is able to connect us all. We hope this collection of texts and notes will help us and our friends to find support for the thoughts and wishes we have, but haven't yet been able to understand well enough in relation to art practice.

Note 1:

Mother City:

How Do Children Grow Up in this City.

(from now until 20 years)

As a child you learn from the environment you grow up in. In 2016, Manman (a member of JaF) was making a piece for a 16mm film tool. His little son was copying the piece in another material and on a smaller scale. It was nice to see that no words were needed for the boy to understand how he could copy his fathers actions. Observing his father was already enough. Children often learn more elsewhere than they learn at school. So how to organise a beneficial environment for a kid to grow up? What is needed is to build an environment of tangibility, love, care and attention next to the structures we are forced into.

The JaF community is a community of poetry. Answers sound like poetry. To talk in poetry creates strength, understanding and a sense of belonging. Can it be framed as the tone of the mother? The common understanding of a mother is a woman who has given birth to a child. The mother is the embodiment of a knowledgeable, responsible caretaker who is willing to sacrifice herself for the sake of the children. But just as motherhood could extend to taking care of other people's children as well as their own, the spirit of motherhood extends to taking care in general. This spirit of motherhood is easily found in communities like Jatiwangi, where nurturing each other and each other's needs is more centralized than, for example, here in the West.

Everyone who comes to JaF will be welcomed by 'Nin.¹ She is called the mother of everyone and therefore the heart and center of the district. Next to 'Nin, there is Yuma, the partner of Arief. She is the only trained artist in the city and uses her skills and knowledge to create art projects for the children. This way, she can be close to her son Nyanya and give him and his friends a playful and imaginative life that gives them access to different experiences. These experiences are not available in a conservative environment or school setting. By maintaining strong connections with the kindergarten and the primary school of Nyanya, Yuma has room to organize more projects for the children. For example, think of mural paintings, costume and drama, making songs and radio, in which Yuma applies everything she knows to create ways for the children to feel and sense what art is and can be, while making it accessible at the same time.

Through these daily encounters, Yuma builds up trust and solid relationships with the children and everyone around her. Her genuine gestures and actions connect with all of the other women-driven practices in the city, forming a collective spirit of agency. However, these gestures and actions can get rather invisible because her work is often measured to other standards of artistic practices, in which tangible works are delivered.

1. *By the time of this publication Nin unfortunately passed away.*

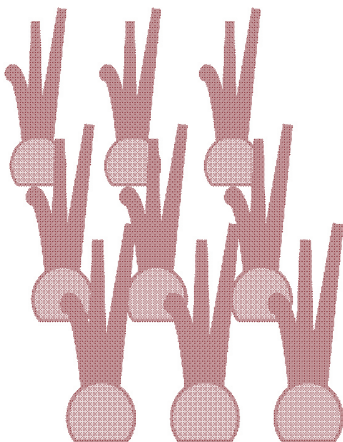
The same "invisibility" goes for children because they are fragile and more easily overlooked, but they also shape a big part of the center foundation. It is interesting that here in the west we strive to create networks that can assist us in ways of exhibition. But in Jatiwangi, the bonds between people can be seen as the artwork in itself.

Think of invisibility of not having the need to document well, not as a lack or inferiority. Think about what agency means in terms of being the heart of the dynamic but not taking the center stage and also take into account that some women in Southeast Asia cannot afford to be visible in the context of liberal definition and that being visible in general is not desirable for women. Yuma tells us her expanded notion of agency. She left us with the question of whether agency could be "actions on actions"- actions that are less interested in idioms of visibility, but that does not mean it is not there. The impact of the agency the women-driven practices carry and these rather invisible and overlooked gestures, in comparison with big festivals and events Jatiwangi organizes, actually determine the collective environment and infrastructures of this mother city and shape itself to be the center of the foundation.

"A male city is more competitive and cold, while a mother city is more nurturing." This is a sentence mentioned during the workshops of Jatiwangi, and it stuck with me ever since. It is an interesting thing to think about. Of course, the nature of a mother is completely different than the nature of a father. I investigated this subject, to see what is the difference between the mother instinct and the father instinct.

