documenta fifteen—aspects of commoning in curatorial and artistic practices

Book

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documenta fifteen— Aspects of Commoning in Curatorial and Artistic Practices

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Editorial
Ronald Kolb and Dorothee Richter

**OnCurating Issue 54: *documenta fifteen*—Aspects of Commoning
in Curatorial and Artistic Practices**

This issue is the result of more than two years of intensive engagement with aspects of commoning in curatorial and artistic practice, stemming from our encounters with ruangrupa on the way to *documenta fifteen*. At its core, this issue follows our research into the discourse on commons and its implications for the exhibitionary complex. We have conducted interviews with lumbung members **Britto Arts Trust, Gudskul, Jatiwangi art Factory, Más Arte Más Acción, OFF-Biennale Budapest, Project Art Works, Question of Funding, Trampoline House, Wajukuu Art Projects** and **ZK/U Center for Arts and Urbanistic** and invited guest lecturers from the Summer School "Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education" that we—Dorothee Richter and Ronald Kolb—organized for the Shared Campus Platform with colleagues from partner universities Cedric Maridet (HKBU), Zheng Bo (SCM), Alison Green (UAL), Yatin Lin and Hongjohn Lin (TNUA).

The educational-theoretical background of this summer school was formed by Jacques Derrida's idea of the "university without conditions," Joseph Beuys' open-discussion format with the public at *documenta 5*, Paulo Freire's empowering role of teaching, and bell hooks' emphatic message about the empowering force of an anti-racist, feminist, and love-based education. Regarding the aspect of the commons, we considered theoretical approaches such as those by feminist thinker Silvia Federici and by George Caffentzis. Federici referred to commons as the shared goods and knowledge of divergent groups. The renewed thinking about the commons inherent in *documenta fifteen* is linked to movements of self-organization and resistance, DIY, and DIWO culture.

In our own teaching and learning frameworks, we have based them on empowering educational formats of equality, aiming to set up contact zones in horizontal-leaning encounters, in open, experimental, and critical frameworks. As one example, we can name the travelling workshop format "Curating on the Move" that aims to open up learning and teaching environments to the condition of situatedness—between students, teachers, publics, and producers—in order to enable a "we": a trans-individuation, that is, an exchange between situated and embodied knowledges, between histories and contexts, between generations and epistema.

Along this line of thought, we developed the two-week Summer School "Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education" as part of *documenta fifteen*'s educational format "CAMP notes on education." Participants of the Summer School were asked to conduct their own workshop for the group (including the staff and lecturers) and to share and discuss their experiences of practice and theory in open, experiential workshop formats, performances, and exercises with and in the city. It created a shared co-teaching experience.

With practices of commoning entering a large-scale exhibition like documenta, a novel approach meets the curatorial-artistic complex. And with that, various conflicts loomed on the horizon, not to mention the internal difficulties of "scaling" a resource infrastructure and its principles of sharing, originally intended for a rather small village community or small group of people, to a global scale. The question is in what form, with what instruments, with what knowledges, and with what new alliances this apparent paradigm shift will come about.

At this point, shortly after the end of *documenta fifteen*, it is still not easy to grasp the impact of this very different approach on the representative exhibition complex, but with this issue we want to shed light not only on the empowering aspects of exhibition-sharing strategies and their impact on the wider public, but also to start analyzing their possible fault lines.

It is difficult for us to write this editorial, as the aspects of commoning have interested us for years and had an inspiring prospect of entering the framework of *documenta fifteen*, but with the accusations of antisemitism (and the display of antisemitic iconography, abstruse propaganda manuevers, and the application of boycott principles), the whole endeavor has been overshadowed. There are, unfortunately, no easy solutions—and no easy analyses—in this conflation of different paths, as issues of repression, ideological propaganda, and pressure from within and without are bogged down in the spectacle of a scandal (and its rules of scandalization) unfolding between hegemonic maneuvering and friendship, to put it bluntly. The sad thing was that any willingness to talk was made impossible.

The **interviews** with **lumbung members** were all conducted before the opening of *documenta fifteen* in June 2022 and before the conflictual events. They all provide insights into the specific collective practice of lumbung members.

"The Exhibition as a Washing Machine? Notes on Historiography and (Self-) Purification in documenta's Early Editions," the article by Nanne Buurman, provides a historical perspective on the first documenta editions. Elly Kent sketches Indonesian's long tradition of collective artistic practice in the reprinted contribution **"The History of Conscious Collectivity Behind Ruangrupa".**

With the contributions of Dorothee Richter, titled **"documenta fifteen—Curatorial Commons?",** and Ronald Kolb, titled **"documenta fifteen's Lumbung: The Bumpy Road on the Third Way: Fragmentary Thoughts on the Threats and Troubles of Commons and Commoning in Contemporary Art and Knowledge Production",** and another reprinted contribution named **"We need to talk! Art, offence and politics in Documenta 15"** by Elly Kent and Wulan Dirgantoro we have added three perspectives that analyze the paradigm shift accomplished and presented by documenta fifteen—with all its problems—from different angles.

Many speakers from the summer school lectures contributed with their theoretical and practical examples, thoughts on practices of commons, and projects in relation to commoning: **"Art-based Commoning? On the Spatial Entanglement of Cultural and Urban Politics at the Example of Project Spaces in Berlin,"** by Séverine Marguin and Dagmar Pelger, traces the historical development of spatial commons. Unchalee Anantawat, Ariane Sutthavong, Lara van Meeteren, and Bart Wissink explore Thailand's artistic commons practice between representation in and resistance to

nation-state logic in **"On the Ideological Flexibility of the Cultural Common(s): The Many Lives of Thailand's Art Lane."** Jennifer Deger reports on her collaborative long-term research project Feral Atlas in the reprinted article **"Feral Atlas and the More-than-Human Anthropocene,"** co-authored with Anna L. Tsing, Alder Keleman Saxena, and Feifei Zhou. In **"Commoning: Environmental Reconciliation in the Work of Common Views,"** Dan Dan Farberoff and David Perahia provide insights into their collaborative practice. Gilly Karjevsky discusses their curatorial and artistic methodology through their project in **"Collective Autotheory: Methodologies for Related Knowledge Practices."** The reprinted article **"Public Movement. The Art of Pre-Enactment,"** by Oliver Marchart, is an example of a political and performative artistic practice by Public Movement.

"Educating the Commons and Commoning Education: Thinking Radical Education with Radical Technology," a conversation between Grégoire Rousseau and Nora Sternfeld, talks about the empowering educational functions of commons, specifically in the context of (digital) technology. And Christopher Brunner's article **"Concatenated Commons and Operational Aesthetics"** analyzes commons in digital infrastructures.

Ronald Kolb is a researcher, lecturer, curator, designer and filmmaker, based between Stuttgart and Zurich. Co-Head of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, ZHdK and Co-Editor-in-Chief of the journal On-Curating.org. PHD candidate in the Practice-Based Doctoral Programme in Curating, University of Reading/ZHdK. The PhD research deals with curatorial practices in global/situated contexts in light of governmentality – its entanglements in representational power and self-organized modes of participatory practices in the arts.

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Impressions of the Summer School "Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education," CAMP notes on education, *documenta fifteen*.
https://www.curating.org/commoning-curatorial-and-artistic-education
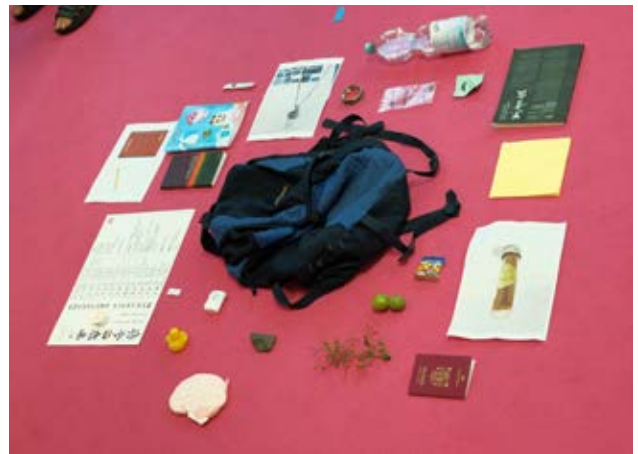
The Exhibition as a Washing Machine? Notes on Historiography and (Self-)Purification in documenta's Early Editions
Nanne Buurman