When fathers interact with their children, they are hardwired to prepare their children for the future. For example, the mother may use babbling or baby talk to speak to their child, whereas the father wants to encourage the child to use bigger words. This isn't necessarily a conscious decision, but he is pushing them a little bit to get them ready for their future. Another example of how dads prepare their children for the future is during game playing. If a mother is playing a game with their child, she will often let the child win. If the father is playing a game with their child, often the father does not let the child win. The paternal instinct is such that he is teaching his son or daughter to be a good loser,

because if the child beats dad in a game, then they have actually accomplished something. This focus on the future is just hardwired in engaged fathers.



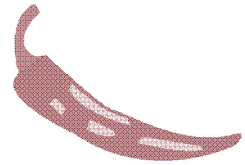
Seeing this, I do understand where the quote of Jatiwangi comes from. A male parent tries to prepare the child for the future, makes him deal with being a loser, teaches them about work ethics, and tries to make the child a better person through his experience. The female parent wants her child to win and feel good about

HOLISTIC PRACTICE

themselves, teach them that they are okay in the present as they are. You might interpret this as the mother being more nurturing, while the father is more competitive. Right now, most places in the world are operating in an all-male fashion, with cities based on the dream of success and the making of money. In this regard, Jatiwangi offers an interesting idea about the making of places, purposely trying to turn it into a mother city.

There is a hope that in the future, we can raise cities that can share harmoniously both the male and the female influence (and other genders for that matter).

*As my neighbour at my current living address, she is kind
Her food fills the body after a hard morning of work
She makes too much food so she can share
Helping my mother move
What residency fits her best*



*The same clay that we walk on, covers our heads
Earth and sky, and everything in between, moves as one
The plants in the garden are nourished by the fertile ground
So are we
Turning to the sun
We gather around the fire, as the temperature rises, so do our voices
Hands that move together to form a symphony
Hands collect together, so mouths can chew together
The children of the city
Standing firm with their feet in the clay
Together they remain*

Can our optimism remain in a world that seems to grow outside of the human, the familiar? A world where the community disappears and remains visible in commercial franchises and as deliverers of data via digital platforms; How do we celebrate that we are alive?

We can rest in the chaos of it all, we can create together, eat together, make music together, watch sports together, do something nice for a neighbour, do something nice for your community. Ask yourself "who is my community and who else can become part of this community." Do something nice for yourself. Do something for the people around you. Share your love, engage in constructive activism, compromise over destructive achievement of ideology. Create healthy soil around yourself for things to blossom.

Stay flexible, that which is rigid will ossify, calcify and break. Walk different paths so our children can play with what we discover.

Note 2:

Anarchist Archipelago (Philippines):

Connecting to each other and one's roots.

People and ideas moved as the currents of the sea in the archipelago; a highly connective and communicative system. The islands with different cultures became a connective system of knowledge. Though during colonial times roads got blocked or broken. The Anarchist Archipelago looks for ways to decolonize, to break open the road towards more fluent culture in the Archipelago.

When I was a child, everything seemed magical to me. I looked at the clouds and I wondered if they were angry because they make thunder. I looked at the trees

and I wondered if they could speak to me or feel my presence. I looked at the fish in the river and I wondered what they were thinking, whether they liked my new baby pink shoes, and whether they wanted to be my friend.

When I was a child, I asked my mother and my father a million and one questions about these things. When they answered, they had two options for me. The first is that: "No child, these things are just what they are and nothing more." But the second option was to go along with me, to feed my imagination with more stories, such as the two mice called Babette and Eleonore going on adventures together, or about giants and fairies and witches.

When I got older, I couldn't afford to stay in this mindset. I had to face the fact that I was growing up, and now it was time to focus on reality instead of imagination. My vision of the future held a big part in that. How am I gonna make money? I loved the imagination so much, but I felt like I should give that up. It felt as if I had to choose between becoming successful and "wealthy" through the safe option; going to university, studying something like maths or science, or becoming happy and content with art and imagination, but struggling with money all my life.