Preface: From Weapon to Washing Machine

In the introduction to OnCurating issue 33, *documenta. Curating the History of the Present*,[1] Dorothee Richter and I highlighted the importance of situating the birth of the exhibition series in the social, political, and economic context of Germany during the Cold War, where shortly after the country's separation into the capitalist Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and socialist German Democratic Republic (DDR, both states established in 1949), the newly independent FRG was seeking integration into the transatlantic West and gained its independence in 1955, the same year documenta first took place. "In this light," we wrote, "documenta initiator Arnold Bode's dedication to primarily expressive modern art and art historian co-curator Werner Haftmann's promotion of "abstraction as a world language," a slogan devised for the second documenta [in 1959], may be read as an ideological affiliation of documenta with the [so-called] "free West," where artistic liberation from naturalist representation was considered as expression of individualism, whereas (socialist) realist art was regarded as "unfree" because it did not cut its ties to extra-artistic reality."[2] As we shall see in the following, however, the depoliticizing ideology of abstraction that was promoted in the early documenta editions as a sign of artistic autonomy from politics cannot be explained by the exhibition's function as a "Weapon of the Cold War"[3] alone. Taking into account the uncanny echoes of Nazi rhetoric permeating the first documenta editions' catalogues that I started to examine in 2018 for a presentation at the Bibliotheca Hertziana in Rome, the following text, based on a lecture delivered in Thessaloniki in 2019 and first published in an abridged version in 2020, argues that it also necessary to reflect on the ways in which exhibitions like documenta may serve as "Washing Machines" for (art) history.[4]

Even if some art historians had already questioned the exhibition's spotless image in recent decades,[5] this has remained largely unnoticed by a wider public until the symposium *documenta. Art and Politics*, organized by German Historical Museum (DHM) in Berlin on October 15, 2019.[6] The conference eventually triggered broader public discussions in German newspapers and art journals during the winter of 2019/2020 that primarily evolved around the news of the NSDAP membership of documenta co-founder Werner Haftmann. The consequent exhibition in 2021 furthermore revealed that Haftmann had participated in the hunting of partisans in Italy.[7] Thanks to the authority of an institution like the DHM and the hard facts presented there, my linguistic diagnoses could no longer be disavowed, called into question, or excused as mere resonances of the "jargon of authenticity" fashionable at time.[8] It became clear that they also needed to be understood in the context of more explicit Nazi entanglements of the documenta founding fathers, whose historiographic, curatorial, and educational practices and ambivalent legacies I am currently

investigating in the context of a larger body of work titled *documenta as a Haunted Exhibition*.[9]

Introduction: Complex Continuities

The first documenta took place in 1955, in the re-erected Museum Fridericianum. After it had been bombed to ruins during the Second World War, the exhibition's first home and main venue ever since was partially reconstructed with whitewashed brick walls. These white walls would become such a prominent feature of the early shows' overall design that—together with plastic curtains as wall covers—they define the signature look of the 1950s documenta editions.[10] The ruin-scenario has proven to be the perfect backdrop for a hagiographic master-narrative that celebrates the founding fathers of documenta as creative individuals, who created the exhibition ex-nihilo after World War II.[11] This essay, in contrast, attempts to provide a critical feminist re-reading of documenta's early history that problematizes such a heroizing historiography by focusing on the exhibition's socially reproductive (or even reparative) functions as a cultural midwife of the West German, revamped identity.

fig. 1. Ruin of Museum Fridericianum after its bombing 1943, Photographer Unknown

fig. 2. German Rubble Women, Photographer unknown, Source: https://www.br.de/radio/bayern2/sendungen/radiowissen/geschichte/truemmerfrauen-nachkriegszeit-104.html
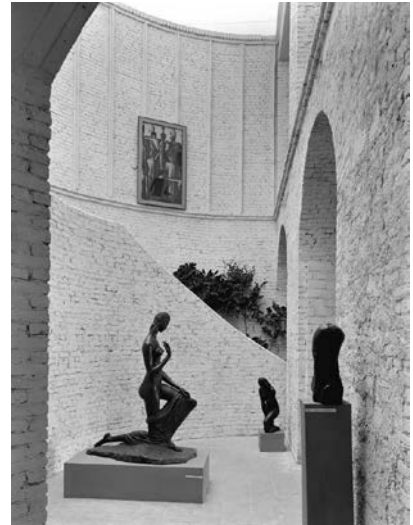
fig. 3. Rotunda of Museum Fridericianum during the first documenta (1955) with whitewashed brick walls and Wilhelm Lehmbruck's *Kneeling Woman*, Photo: Günther Becker, Copyright: documenta archiv.

The beautiful tale of documenta as an arbiter of democracy, whose makers were performing a radical break with the Nazi past, has only recently come under serious scrutiny by scholars calling attention to the complex continuities, both on an ideological and personal level. With this in mind, I ask if the dehistoricizing celebration of the timeless universality of abstraction during the first three documenta exhibitions did not perhaps serve its founders as a means of whitewashing German (art) history, including their own roles in "Third Reich" cultural politics. Based on Irit Rogoff's elaborations on how constructions of innocent femininity can be deployed to turn the vanquished into victims, and how a feminizing focus on the mundane everyday survival of German civilians has been used to relativize German guilt,[12] I will furthermore discuss to what extent documenta's depoliticizing domestication of modern/contemporary art was instrumental in forgetting, repressing, or covering the immediate past by focusing on the present, thus "clearing the conscience" of an entire nation.[13] In line with Rogoff's discussions of the museum as a "funerary site for uncomfortable or inconvenient historical narratives,"[14] I will think about the ways in which docu-

menta contributed to clearing away the dark spots of the Nazi past that was haunting documenta then and keeps haunting it up to today.[15]

Teleology towards Timelessness

In my 2018 talk "Presenting as Presenting," which was dedicated to the philosophies of history informing different documenta editions,[16] I problematized the reactionary dimensions in the universalizing notions of timelessness of modern abstraction that were evoked by Haftmann and his colleges during the early documentas. The presentation of "abstraction as a world language" conceived of modern non-figurative art as the end point of a teleological development towards abstraction.[17] Although the slogan was coined only for the exhibition's second edition, the first edition already included a visual curatorial prologue showing photographs of African masks, archaic Greek portraits, pre-Columbian sculptures, and Mesopotamian castings that served to legitimize modern abstraction by providing an argument of transcultural and transhistorical kinship of the arts of all times.[18] In his book, *documenta. Mythos und Wirklichkeit*, Kassel-based art historian Harald Kimpel argues that the aim of this presentation (that was lacking any chronological or geographical order) was "dehistoricization by way of history" resulting in a "static notion of art," rather than "making transparent the historical processes underlying contemporary art."[19] Artist and designer Arnold Bode's "ahistorical way of thinking," according to Kimpel, corresponds with a Nietzschean "meta-historical blurring of the past and the present in a multiplicity of omniscient unchanging types of eternal value and meaning."[20] This idea of trans-historical validity or timelessness—which Kimpel links to the notion of the *Gleichzeitigkeit* (i.e., synchronicity) of all cultures, developed by universalist historians like Arnold Toynbee or the right-wing conservative Oswald Spengler[21]—however, was not merely the consequence of an ahistorically minded artist. It was also a deliberate historiographical choice by the art historian Haftmann to present contemporary art in continuity with a specific branch of European prewar modernity.[22] By thus promoting an evolutionary development of art history towards art's timeless abstraction, the documenta founders were curating a very selective history of the present with many blind spots—for instance, largely factoring out leftist political traditions, realism in general, works by Jewish artists, as well as "non-Western" art, and, with very few exceptions, art made by women.[23]

fig. 4. Photographic prologue at Fridericianum during the first documenta (1955), Photo: Günther Becker, Copyright: documenta archiv

In the introduction to the catalogue of the first documenta (in 1955, dedicated to art of the 20th century), Haftmann, for instance, seemingly apologetically elaborates on the lack of temporal distance to contemporary art and mentions the difficulty of dealing with contemporaneity without historical hindsight.[24] The lack of oversight in the midst of what appears as "chaos" of the present is taken up again in the preface to the catalogue of the second documenta (in 1959, dedicated to art since 1945), where Bode and other members of the exhibition committee stress that the "temporal proximity to the exhibited artworks made the selection more responsible […]."[25] Likewise, Haftmann, picking up on his earlier statements, notes that "even the discipline of history admits that the ordering and mastering of historical visions cannot do without the insights of contemporary thinking and perception."[26] His response to the challenges contemporaneity poses to control and mastery is creating an essentializing teleological master-narrative in which the "inner necessity"[27] of the development of European modernism since 1890 provides the basis of mastering (and even celebrating) the timeless present, thereby turning the unmasterable fascist past into a blind spot.[28]

Constructing a genealogy of abstraction that is rooted in the history of modernity, but is nevertheless untainted by political power constellations or sociological understandings of art, Haftmann naturalizes it as "evolutionary rather than revolutionary in nature," stressing that the development of contemporary art "stands with all its roots in a strict continuity" with the insights of the earlier decades of the twentieth century.[29] In preparation for *documenta III* (1964, dedicated to art of the past five years)—according to Haftmann's catalogue introduction—there were further (unrealized) plans "to exhibit great historical works and masters as examples erected in a hall of columns in order to liberate modernity from its temporal ties and place it on the fond of art's timelessness."[30] The years of the Nazi rule, between 1933-1945, however, are cut out of this continuous teleology towards timelessness, and in the first two documenta catalogues the Nazis are only alluded to as an oddly absent, ungraspable totalitarian force, in passages where Haftmann problematizes political interference with art in general.[31] Thus, he implicitly perpetuates a "horseshoe theory" of art by denouncing realisms on the left and the right sides of the political spectrum as equally totalitarian representations of mass culture that cannot be reconciled with abstraction's liberal freedoms of individual expression.

Victimizing the Vanquished
Although he does not explicitly mention the so-called *Degenerate Art* exhibitions (the first and most famous of which took place in Munich in 1937), reading Haftmann's catalogue introduction, it seems as if, for him, the main problem with Nazism was not so much its racist and political genocides, but rather specific agendas of its cultural policy—i.e., the political instrumentalization of art and the ostracization of modern abstract tendencies.[32] Warning against the risks of "academization" and "petrification," in the 1955 catalogue he maintains that contemporary art's "great freedom" and the "moment that we celebrate as our present," is not the result of "arbitrary chance" but had to be "bred upward" (*heraufgezüchtet*) in a "continual development of humankind."[33] Notably, the German verb *heraufzüchten* means improving and nobilitating by breeding. The expression resonates with the eugenics and euthanasia-programs by the Nazis whose goal, only a couple of years earlier, had been to "nobilitate" and "purify" the so-called "Aryan race" by killing and "breeding out" everyone deemed unworthy of life. Moreover, Haftmann explicitly calls upon the "German spirit"[34] and repeats the words "German" and "Germany" in a way that leaves little doubt as to the importance he attributes to national identity.[35]

Rather than explicitly referring to the Nazi crimes, he only obliquely mentions a "fit of iconoclasm" as a somewhat unauthored "stepping outside" of the European "development logic" of modern art.[36] Thus avoiding explicit attribution of the iconoclasm to the Nazis, he likens it to a natural catastrophe that interferes with the "natural order" of artistic evolution.[37] Nevertheless, he maintains that the "outlawry" or "ostracization" (*Verfemung*) could not do much damage to the artists themselves.[38] Instead, according to him, "The damage was rather done to the nation, its understanding of contemporary culture, its passive will to art/culture."[39] Here, Haftmann explicitly victimizes the German nation whose wounds and losses—he claims—documenta has come to heal by bringing back to light those male heroes of modernity who had gone "underground, painted in wash houses, modelled in ruinous factory halls and nurtured themselves like the lilies of the field."[40] Besides, once again drawing on naturalizing metaphors of artistic self-sustenance under divine guidance, Haftmann forgets to mention those victims and casualties of Nazism—among them Jewish or leftist artists—who were tortured and killed by Nazis like Haftmann himself, thus conflating two incomparable modes of suffering.[41] In his later writings, he would even go so far to claim that the barren conditions for modern artists in so-called inner emigration during the NS contributed to nobilitating their art, as it forced them to focus on the essential inner truth rather than dealing with contingent realities, thus constructing a quasi-Darwinist version of art history as a "survival of the fittest."[42]

Haftmann thus not only naturalizes the Nazi regime but also conceptualizes the art(ist)'s response to the regime in biological terms. By foregrounding the reproduction of life over the production of works, he thereby also domesticates the surviving artists by using an imagery that situates them in the mundane and feminized realm of reproductive labor (washing and nurture), in which painting appears like a humble, privatized household activity. These feminized, mundane artistic labors are furthermore situated in a landscape of ruined factories—i.e., prototypical places of male (war) production rendered dysfunctional—thus, allegorically emasculating the artists and—by stressing their impotence—rendering them innocent "like the lilies of the field." Painting is here portrayed as a domesticated, civilian, yet also heroic, reproductive activity of passive endurance during times of political *Berufsverbot* (professional ban). Against the backdrop of this makeshift domesticity that is mirrored in the improvised furnishing of the Fridericianum's ruins, documenta's highly selective display of formerly ostracized modern art is implicitly conceptualized by Haftmann as a curatorial extension of its earlier, unseen, reproductive functions of nursing the existential "will to art/culture"—presented by him as a basic need from which the German population, including the show's visitors, was deprived for too long. Thus, the curator presents documenta not just as an instrument of care for the artists, but also "for the spiritual welfare of the nation."[43]

Since the whole introduction to the first documenta catalogue not only factors out Nazi necropolitics in favor of stressing the biopolitical reproduction of life and the recreation of national cultural identity addressed to the youth and aimed at the future, I believe it is not too far-fetched to argue that, by employing naturalizing and feminizing discourses, Haftmann here activates its discursive function of victimization within what Rogoff calls the "culture of survival," often located in the "supposedly timeless and ahistorical arena of women's lives."[44] Another part of the first documenta's photo prologue, which staged modern artists as civilized heroes of modernity in black-and-white photos, may also serve as an example of such a domesticating whitewashing of history. As Walter Grasskamp noted, many of the artists were shown wearing immaculate suits and ties so as to re-establish their respectability by juxtaposing these ideal

types of modern citizens with the earlier delegitimatizing representation of their art by the Nazis in the *Degenerate Art* shows.[45] Showing them as a plurality of individualized civilians, rather than uniformed soldiers, moreover, the artists were exhibited in their "white vests," even though some of them were not as politically innocent as the curatorial story would have it.[46]

fig. 5. Portraits of modern artists in the photographic prologue at Fridericianum during the first documenta (1955), Photo: Günther Becker, Copyright: documenta archiv

Biopolitics of Biography

The prominent inclusion of artists like Giorgio Morandi or Emil Nolde—artists who have often been cited as examples of the so-called inner emigration, despite their sympathies with Fascism or National Socialism respectively—is just one hint that the history of modern art was in need of active purification in order to appear innocent. In the Cold War context, where incomplete denazification had given way to anti-Communism, Haftmann seems to have been the right person for the job.[47] He, for instance, actively supported Nolde before and after the Second World War. Featuring the artist not just in his 1934 articles in the Nazi art journal *Kunst der Nation* and the first three documentas (1955, 1959, 1963),[48] Haftmann also wrote a biography in 1958 that factored out the artist's racism, antisemitism, and Nazi sympathies and portrayed Nolde as a victim of Nazi persecution, due to the inclusion of his works in the *Degenerate Art* exhibitions.[49] Perpetuating the myth of the "Unpainted Pictures"—allegedly painted in "inner emigration"—both in the biography and in the picture book *Ungemalte Bilder* (*Unpainted Pictures*) that he edited in 1963, the very year in which the second Auschwitz trials (1963-1965) began, Haftmann managed to depict the antisemitic artist, who was one of the first to join the Nazi party and had many admirers among the regime's higher ranks, as bereaved by the National Socialist professional ban that allegedly prohibited him from painting.[50]

fig. 6. Installation view of Emil Nolde "Die Familie" (1931) during the first documenta (1955) at Frideri-cianum, Photo: Günther Becker, Copyright: documenta archiv

fig. 7. Emil Nolde: "Die Familie" (1931), scan of catalogue page, Copyright: Nolde Foundation Seebüll.

The book *Unpainted Pictures* remarkably deals exactly with those years between 1938 and 1945 that the historian had bracketed out of his earlier genealogies of modern/contemporary abstraction. Haftmann's highly apologetic portrait of Nolde's withdrawal into his hidden studio closely resonates with and amplifies the scenario of inoperative underground existence, which Haftmann evoked in the first documenta's catalogue, feminizing the artist's invisible labors as a culture of mere survival in a private realm beyond historical time.[51] The repeated stressing of the small size of the space and the images he paints there as well as the introversion in the material handling of the paint almost evokes the 19th-century stereotype of women sitting in their lonely chamber, bent over a piece of embroidery, or even Rumpelstiltskin's imprisoned princess spinning straw into gold. "The more the outer life was reduced to the silent domestic circle, the more the inner life, this 'real life' started to shine."[52]

Moreover, Haftmann repeatedly mentions that Nolde and his wife did not have any children of their own. According to the art historian, the paintings were like their children that the artist "wished to protect like bodily progeny."[53] This simile suggests a transfer of biological infertility to political impotence and virginity, climaxing in Haftmann's excuse of Nolde's early Nazi sympathies as politically naïve.[54] Framing the small formatted "Unpainted Pictures" as embryos of real, large-size paintings,[55] Haftmann links artistic creation with procreation and restrained masculinity, whose realization of full creative potency had to be postponed until the paintings would see public light after the break of the Nazi "ban"/"spell." Remarkably, Haftmann's description of Nolde's artistic work oscillates between a feminizing description of painting as a caring domestic labor of small scale that requires continuous effort and its masculin-ization as effortless automatic painting "that gave him the masculine pleasure to be and to be at work. Whenever he dressed himself in the king's coat of his artistry all of his fears and all threats disappeared and he once again became the strong painter, who knew himself in front of a strong work."[56] Haftmann's portrait is characterized as a constant shifting between stress on Nolde's innocent impotence (old age, political

naiveté, professional ban, tied hands) and the creative sublimation of unrealized fatherhood or lack of recognition by the Nazis in a heroically stubborn dedication to painting against all odds.