Participating in the talks of JaF, I got very inspired because of their mindset. For them, art is a road everyone could take, whether you are a baker or a filmmaker. Art and imagination is something that connects people and places, that makes the community have a purpose and an identity, and most importantly (at least in the western perspective), something that could bring you progress, success, and wealth.

Art is part of our life, not something only for just a small group of people.

Note 3:

*Actively Creating
a Space You Want
to Live in:*

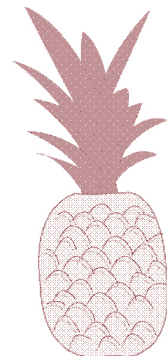
*Development vs.
Personalisation.*

Installing a Sense of Pride & Connectedness: I rather acknowledge culturally diverse identity than national identity. National identity imposes an idea of belongingness. Nationalism colonise and inflict identity. Nationalism, for me, has always brought a negative connotation with it. By feeling proud and connected to one place means we do not feel the same way about another. It is a very easy recipe for us to start feeling like one is seen better than the other, only because we do not know about the other place. What this previous quote says, is that there's so many more things that form your identity, than solely the place you are born or living in. Your identity is also influenced by social class, ethnicity, religion, generation and many other things. It is basically about feeling part of a certain group, for whatever reason you yourself see fit.

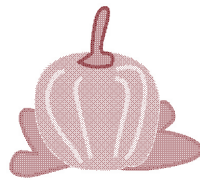
The other day, I was talking with a friend about the fundamentals on which we create this connectedness with a certain group. He posed the question to me: "You are an art student in your twenties living in the Netherlands. Do you feel more connected with a Dutch farmer in his fifties, or a Polish art student, in her twenties?" It made me think quite a lot, because we seem to think the logical answer for us is to point at the person that lives in the same country as they seem to be more connected to us. But I think it is far away from the truth.

There is a mindset that one of the speakers shared with us from JaF. It is almost like a love poem to the earth around us, and not just to the things we know and the places we are at, but also to everyone and everything else. It shows the whole world as our living place, and a mindset that says "we are all in this together."

*Everything is related
Earth, sea, sky are interconnected
Animals, plants, people are intersected
We are riding in a world that travels
In the middle of the universe
Rotating around a star that gives life
To plants, to animals and to us*



Therefore, when I think about forming pride and connectedness with the place you are living in, I think of feeling that same pride and connectedness with everything else. Because you are connected to other places in other ways, like how the Polish student might live the same life as yours, or how the eighty year old lady from California loves ballet just as much as you. Once you start seeing everything as part of a whole, and seeing this as something beautiful and amazing, it is not about competition between other places. You do not belong to one city, because that city is part of the whole web of cities that come with it. You do not belong to one identity, because that identity is part of a whole web of identities that together, creates you, us and everyone.



Note 4:

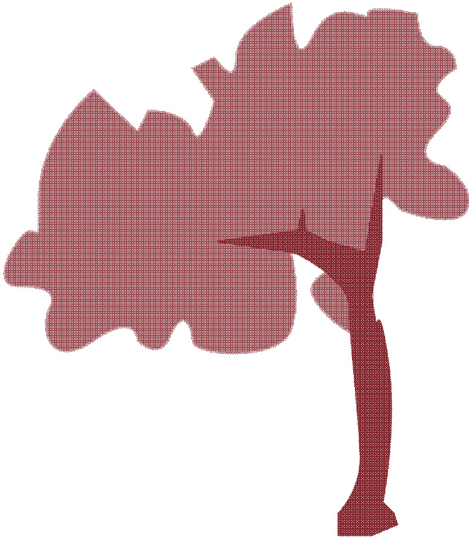
*KITA as an
Understanding.*

You could say that Javanese (Indonesians) are collectively orientated and very communal. This shows how villages keep close and unique communities; all have their own rituals and beliefs and take care of each other. These cultural values push the principles that shape collectivism organically. Inclusivity can be seen as one of Indonesians core values. A great reflection

of these values is visible in their language, as a way to connect to the community to describe "what is ours". Bahasa Indonesia holds several ways to describe we/us. The first example illustrates we/us without the person that is being spoken to, is included; they will refer to we/us as "kami". The next situation in which the person that is being spoken to is included will be referred to as "kita". It roughly means "we/us/our and you included" and there is no direct English translation.

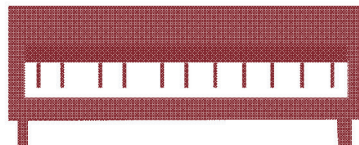
Bahasa is not the only language that holds this definition. In Tagalog (Philippine) the same principle arises, but they use "kami" as not including the other and "tayo" for including the other as well. In Mandarin 我们 'wô men' is exclusive and 咱们 "zán men" is inclusive. In relation to KITA, we want to share the following words used during the workshops which relate back to the Indonesian communal spirit:

Nongkrong can be a tool for an artist working in a particular area and/or performing within a space on a daily basis. It is important to be in contact and visible to the people you engage with. After seeing you on a daily basis, people are less hindered to strike up a conversation. In Indonesia this concept of slowly embedding yourself into a space by the use of smalltalk is called "nongkrong". Nongkrong means something like "chitchat". JaF uses nongkrong in order to identify what is alive within a community. It is a slow process, but slowness is valuable when one doesn't want to jump to conclusions. To engage this tool as a work of art or process, documentation is necessary but hard to achieve as through nongkrong things happen organically.



Musyawarah-mufakat (deliberation and consensus) is a traditional group decision-making process in which participants develop and decide on proposals with the aim, or requirement, of acceptance by all. It has been observed in village-meetings but is still used in modern day Indonesia, even in the parliament: President Sukarno announced the Pancasila, which are the five pillars that embody the basic principles of the independent Indonesian state. Musyawarah-Mufakat is included in the fourth pillar: "Kerakyatan Yang Dipimpin Oleh Hikmah Permasyarakatan-Perwakilan"/ democracy guided by the inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations among representatives, which basically means that all decisions should be taken by the majority after long deliberation.

Gotong royong is a Javanese expression to illustrate communal cooperation to achieve a shared objective. Gotong means "carrying a burden using one's shoulder", while royong means "together" or "communally", thus the combined phrase gotong royong can be translated literally as "joint bearing of burdens" or "mutual help".



Note 5:*Soil Strategy
for Development.**a. why Soil*

The soil is a shared good.
It carries the feet of the workers.
It carries the nutrition for the crops and the people.

The soil in Jatiwangi has fueled the economy in the years of industrial progress in the form of terra cotta clay.

The soil now supports new infrastructure to keep the global economic upward trend going.

The soil has a common history and future.
The soil is employed by JaF as social glue.
The material is centralized in their practice and by this connects everyone to the central support system of the ground.

The soil can be formed as one pleases.

b. how to Soil

By organizing workshops and activities that are centered around the soil, new values are created. The value of connection is one.

When the ritual of ringing the earth is performed, people are playing clay instruments together.

By collectively ringing the earth, a ritual of praising the earth with earth is put in place. Secondly, the soil is there. It is the basis for our existence. By putting it back on the forefront of the community, a common part of it is emphasized and made tangible.

The moldability of the material enables many possibilities.

The urges, dreams and needs of the community are kneaded into the common ground.

Exposing the material and researching its possibilities on a collective basis is a perfect example of social art practice. The soil is used as inspiration to invite guests to use, invent and (re-)create by means of artistic productions.

*The artists' position***Note 6:***How to Use
Established Art
Infrastructure as Tools
to Do Something Else.*

As an artist, you have access to resources like funds, spaces and knowledge provided by institutions like the art academies, museums and public funds. The practice of many artists is often poured into a small bubble of these institutions and the people that are involved. The circulation of ideas produced in these bubbles often creates stagnation. There is more floor to cover. There are different challenges outside the art bubbles. I do not mean that art needs to necessarily fix these challenges. It can help in some cases but to repeat the words of JaF: you can also lose in style.