A year after Haftmann's publication on Nolde's *Unpainted Pictures*, a selection of them were shown during *documenta III* (1964) as the only monographic cabinet in the survey of modern graphic arts at Alte Galerie (today's Neue Galerie). As Haftmann wrote in the catalogue:

> We furnish it just for Nolde, in order to show, in a space of their own, the small late water colors, sketches of never painted pictures, that he made in the dark years of war and ostracization. They are the poignant last word of a great German painter from the darkest times of German history.[57]

In contrast to this celebration of the German painter's heroic suffering, the Shoah remained the exhibition's unacknowledged blind spot. Instead of taking issue with Nolde's antisemitism, Haftmann defended the artist against such charges when they were raised in the catalogue of Nolde's 1963 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York by claiming that the artist was "by no means antisemitic."[58]

As late as 1986, Haftmann wrote a study on degenerate art and inner emigration, commissioned by former chancellor Helmut Kohl, in which Haftmann perfected this story by claiming that the artist "was, when the massive attack reached him, the natural-born, the existential anti-fascist."[59] Thanks to Haftmann's support, Nolde was generally perceived as one of the prime casualties of Nazi cultural politics by the wider German public, until the 2019 Nolde exhibition *Emil Nolde. The Artist during the Third Reich* at Berlin's *Hamburger Bahnhof* caused Chancellor Angela Merkel to take down the artist's paintings from the walls in her office. By turning a Nazi like Nolde into a victim, Haftmann managed to create for himself the image of an art historian who tirelessly fought for the rehabilitation of modern artists. His self-staging as a defender of the art that was declared degenerate thus not only whitewashed Nolde's biography but also his own.

Decorative Debris

documenta*,* with its official aim to rehabilitate the artists that had been declared "degenerate" by the Nazis (but not those who were persecuted on racial or political grounds), was a good occasion to bury the dark past. It was founded as a satellite to the *Federal Garden Exhibition*, organized by Bode's colleague Herman Mattern, another former NSDAP member and member of the documenta organizing committee, who had earlier been responsible for the 1939 *Reich Garden Show* in Stuttgart. Covering over the rubble of the city's bombing with beautiful flowers, the show's decoration of debris could be read in analogy to documenta's display of a depoliticized teleology towards abstraction: just as the flower beds on Kassel's rose hill (a pile of rubble) helped to elegantly camouflage not so honorable military memories of the city's arms produc-tion that were the reason for its bombing,[60] the art show's blooming fields of color allowed its makers to conceal their former Nazi entanglements behind the thorny blossoms of decorative ornamentation. Haftmann notably compares documenta's "diversity" of international abstraction at the end of the 1955 catalogue to "a bouquet of flowers, in which each flower keeps its own scent and color while harmonizing within a larger universality."[61] The ethnopluralist vision of abstraction articulated in this floral metaphor, with its reliance on notions of national character, however, has a more

ambivalent genealogy whose problematic historical roots were deliberately cut off in favor of presenting a domestic image of harmony within European unity.[62]

fig. 8. Clearing away war debris from Fridericianum after its bombing in 1943, Photographer unknown.

In his speech during the public program of *documenta III* in 1964, titled "*Über* bildende Kunst im Maschinenzeitalter" (On Fine Arts in the Age of Machines), Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch interpreted the declaration of the new painting and sculpture as the "end of art" to be the "war cry of standstill of those whose own mind stands still."[63] Without explicitly mentioning Haftmann, Bloch here takes issue with the essentializing cliché of subjective interiority, which Haftmann had described just one year earlier in his *Ungemalte Bilder* (1963) as the prime characteristic of contemporary art, i.e., that it expresses the "inner world of the subject" or "the reality hidden within the human."[64] Even if art has figurative tendencies, like Nolde's paintings, according to Haftmann, these contents are "turned into the timeless universality" in the same way that the artist's entire life is comprised in his work's formal qualities, thus "standing on the ground of the timeless-anonymous world of art."[65] Bloch's observation that—due to the "creative subject's withdrawal into musical inwardness of the domestic living room"— these "objects appear as inhabitants of their own inner landscape," or even as "mummified ornaments of our innermost *Gestalt*," "which even denaturalizes the outside as an appearance of the inside"[66] sound like a direct response to Haftmann's depoliticizing and dehistoricizing domestication of contemporary art.

Against the false appeasing appearance of plurality, which "pulverizes the antagonistic," he calls to mind the ways in which montage was developed out of technological developments and may give rise to a simultaneous perception of "things miles apart," thus countering Haftmann's suggestions of "timelessness" with his own deterritorializing understanding of "Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen" (synchronicity of the non-synchronous).[67] For Bloch, technology and the artistic technique of montage bear the potential to "adequately bring into the frame and on the pedestal our world […] half pile of debris, half figure in becoming."[68] Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* (1920), which happens to depict just such a hybrid fractured figure mediating between earth and sky, life and death, past and present, therefore signals "more than the end of the museal in the culinary cultural perception."[69]

Notably, Bloch's materialist critique of spiritual ontologies like that of Haftmann in many ways reads like an echo of Walter Benjamin's reflections on the philosophy of history and on the *Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936). In his "Theses on the Philosophy of the History," written in 1940 shortly before he committed suicide to escape capture by the Nazis, Benjamin actually refers to Klee's *Angelus Novus* (which he owned):

> A Klee painting named "Angelus Novus" shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.[70]

With this, we could perform a sort of reverse Benjaminian tiger's leap into the present of 2007, right into the Rotunda of the Museum Fridericianum during *documenta 12*. Here, the curators Roger Buergel and Ruth Noack displayed a reproduction of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*, with Benjamin's discussion the "Angel of History" posted besides the image as a wall text.[71]

Whereas the first documenta editions referred back to ancient objects for legitimation of modern art as part of a declaredly timeless and universal tendency towards abstraction, thereby initiating a ritual of forgetting, *d12's* display of a copy of an iconic picture by one of the modern masters heavily promoted in the early documenta editions was used to introduce one of the leading questions of the exhibition: "Is Modernity our Antiquity"? This was an invitation to revisit the past to actualize and politicize its gaps in the present of the now—rather than following the likes of Johann Joachim Winckelmann, who took part in literally whitewashing the whole legacy of antiquity in the 18th century by spreading the erroneous belief in the whiteness of classical sculpture, thus institutionalizing pure whiteness as a norm that still haunts art history today, as *documenta 14's* display in the *Neue Galerie* reminded visitors in 2017. As this essay has aimed to show, it is as important to revisit and correct the historiography of documenta, especially the myth of its political purity, by shedding light on its socially reproductive and governmental functions.