Art has the ability to celebrate life; highlighting that which is important to us. It can bring people together that find themselves in that which is celebrated. Therefore the artist shouldn't be scared with the time they invest in their surroundings. The interactions with others allows for the accumulation of ideas, materials and information that can not be gained in any other way. It is important that when you involve yourself with others the energy is reciprocal because after some point you or the other will stop caring. JaF makes sure to take care of each other, their community and has shown that this is the way to let your community grow. By getting more people on board, a movement begins.

The academy as a social hub (making the academia accessible)

The academy imagines itself often as a frontier in social change. However, this imagination often sticks to the walls of museums and smaller art spaces, failing to impact anything other than the so called awareness of the people that are the regular visitors of these spaces. Awareness is an important step. If we aren't aware that something needs fixing, the problem stays. Awareness is often treated as an end to itself, but too much awareness only shows us the grand scale of the problems, often resulting in pain. When we carry too much pain, we feel powerless and naturally turn away, maybe by blaming someone else. Awareness needs action. For action, we need plans and resources. Coming up with constructive ways to change systems for the better must be done on a smaller scale, with friends or a community. It should be fun. The energy must be reciprocal.

The academy, instead of prepping their students as frontiers for spreading awareness to the multitude, should start with experimenting within the walls of the academy in order

to be able to reach out to others and do something constructive from the inside.

Letting the students make people aware of how bad plastics are, but selling sandwiches in their own canteen in plastic seems counterproductive. The academy should be more experimental and engage with people that are already implementing change outside the walls of the academy. Supporting what is already there and having students be part of the process is a more productive way of learning and coming closer to changes in thinking and acting.

The academy puts emphasis on ‘being out there’, as in, being a part of society, but often fails to open its doors for those that work and live in the area. How do you imagine connecting with others if you do not connect yourself? For example, next to the main building of the academy, there are a few spaces being used in which students are unaware of. These spaces could be perfect as a base to do field research or to start a creative project. Using the main building as the initial base for making work is great, but getting the work “out there” (instead of exposing it to your fellow students, after which the work is discarded in the trash) and actually making an impact is a must.

In short, opposition is the way for a few to grab power and let the others fight over it. By unifying people, we can all progress. Globalism must be embraced to not fall in the trap of nationalist localism, we thus need to stay in contact and inspire each other to act local, visiting each other (online) and sharing resources, knowledge and love.

Note 7:

*Role of the Artist
within Political
Structures.*

If you are against parts of the law or when you act unlawful, it is important to stay friends with the “authorities”- represented often by the police. I understand "ACAB" in the sense that cops commit to a job that reinforces policies that keep a repressive regime in place. Still we are dealing with people that also deserve love. This seems counterintuitive, but only by keeping up a relationship (even a challenging one) can we progress. JaF shared a vivid example that they once invited local policemen to come to their place and make a song together. By creating another setting - sharing love

for music and spending time together - we create an understanding. The social safety net and social control that would render the aggression of police only in necessary situations can only be established when we work together. The cooperation between family, neighbours, school, medical professionals and police would actually strengthen communities. Aggression on both sides would diminish if problems are acted on earlier. Creating a setting where people can meet and establish bonds outside the idea of duty and work is a challenge artists should undertake. JaF shows us in many ways how to start in a small and organic way, as a town isn't built in a day.

The idea of working locally is necessary but not always as fruitful as we hope. Filmmaker Alex Sihar told us about how we need artists on "the field" that work in direct contact with a community but also artists, like himself, that have a job as politicians. We need people in these positions, working with the system, to implement change that is needed on the streets. He used his position to get funding for local artists and started a program for protecting Indonesian heritage in the form of cultural production. By raising the importance of this cultural production for Indonesia and understanding how to let this thrive i.e. how to implement it so it can be of use for the people, the government becomes your friend, not your enemy.

We need people with artistic know-how in the field of decision making to let culture thrive. Connecting the head with the hands.

Does the creation of a song together lead to deep listening? During the two weeks of the program, we had deep listening workshops, learning about other ways of receiving and processing information. Listen in order to understand.

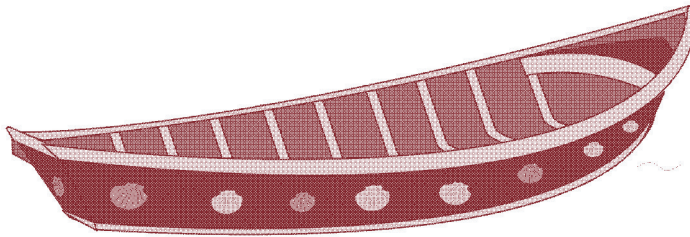
Note 8:

*Making a Song
is Making Friends.*

“Essential conversation is a meaningful exchange in an atmosphere of trust... Meaningful engagement creates a connected and interdependent whole.”

- Craig Neal, *The Art of Convening: Nine Ways to Transform Your Meetings, Gatherings and Conversations*

During the talks, participants from JaF told us how sometimes they would play music together with policemen. Mutual understanding without words but by creating togetherness. Development of a language between people, who take different roles in the society building, by using music as a tool. Feeling as one entity with the group. In the end, we are working towards one goal, so why not spend more time with each other? Constructing relationships brick by brick while having a good time together. Using imagination and playfulness in music as a way to make friends.



Note 9:

Rituals and Spirituality.

Importance of rituals: sense of connection, setting intention to achieve desired outcome, bring honor and acknowledgement, showing respect, to humble yourself, bring people into contact, create places of a particular concentration.

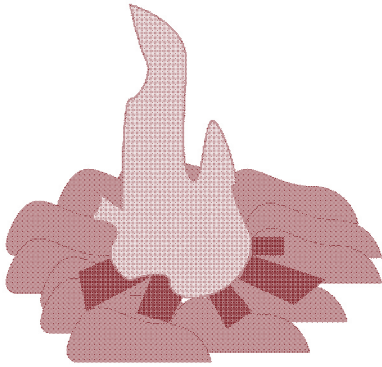
Elizabeth von Samsonow is an artist and philosopher that lives in Austria. Her project is about the loess - a material that is made out of tiny dust specks - that covers the nature area she lives in. Every meter below her feet is a 1000 years in loess, so you can literally see the earth being built. In Europe, the area in which the loess collects goes from Portugal through France until Poland. In the nature that she lives in, species

that were endangered have been coming back. She's seeing bee-eaters, rabbits, foxes, mice and many more different things. It is because the people have been leaving the earth in peace, they've been listening to what she needs. They've found a connection with the earth, and the earth has thanked them. During the JaF talks, Elizabeth von Samsonow came to talk about her project about loess.

HOLISTIC PRACTICE

*A new kind of ritual, inspired by
Elizabeth von Samsonow*

Reading the earth: what kind of people would live on this kind of land? What do they gain from it, what does the water bring and what do the trees whisper, what food is harvested from the land? Look at the soil, the animals on it, the layers of the earth that stack underneath our feet. What does the earth do to us, and what do we do to her? What is the land's life story, the living energy that flows through all the sand specks?



Get to know the nature of the area you live in. Treat her like a person. There is not a single intervention in its landscape that would not forever keep its place. The earth can tell us stories of a thousand years old, if we just listen to her. When you create a connection with the land, and you listen to her stories, you will know how to take care of it and you will see what it needs.

From the soil

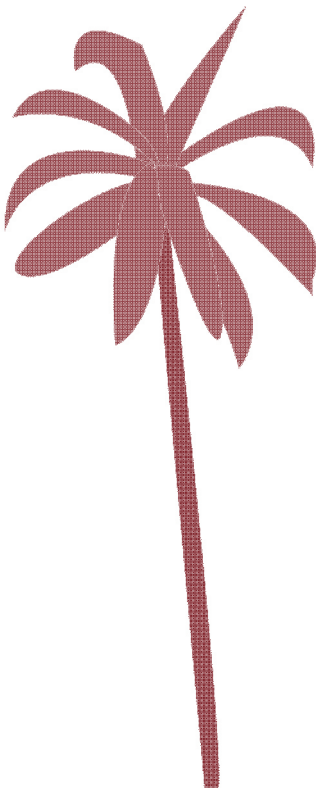
From the history of the roof tile factory where the district is known, to a giant music festival surrounding the famous soil, JaF gave a clear insight of how their projects came to be. What stood out is that all of these projects or activities are for and executed by the community and supported by rituals.