Postscript: Haunted House
From the perspective of early 2022, is seems even more urgent to address the ambivalent heritage of modernity and its uncanny hauntings today. During the pandemic, we saw a resurgence of antisemitism in the context of naturalizing and essentializing ideas of purity, with anti-vaccination activists (such as "Jana from Kassel") demonstrating in 2021 in front of the Museum Fridericianum, wearing the yellow star and relativizing the Holocaust by comparing their situation to the persecution of the Jewish people and members of the resistance during the Nazi regime. As the complicity of historical life-reform movements with blood and soil ideologies should have taught us, the contradictions of capitalism cannot be healed by a simple return to purified ideals of nature.[72] Nevertheless, an important documenta figure like Joseph Beuys tried to counter *Stadtverwaltung* (municipal bureaucracy) with *Stadtverwaldung*

(afforestation of the city) as his *7000 Oaks* contribution to *documenta 7* (1982) and is currently celebrated as a forerunner of the Fridays for Future movement, despite his biographical and ideological proximities to *völkisch* (ethno-nationalist) ideologies.[73]

fig. 9. Joseph Beuys planting the first of 7000 Oaks during documenta 7 (1982), Photo: Dieter Schwerdtle, Copyright: documenta archiv

fig. 10. Planting of so-called Hitler Oak during the NS, Photographer Unknown, Source: https://hugenotten-rathaus.de/marktplatz-danach

Whilst climate change, pandemics, and the atomic bomb are serious threats to the livelihood not just of humankind but also the entire planet, we should be careful to react to these complex sources of anxiety with wholistic phantasies of healing, identitarian notions of community (such as the reenactment of a Western "we"), or "object-oriented ontologies" as cures to the alienating conditions.[74] Rather than subscribing to fairytales of good and evil or reactionary deployments of the idea of freedom once again, thus reenacting practices of moral self-purification by externalizing responsibilities, it is important to acknowledge the structural continuities of antisemitism, racism, and sexism as well as our own complicities in hosting those ghosts from the past—not just in cultural, epistemological, and economic infrastructures, but also in our own minds and practices.[75] Here lies another political potential of curating. Instead of turning exhibitions into weapons, washing machines, or hospitals for healing unhealable historical wounds,[76] we need to inhabit art institutions, such as documenta, as haunted houses, never ceasing to deal with the processes of dis/possession that define our histories, thus g/hosting the past and haunting the future.[77]

fig. 11. Installation view of *wir alle sind gespenster: haunting infrastructures*, Kunstverein at Fridericianum Kassel (2021), Photo: Nanne Buurman

fig. 12. Installation view of *g/hosting the past* at St. Kunigundis/*documenta fifteen* (2022), Photo: Nicolas Wefers

Notes

1 Nanne Buurman and Dorothee Richter, eds., *OnCurating* 33: *documenta. Curating the History of the Present* (June 2017), https://www.on-curating.org/issue-33-reader/documenta-curating-the-history-of-the-present.html.

2 Ibid., introduction, 2.

3 I adopt this expression from Eva Cockcroft, "Abstract Expressionism as a Weapon of the Cold War," *Art Forum* 12, no. 10 (June 1974). See Harald Kimpel: *documenta. Mythos und Wirklichkeit* (Cologne: DuMont, 1997), 124-139 for the ideological function of documenta as a "bulwark against socialist realism" due to its position close to the inner German border between East and West.

4 Buurman, "The Exhibition as a Washing Maschine? Some Notes on Historiography, Contemporaneity, and (Self-)Purification in documenta's Early Editions," in *Stasis: Taking a Stance*, ed. Syrago Tsiara (Thessaloniki: MOMus (The Metropolitan Organization of Museums of Visual Art), 2020). The lecture titled "Whitewashing / Freezeframing: Some Notes on Historiography, Contemporaneity, and

(Self-)Purification in documenta's Early Editions" was given at the symposium *Stasis #2: Contemporary Art in Historical Terms* as part of the Thessaloniki Biennale program. I thank Louisa Avgita for the invitation and the encouragement.

5 See Karl Hofer, "Zur Situation der bildenden Kunst," reprinted in Gabriele Schultheiß, "Gegenständlich oder ungegenständlich. Kapitel zur kleinen Waffenkunde, in *documenta 55*, ed. Simon Großpietch and Kai-Uwe Hemken (Kassel: UP, 2018), 284; Martin Damus, "Ideologiekritische Anmerkungen zur abstrakten Kunst und ihrer Interpretation – Beispiel Kandinski," in *Das Kunstwerk zwischen Wissenschaft und Weltanschauung*, ed. Martin Warnke (Güterlsoh: Bertelsmann, 1970), 48-73; Walter Grasskamp, "Degenerate Art and Documenta 1: Modernism Ostracized and Disarmed," in *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles,* eds. Irit Rogoff and D. J. Sherman (London: Routledge, 1994), 163-169; Martin Schieder, "Die documenta I (1955)," in *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte II,* eds. Étienne Francois and Hagen Schulze (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2003), 645.

6 Julia Friedrich and Bernhard Fulda in particular used the occasion to problematize the idea of documenta as a

counter-exhibition to the 1937 *Degenerate Art* exhibitions. For articles based on the conference presentations in German and English, see the journal *Historische Urteilskraft/Historical Judgement* 2 (March 2020), published by the DHM.

7 See findings of Carlo Gentile, page 9 of the exhibition catalogue *Documenta. Politik und Kunst*, ed. Raphael Gross with Lars Bang Larsen, Dorlis Blume, Alexia Pooth, Julia Voss, and Dorothee Wierling (Munich: Prestel, 2021). For the documenta founders' NSDAP and SA memberships, see Mirl Redmann, "Das Flüstern der Fußnoten. Zu den NS-Biografien der documenta-Gründer*innen," in *documenta studies* 9 (June 2020). For Haftmann's SA membership, see Vincenca Benedettino, "Werner Haftmann as the Director of the Neue Nationalgallerie in Berlin," in *Actual Problems of Theory and History of Art,* Vol. 10, eds. Svetlana V. Maltseva, Ekaterina Yu Staniukovich-Denisova, and Anna V. Zakharova (St. Petersburg: Lomonosov Moscow State University, 2020), 692–702.

8 According to Theodor W. Adorno, "Language granted [fascism] asylum" when the "jargon of authenticity" became omnipresent after the war, with "formalities of autonomy replacing its contents." See Adorno, *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit. Zur deutschen Ideologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1964), 9 and 19.

9 The project also materializes in a number of talks and articles, such as Buurman, "Northern Gothic: Werner Haftmann's German Lessons, or A Ghost (Hi)Story of Abstraction," *documenta studies* 11 (December 2020), https://documenta-studien.de/media/1/documenta_studies__11_nanne_buurman.pdf; Buurman: "d is for democracy? documenta and the Politics of Abstraction between Aryanization and Americanization," *Modos Journal, Revista de história da arte* 5, no. 2 (May-August 2021), https://periodicos.sbu.unicamp.br/ojs/index.php/mod/article/view/8665413; Buurman, "documenta's Chronopolitics of the Contemporary, or Un/Curating Nazi Continuities in Werner Haftmann's Historiographic Practice," in *Curating the Contemporary in the Art Museum*, ed. Kristian Handberg (London: Routledge, forthcoming); Buurman, "d is for domesticity? Biopolitics of Domesticity in the Early History of documenta," in *Ästhetische Ordnungen des Wohnens. Zu bildlichen Politiken des Wohnens, Häuslichen und Domestischen in Kunst und visueller Kultur der Moderne*, eds. Irene Nierhaus and Kathrin Heinz (forthcoming); and Buurman, "Un/heimliche Nachbarschaften in der künstlerischen und kuratorischen Forschung," in *Forum Wissenschaft* 4/22: *Wissenschaft und Kunst* (forthcoming).

10 Bode's choice to use the ruin in its raw state, with just a few added brick walls and concrete structures, was inspired by his visit to the Picasso exhibition of 1953, in Milan's bombed-out *Palazzo Reale*. See Kimpel,

documenta. Mythos und Wirklichkeit, 296-97.

11 On the "symbolic character" of the ruin as a provisional exhibition space in the "spiritual vacuum" after *Stunde Null*, with no museum of modern art existing in Germany, yet, see also Martin Schieder, "Die documenta I (1955)," 639.

12 Irit Rogoff, "From Ruins to Debris: The Feminization of Fascism in German History Museums," in *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*, 223-249.

13 For the genealogy of this argument, see the works cited by Grasskamp and Kimpel. For its most recent iteration, see Julia Friedrich's lecture "Modern Art is the Best Medicine: How documenta helped the West Germans to pass off the wounds they had inflicted upon others as their own—and at the same time to heal them," *Historische Urteilskraft* 2 (March 2020): 18-23.

14 Rogoff, "From Ruins to Debris," 233.

15 This sentence was written in 2019, but the current discussions around *documenta fifteen* are a case in point.

16 For the program, see https://www.biblhertz.it/2480074/Exhibiting-and-History.pdf, accessed December 22, 2019.

17 In the introduction to the catalogue of the first documenta, Haftmann argues against seeing abstraction as an "endpoint," while his arguments—especially in the catalogue to *documenta II*– describe a "necessary" "path towards abstraction." See Werner Haftmann, "Einleitung," in *documenta. Kunst des XX. Jahrhunderts* (Kassel/Munich: Museum Fridericianum, 1955), 15-16 (henceforth *dI*), and "Malerei nach 1945," in *documenta II. Kunst nach 1945* (Cologne: DuMont, 1959), 14, 15, 18, 20 (henceforth *dII*). All translations of Haftmann's texts from German into English are by the author.

18 See Walter Grasskamp, "Becoming Global: From Eurocentrism to North Atlantic Feedback. documenta as an 'International Exhibition' (1955-1972)," in *OnCurating* 33: *documenta. Curating the History of the Present,* 101-102.

19 Kimpel, *documenta. Mythos und Wirklichkeit,* 263 (translation by the author). See also Walter Grasskamp, *Die Unbewältigte Moderne. Kunst und Öffentlichkeit* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1989), 87, where he problematizes the dehistoricizing suggestion of a false continuity of modernity since archaic times. For an English version, see Grasskamp, "'Degenerate Art' and Documenta I: Modernism Ostracized and Disarmed," in *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*, 163-196.

20 Kimpel, *documenta. Mythos und Wirklichkeit,* 266.

21 Ibid., 267. Although Spengler was not a follower of Nazism, his *Decline of the West* (1918/1922) was praised by Benito Mussolini and became a "pioneer work of national socialism," as it was a best-seller in Germany. See Ernst

Cassierer, *Der Mythus des Staates. Philosophische Grundlagen politischen Verhaltens* (1945) (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1994), 381.

22 See, for instance, Ludwig Goldschneider, *Zeitlose Kunst* (Vienna: Phaidon, 1934). This book on "Timeless Art" comprises a collection of "works close to contemporaneity from faraway epochs, 132 photos, collected and commented on by Goldschneider. The subjective collection of photos showing historical works and juxtaposing them with lookalikes from other periods, accompanied by comments on their stylistic contemporaneity with modern art, may have inspired both André Malraux's *Musée Imaginaire* (1947-51) and the photographic prologue of the first documenta. For a further historicization of Haftmann's historiography, see Buurman, "Northern Gothic," "d is for democracy," "d is for domesticity?," and "documenta's Chronopolitics of the Contemporary."

23 In "'Degenerate Art' and Documenta I," Grasskamp called attention to the omission of Jewish artists (like Ludwig Meidner, Otto Freundlich, or Felix Nußbaum) and leftist political tradition (represented by artists such as George Grosz and John Heartfield). See also Grasskamp, "Becoming Global."

24 *dI*, 15-16.

25 *dII*, n.p.

26 Ibid., 14.

27 *dI*, 17.

28 With Haftmann's memberships in Nazi organizations and activities in NS cultural politics in mind, this does not come as a surprise. He also avoids references to the Nazi art history professor Wilhelm Pinder, whose ideas on generation and geography influenced his writing as a young art historian in the Thirties but also the documenta catalogue introductions in the Fifties, which sometimes sound like echoes from his earlier texts. For a comparison, see Buurman, "documenta's Chronopolitics of the Contemporary."

29 *dII*, 14, 16.

30 Werner Haftmann, "Einführung," in *documenta III. Malerei/ Skulptur* (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1964), xv.

31 In *dI*, he speaks of "German totalitarianism" (18) and only in *dIII* does he mention, for the first and only time, the "Nazi Years" (xvi) explicitly, citing them as a reason why it was difficult to get certain loans.

32 Given what we have learned about his biography in recent years, this seems to be very likely indeed.

33 *dI*, 22-23.

34 Ibid., 15.

35 See *dI*, 16. Whereas Heinz Lemke, in the preceding foreword of the catalogue of the first documenta, speaks about his hopes of raising a "European" or "Occidental" consciousness, *dI*, 13, nine years later, in the introduction to the painting and sculpture catalogue of *documenta III*, Haftmann is at pains to stress the "transnational character" of documenta, claiming that "documenta is the only exhibition in the world without national ambitions," although it becomes clear that "national" here stands for the state and its institutions. See *dIII*, xvii.

36 *dI*, 16. Obscuring agency by excessive use of the passive voice, he also nebulously mentions anonymous "proponents of […] long forgotten positions," "national, social and ideological doctrines," and "orders of political clans" (16-22).

37 For Haftmann's suspiciously excessive othering, externalization, demonization, and disembodiment of the Nazi crimes as an overcompensatory exorcism, see Buurman, "Northern Gothic."

38 *dI*, 16.

39 Ibid., 16-17.

40 Ibid., 16.

41 In the *dII* catalogue, Haftmann calls 1945 a "fateful year" because, after the war, Germany, Italy, and Japan "had to find a new beginning after their almost complete destruction" (*dII*, 16), thus rhetorically turning the aggressing countries into victims.

42 See Werner Haftmann, *Emil Nolde – Ungemalte Bilder*, published by Ada und Emil Nolde Stiftung Seebüll (Cologne: Dumont, 1963).

43 *dI*, 18.

44 See Rogoff, "From Ruins to Debris," 231 and 247.

45 See Grasskamp, "'Degenerate Art' and documenta."

46 The fact that there are very few portraits of women can be read as a double disenfranchisement in the context of a general 1950s backlash to the kitchen. After they had replaced men in public professions during the war, and modern art had been largely privatized, after the war, female artists were nevertheless once again largely excluded from representation.

47 His article "Woran krankt die östliche Kultur," in *Die Zeit*, December 6, 1956, with its call to boycott the Russian invitation to collaborate in the cultural realm (articulated by Ilia Ehrenberg at the sixth general assembly of the *Société européenne de Culture* in Venice, March 1956) by responding with "deadly silence" as long as the Hungarian question is not solved, for instance, sounds like a sponsored anti-Soviet propaganda piece.

48 *Kunst der Nation* advocated for German Expressionism to become the Nazi regime's official art. See Stefan Germer, "Kunst der Nation. Zu einem Versuch, die Avantgarde zu nationalisieren," in *Kunst auf Befehl 1933-1945,* eds. Bazon Brock and Achim Preiß (Munich: Klinkhardt & Biermann,

1990), 21-40. Besides contributions by propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels, the journal also featured articles by the later documenta co-curators Will Grohmann, Alfred Hentzen, and Werner Haftmann. Haftmann's contributions, such as "Geography and our Conscious Art Situation," "Form and Reality. Excursus on the Unity of Modern Art," and "Diversity of Modern Art" appeared in 1934, before the journal was closed down in 1935 because Expressionism was no longer considered as compatible with the official ideology. See also Buurman, "Northern Gothic," "d is for democracy?," "d is for domesticity?," and "documenta's Chronopolitics of the Contemporary."

49 Haftmann, *Emil Nolde*. Kirsten Jüngling cites a letter from Haftmann to the collector Bernhard Sprengel, in which he admits that he deliberately kept silent about Nolde's Nazi past because Joachim von Lepel, Nolde's former assistant, estate manager, and first director of the Nolde Foundation, plead with him to omit any reference to that past in his book, so he did. See Kirsten Jüngling, *Die Farben sind meine Noten. Emil Nolde Biografie* (Berlin: Propyläen, 2013).

50 For a detailed deconstruction of the myth, see Bernhard Fulda, "Die 'Ungemalten Bilder'. Genese eines Mythos" in *Emil Nolde. Eine Deutsche Legende. Der Künstler im Nationalsozialismus,* eds. Bernhard Fulda, Aya Soika, and Christian Ring (Munich: Prestel, 2019), 179-217. In the brochure "Emil Nolde 1867-1956. Der Künstler im Nationalsozialismus," published by the Nolde Foundation in 2019, its director Ring also clarified that these myths were fabricated by Nolde and his apologists. On page 21he insists that Haftmann's assertion, according to which Nolde "turned away" from the Nazis "once they 'dropped their masks'" (translation by the author), was definitely false, as Nolde did not turn away until the end of the regime. See also Mario von Lüttichaus, "Emil Nolde. Die Jahre 1930–1945. Tagtägliches Paktieren mit den Zuständlichkeiten," in *Emil Nolde*, ed. Rudy Chiappini (Milan, Lugano: Electra, 1994), and Uwe Danker, "Nachdenken über Emil Nolde in der NS Zeit," in *Demokratische Geschichte* 14 (2001): 149-188.