Most traditional rituals can be found in Indonesia's diverse culture, which is mainly formed by indigenous people but are also influenced by other regions such as South Asia, Far East and Middle East and Europe. On top of that, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucian, Christianity and Islam, all impacted cultural assimilation which combined make up the most diverse society in the world. The sea separates (or rather connects) over 17000 islands of which about 6000 are inhabited, each island has their own language, way of living, customs and rituals. Rituals are embedded in the community by culture, because it is a way of connecting, giving thanks, setting new intentions and honoring the old. It comes as no surprise that rituals also stood out in JaF's projects and activities.

An example of a ritual that was given was about burying a (duck) egg in the ground which you plant to live on. By doing so, they believe the ground will be your property in the future. Another beautiful example is that when a new highway opened in the village, instead of opposing it and rejecting it, JaF put the soil of the highway together with the

soil of the village to introduce it to each other. They said they wanted to welcome the neighbor that is now also a part of the community. Terracotta soil is important for various reasons. To the people of the district, the soil is an entity. There is a celebration every three years called "Berjamaah," which roughly translates as "mass burning". The community is invited to make an object from the soil and to bring it to the ceremony. They will come together to pray for the wellbeing of the soil and to be mindful about what the soil gives them. Important people like the Imam will be present. Afterwards, they will symbolically burn the terracotta objects.

These examples show that the people of Jatiwangi have a different awareness of the environment and their community because these factors are embedded in the culture they live in. Although they pray together when they celebrate, religion has less to do with these rituals. It is rather an intimate moment you share together to strengthen the relationships with the community.



This last example shows that you do not have to rearrange the entire activity to be mindful about your surroundings. Supernatural farming was initiated by JaF to point out that farming has become a mere economic activity. By doing rituals when you plant, give thanks, set intentions against pest repelling and harvesting, you create a way to connect back to the ground and soil you live on. They believe once you go back to this soil, it is not just a commodity. Supernatural farming shifts the awareness of farming back to the basics.

Jatiwangi also creates new rituals as they go. The basic principle of the new rituals rely on the notion of the old ones and are translated back to the way people in Jatiwangi live as a community and how they celebrate.

Note 10:*Art as
Holistic Practice.*

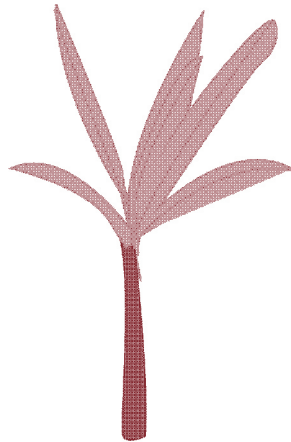
In our first note, the definition of an art practice can be interpreted differently with the example of Yuma. This definition of what art can be and how to apply it, is determined according to one's capability to translate it back to their own upbringing, culture, environment and needs. These organically evolved fundamentals embedded in Indonesia's culture determine the use and effect of art. Jatiwangi applies art in their day-to-day life with the core purpose of growth and happiness for all. It is their basic instinct of communicating and connecting with each other. By operating as a community even in their art projects, the projects are a pure extension of their holistic way of living.

Instead of focusing on how isolated individual components function distinctively, you shift the focus towards how these components work together as a whole. This way, you cannot exclude the way they live, the rituals they do and the simple moments of getting together when you try to define the art practice of JaF: the rituals are important to set intentions to achieve a desired outcome. It is a collective mindset to reach a higher goal. It is a way to show respect and humble yourself for the greater good to gain and strengthen a communal spirit. By collectively operating, the community pours soul into what they do and deliver. This is, in my opinion, the greatest difference between art practices in the West and in Southeast Asia because all of these components make up their ecosystem.