51 Haftmann, *Emil Nolde – Ungmalte Bilder*, 20-21.
52 Ibid., 24.
53 Ibid., 13 and 37.
54 Ibid., 15.
55 Ibid., 22.
56 Ibid., 19.
57 Haftmann, "Einführung."
58 Haftmann, *Emil Nolde – Ungemalte Bilder*, 16. Trying to justify the artist's position by pointing to the dominance of Jewish art dealers in Berlin around 1910, Haftmann reproduces antisemitic arguments himself.
59 Haftmann, *Verfemte Kunst. Bildende Künstler der*

inneren und äußeren Emigration in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus (Cologne: DuMont, 1986), 18.
60 Writing on Martha Rosler's *Passionate Signals* contribution to documenta's twelfth edition, curator Ruth Noack reminds readers of the reasons for Kassel's bombardment and takes note of "the correlation [of] the molehills with an eruption of the buried ruins beneath the rose hill way beyond. Unearthed history: propaganda of rebuilding in close proximity to the iron curtain, raids by the Allied forces that flattened the town and the prevalence of the armaments industry now and then." See *documenta 12*, eds. Roger Buergel and Ruth Noack (Cologne, Kassel: Taschen, 2007), 294.
61 *dI*, 25.
62 See Buurman, "d is for domesticity?" and Buurman, "documenta's Chronopolitics of the Contemporary".
63 Ernst Bloch, "Über bildende Kunst im Maschinenzeitalter," lecture at *documenta III,* 1964, in Ernst Bloch, *Literarische Aufsätze,* Vol. 16 of Selected Works (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985), 571 (translation by the author).
64 Haftmann, *Emil Nolde – Ungemalte Bilder*, 39.
65 Ibid.
66 Bloch, "Über bildende Kunst im Maschinenzeitalter," 573.
67 Ibid., 569-572. For Bloch's notion of the synchronicity of the non-synchronous, see also idem.: "Part II: Non-Contemporaneity and Intoxication," in *Heritage of our Time* (1935/1962)*,* trans. Neville and Stephen Plaice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991). See also Buurman: "documenta's Chronopolitics of the Contemporary."
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid., 571. He goes on to praise montage (de Chirico and Joyce) as a means to "bring together in close proximity things that are many miles divided" (572). Bloch's text also strongly resonates with Theodor W. Adorno's "Valéry Proust Museum" (1955), published in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (London: Neville Spearman, 1967), 175-185.
70 Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," English translation published in Hannah Arendt, ed., *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 257-258.
71 What was on display here in the perhaps most prominent and historically significant spot of documenta is not an original artwork, but a copy in an IKEA frame. So, like Bode and Haftmann forty-three years earlier, the curators Buergel and Noack once again used reproduction as a sort of historical prologue—thereby explicitly nodding to Benjamin's insight that the technological reproducibility of artworks increasingly calls into question the originality of art and that

"exhibition value" replaces "cult value," emancipating artworks from their ritualist functions.

72 In the context of my 2019 curatorial research seminar "Back to the Roots?" at Kunsthochschule Kassel, participants engaged with the parallels between historical life reform practices and today's slow-and-conscious living trends, such as yoga, detox, and decluttering. The same year that the Bauhaus was founded 100 years earlier, in 1919, a group of women started the Loheland school for Physical Education, Agriculture and Craft to provide other women with a holistic education as gymnastics teachers. Dubbed at the time as the "Amazons' State in the Rhön," their program to liberate the body from civilizational corsets by recovering its "natural range of motion" later tempted Ernst Bloch to describe these life reform settlers as a "purification movement" whose unrestricted but nevertheless artful demeanor appeared like being "dressed in freedom." As a response, we set up the *exhibition in freiheit dressiert // being natural is simply a pose* as a laboratory to jointly investigate the political ambivalences of back-to-nature movements then and now, including the ambiguous role of Joseph Beuys. Notions of immediacy, transparency, and purity were critically examined by curatorial and artistic means in order to better understand the deployment of "nature" and "naturalness" in the context of neoliberal greenwashing and the (new) right. For the *Show and Try Again* program at the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the *Cultures of the Curatorial* Master's Program in Leipzig, the group experimented with a repertoire of Lohelandian body practices through the lens of voguing to reflect on the biopolitical implications of historical modes of subjectivation and their contemporary reenactments.
See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xAOrOGIX1RQ and https://showandtryagain.kdk-leipzig.de/nannebuur-manandstudents

73 It is surely no coincidence that Beuys used oak trees, whose German nationalist iconography includes the Nazi use of oak leaves and the planting of "Hitler Oaks." See Frank Gieseke and Albert Markert, *Flieger, Filz Und Vaterland: Eine Erweiterte Beuys Biografie* (Berlin: Elefanten Press, 1996). For his *völkisch* language, see Joseph Beuys, *Sprechen Über Deutschland* (Wangen: FIU, 1985). For his connections to right-wing networks and thinking, see Hans Peter Riegel, *Beuys – Die Biographie*, Vols. 1-4 (2013, extended and updated 2021). These findings still caused controversy in the year of the 100th anniversary of Beuys' birthday in 2021, where the anniversary program in Kassel and the publication *Beuys 100*, ed. Volker Schäfer (Kassel: euregioverlag, 2021) turned a blind eye to these aspects.

74 In my work on *dOCUMENTA (13),* I have repeatedly discussed how the post-humanist, post-critical,

anti-correlationist ideas developed under the heading of "object-oriented ontologies" played a role in the curator's declaredly non-interventionist performance stands in contradiction to the human-centered, highly curated setting such as documenta. The bracketing out of human agency, questions of epistemology and mediation, I argued, not only caters to curatorial self-purifications and denials of power, but also problematically depoliticizes and re-essentializes the conditions of life on the planet in the Anthropocene. See, for instance, Buurman, "Angels in the White Cube? Rhetorics of Curatorial Innocence at dOCUMENTA (13)," *OnCurating* 29: *Curating in Feminist Thought*, eds. Elke Krasny, Lara Perry, and Dorothee Richter (May 2016), https://www.on-curating.org/issue-29-reader/angels-in-the-white-cube-rhetorics-of-curatorial-innocence-at-documenta-13.html#.Yn-QX2DP3lw.

75 This is also our concern in the "dis_continuities" research group that I have co-headed at the Kunsthochschule Kassel with Alexis Joachimides since 2020. See https://kunsthochschulekassel.de/willkommen/news/dis-kontinuitaeten-/-dis-continuities.html. It is part of the larger project on the potentials of artistic research initiated by the former documenta professor Nora Sternfeld before she left Kassel. See also the landing page of our website currently still under construction: https://www.dis-continuities.de/.

76 See Buurman, "From Prison Ward to Healer: Curatorial Subjectivities in the Context of Gendered Econonomies," *OnCurating* 52: *Instituting Feminism,* eds. Dorothee Richter and Helena Reckitt (November 2021), https://on-curating.org/issue-52-reader/from-prison-guard-to-healer-curatorial-authorships-in-the-context-of-gendered-economie.html#.Yn6QNWDP3lw.

77 "We are ghosts, too, and together we can haunt the future" were the final words of my article "Northern Gothic: Werner Haftmann's German Lessons, or a Ghost (Hi)Story of Abstraction." It inspired the title *Wir alle sind Gespenster (We are all Ghosts)/Haunting Infrastructures* of the *dis_continuities* group's experimental exhibition at Kunstverein Kassel/Museum Fridericianum in December 2021. See https://www.kasselerkunstverein.de/ausstellung/kkvexh/detail/kkv/wir-alle-sind-gespenster. For another joint historiographic experimentation of artists and academics with the hidden heritage, silenced (hi)stories, and unrealized potentials haunting exhibitions such as documenta, see the workshop *g/hosting the past* that I co-organized with Leah Gordon in the context of the Ghetto Biennale at *documenta fifteen*: https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/calendar/g-hosting-the-past/.

Nanne Buurman is an author, editor, and curator working as a researcher and lecturer for documenta and exhibition studies at the Kunsthochschule Kassel, where she has been part of the team building the *documenta Institut* since 2018. In that capacity, she was involved in founding the Transdisciplinary Research Center for Exhibition Studies *TRACES* and is currently co-heading a research group on Nazi continuities at documenta. After graduating from Leipzig University, she was a member of the International Research Training Group InterArt at the Freie Universität Berlin and a visiting scholar at Goldsmiths College in London, supported by a DFG scholarship for her doctoral research on the gendered economies of curating.

Buurman taught as an adjunct lecturer at the universities/art academies of Leipzig, Hildesheim, Bremen, and Frankfurt/Main. She has also realized numerous art education, exhibition, and publication projects, such as *Arbeitslose als Avantgarde* (the unemployed as an avant-garde), which she organized in the framework of *documenta 12* (2007); the curatorial research project *dressiert in freiheit: being natural is simply a pose*, which she realized with students in Kassel and Leipzig (2019); the *Networks of Care* program, which she co-curated at nGbK in Berlin (2021); and the exhibition *wir alle sind gespenster: haunting infrastructures. Versuchsanordnungen zu NS-Kontinuitäten*, which she curated with members of the *dis_continuities* research group at Kunstverein Kassel (2021).