When you isolate components, the outcome will be different from what the outcome will be if all these components work as a whole. Therefore, it is hard to extract methods out of Jatiwangi's ecosystem and apply them in the Western educational system because the foundations of our practices differ in nature and purpose. The purpose and expectation on why we study and work is still focused on the economic value. It is a basic instinct in the West because we need to survive in our fast society. To apply methods inspired by JaF will require us to go beyond what is expected from us as students or teachers in the Western education system. It will ask us to make room and truly connect to each other and our environment. It requires us to acknowledge and embrace issues in society and take time together to understand its root instead of just opposing it. Instead of working individually, we should be collaborating and exchanging knowledge and skills with each other. We should not just work with artists, but also our neighborhood and environment.

The experience shared by JaF can be a great example of how art could be practiced otherwise. But we should understand that connection and sense of belonging should be the key aspect, and that we should be able to really listen to each other as well as our

environment. The main difference in how we live in contrast with JaF is also the main difference of the purpose of art and how we apply it.



Múz Spaans

Múz is actively working on places, tools and objects that support us to safely explore dreams and wishes without putting up borders. The dilemma between an insider and outsider is what thrives Múz's artistic explorations.

repelsteeltje

As a squatter, anarachafeminist and activist I am constantly researching and fighting the harm this white supremacist capitalist patriarchy does to me and the people around me. Right now I am researching this through my work "Praten met de Politie" where I transcribed police interactions and write them down in the format of plays that are printed out in the shape of zines. I also made these posters that consist of real quotes of policemen and visuals of the performed eviction play.

My work is about power and abuse of power, privacy, security and the differences in different levels of society. The work mostly consists of actions, gatherings, where I bring people together, like Intergalactic Jam x Tweebosbuurt where I gathered another group of artists to collab with squatters, this time in the format of a jam session with free food. I like to document through making zines. Zines are an accessible way to distribute the gained knowledge.

Elena Kolesnikova

Lena, a fine arts student who mostly works with photography, takes a poetic approach to her surroundings and observations. She creates playful dynamics, mixes words, images and materials to portray a visual story.

Chellysia Christen

Chellysia is an Animation student at the Willem de Kooning Academy in Rotterdam. She finished her last year of education, working on a 3D experimental animation that is about the subject of time. She is mostly interested in surrealism, magic realism, and 3D animation.

Kristy Ilyas

The work of Kristy Ilyas taps into the political, cultural and day-to-day issues that arise in society. She experiments and discovers the boundaries and flexibility of regulating systems and tries to create dialogue and defy these issues by opposing counter narratives in word/dialogue and visuals in her social environments. She likes the approach of working research-based and when she feels the need it will develop into something tangible. Kristy works with other people, communities and artists to combine and, most importantly, exchange skills and knowledge. She is interested in intersectional approaches, methods to decolonize systems, counterculture and oral histories.

Naomi de Wit

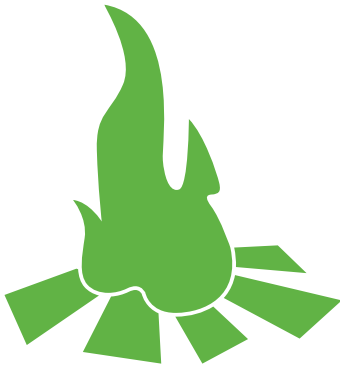
Naomi graduated in 2019 at the Willem de Kooning fine arts department. In her work she likes to connect people and ideas together. Through this connection bonds can exist and new perspectives can flourish. By means of workshops, community, clothes swaps and other moments, Naomi will provide frameworks to discuss sometimes complex social topics. They end up translating in textile, tapestry, spoken and written works.

Strength
in community

volume 1:

Art for (and within) a Citizen Scene:

A Look at Art Primarily Active
in the Context of Daily Practices



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