Her research and publications focus on exhibition studies, the politics, economies, and epistemologies of curating, the past and present of documenta, the shifting roles of race, class, and gender in artistic and curatorial practice, as well as the transcultural conditions of cultural production in a global context. She co-edited *documenta: Curating the History of the Present* (with Dorothee Richter, 2017), *Situating Global Art: Temporalities – Topologies – Trajectories* (with Sarah Dornhof, Birgit Hopfener, and Barbara Lutz, 2018), *Networks of Care. Politics of Preserving and Discarding* (with Anna Schäffler and Friederike Schäfer, 2022), and serves as an editor of the research platform *documenta studies*, which she co-founded with Nora Sternfeld, Carina Herring, and Ina Wudtke in October 2018.

The History of Conscious Collectivity Behind Ruangrupa
Elly Kent

Indonesian artists are developing new and diverse responses to politics, culture, locale and form, centred around the conjunction of artistic autonomy and a socially-engaged commitment to responsibility

Ruangrupa's artistic direction of Documenta 15, the five-yearly art exhibition which opened in Kassel, Germany, in June, introduces a global audience to the conscious collectivity that has been a feature of modern Indonesian art since the early twentieth century. Appropriating the idea of the *lumbung,* or communal produce-storage barn, ruangrupa has developed an artistic direction that fragments and delegates creative input, drawing on the resources of a community of art collectives from Indonesia and around the world.

In Indonesia's creative and intellectual circles, collectivity's roots are to be found in the archipelago's rich and diverse agrarian-subsistence cultures, with links also to past Hindu-Buddhist civilisations. Embedded concepts like *gotong-royong* (mutual cooperation) and *sanggar* (creative communities) were elevated by the communitarian values that underpinned the anti-colonial independence movement during the first half of the twentieth century, and in Indonesia's subsequent nation-state.
However, like *lumbung*, which has also recently been appropriated by the government to describe a controversial 'food estate' programme for increasing agricultural production, these embedded concepts that dominated the emergence of modern and contemporary art in Indonesia have remained sites of contested interpretation. They encompass an intriguing conjunction of the artistic autonomy championed by modernism in Euro-American 'centres' *and* a socially engaged realism with concomitant responsibilities to society.

In 1969 eminent Indonesian art critic Sanento Yuliman pointed out that even if a singular framework for the 'Indonesian-ness' of Indonesian painting could be determined, 'there would still be artists who would deliberately deviate from it'. 'Why not several frameworks, why not many?' he wrote. 'Is it not possible that Indonesia contains rich and unknown facets and concerns... including those that are mutually oppositional?' In his 1970 analysis of the emergence of abstraction, 'Seni Lukis Di Indonesia: Persoalan-Persoalannya, Dulu Dan Sekarang' (Painting in Indonesia: Issues Past and Present), Yuliman went on to conceptualise a complex artistic continuity that alerts us to the ways in which modernism in Indonesia diverged from the rupturing and universalist tendencies it showed elsewhere. He identified its earliest precursors in the attitudes of one of the nation's earliest modern art collectives, PERSAGI, the Association of Indonesian Draughtsmen. PERSAGI was founded in 1938, as Indonesia's nationalist movement was gaining momentum, by the painters Sindudarsono Sudjojono, known as the father of Indonesian modernism, and Agus Djaya.

Yuliman quotes PERSAGI painter Basuki Resobowo, who in 1949 argued that the difference between 'the teapot' and 'the painting of the teapot' lies in their functions: 'The teapot on the canvas has other obligations... the line and colour that we intend to

arrange harmoniously (a unity of emotion) functions to fill the field of the canvas'. This, wrote Yuliman, shows that 'the development of painting in Indonesia has, since PERSAGI, prepared the ideas and sensibilities – let's say it prepared the climate – for the development of a number of abstract paintings'.

Yuliman later identified this continuity as an ongoing 'artistic ideology' that respects the artist as an individual; and holds the belief, perpetuated through the teachings of the *sanggar* and institutions, that 'visual elements and their arrangement, regardless of the object they depict, can evoke, declare or convey valuable emotions, feelings or artistic experiences'. In time, this was an ideology that extended beyond the canvas. Thus, PERSAGI and the conception of s*anggar* both prepared the climate for the abiding importance of dual attention to collectivity and the individual in Indonesian art. Sudjojono's own charismatic personality and strong nationalist sentiment, coupled with the progressive teacher-training he gained at the Taman Siswa school in Yogya-karta (inspired in part by the educational philosophies of Rabindranath Tagore), made him a natural leader in a number of *sanggar*.

Sudjojono's principle of *Jiwa ketok*, or 'the visible soul', clearly linked aesthetic beauty to social truths. In the late 1930s he decried the beautified landscape-painting genre known as *mooi Indië* (beautiful Indies): '… our painters only imitate the works of these foreign painters and serve the needs of tourists… They are people who live outside our real life. But fortunately a new generation is coming up… a generation with new and fresh ideas… that will dare to say "This is how we are"'.

The focus on social responsibility combined with artists' autonomy meant that artists from the early nationalist period (the 1930s through to the 50s) were seen as interpret-ers of society's needs. During the 50s and 60s, these tendencies were institutionalised as leftist organisations gained political power following the declaration of independ-ence in 1945. The Institute for the People's Culture, or LEKRA, in which Sudjojono was a prominent figure, mandated its members to 'Go down below, through interviews and in-depth investigation of the conditions and aspirations of the people'. Known colloquially as *turba* (an acronym derived from *turun ke bawah* – 'go down below') this practice inspired creative workers across all fields, but it also became a millstone for those who sought less prescriptive expression. Those who did not adopt the *turba* approach found funding and exhibition opportunities hard to come by.

With the rising influence of the Communist Party and the dominance of leftist organisations attracting censure at home and abroad, a series of conspiratorial manoeuvres conducted between politicians and the military led to an anticommunist purge in late 1965, conducted with unspeakable and indiscriminate violence across the archipelago. *Turba*, with its socialist aspirations but fundamentally classist approach, was able to continue in the new authoritarian regime's developmentalist politics. Like *gotong royong,* it was co-opted into the linguistic framework of the New Order, used to describe politicians' visits to underprivileged communities for photo opportunities. Artists, if they endured, moved to less overt tactics; collectivity survived.

In 1974 a collective of art-school students, Desember Hitam, boldly sent a letter mourning the death of Indonesian painting to the organisers of Indonesia's largest selective painting exhibition (and were expelled as a result). By 1975 they were members of the GSRB (*Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru*, New Art Movement), whose mani-festo stated that they were 'striving for a more alive art, in the sense of demanding attention, natural, useful, a living reality throughout the whole spectrum of society'.

PIPA was a shortlived collective of 13 artists including several members of GSRB, whose confrontational exhibition *1977* in Yogyakarta was banned just two days after it opened, as were many exhibitions overtly critical of the New Order regime and its cronies.

These three groups had in common an enthusiasm for interdisciplinarity, experimentation with form and medium, and a focus on concept over form: installation and found objects became the language of their art. In his catalogue essay for GSRB's 1987 exhibition *Pasar Raya Dunia Fantasi* (Fantasy Supermarket), artist and critic Jim Supangkat reflected that what had carried over from the group's earlier work was 'a manifestation of exploration, opposition to elitism and revitalising pluralism in fine art through practices of art in everyday life'.

During the 1980s, collectives and individuals began using social-research methodologies, collaborating with other researchers and NGOs to address pressing issues. The artist Moelyono's work with rural villagers was reinterpreted through the lens of progressive Brazilian pedagogist Paulo Freire and became 'conscientisation art'. Performance artists in Bandung conceived of events that came to be known as *jeprut*, which were roughly analogous to, but less predictable than, the 'happenings' of their peers overseas, appearing unannounced in public spaces, a radically subversive act in an atmosphere of authoritarian vigilance.

By the late 90s, a thriving arts and cultural scene, and flourishing student movement coalesced to bring political criticism onto the streets. Indonesian president Suharto's New Order fell.

One of the abiding debates that surround these kinds of practices – exemplified in critiques by art historians Claire Bishop and Grant Kester – is that of amelioration versus antagonism. Should artists bandage the wounds that capitalism and neoliberalism visit on society, or should they fight back? In Indonesia, many do both, often simultaneously. One example is Jatiwangi Art Factory (JAF), a collective of art-workers in rural West Java, and one of the organisations ruangrupa has invited to contribute to Documenta 15. JAF's perspective is defiantly village-oriented, albeit with a sophisticated and organised framework with national and international reach. From 2008 they worked closely with the village-level government; one founding member was even elected village head. Visiting Jatisura in 2013, I witnessed an attempt by local bureaucrats (invited, but arriving tardy) to turn a community art event, in which residents were busily sharing creative drawings envisioning the village's future, into an urban-planning focus group. JAF organisers prevailed, inviting officials to stay as observers only; such visits were not unusual, they told me.

Another example, the Babakan Siliwangi Residents Forum, active until 2013, was an interdisciplinary collective of artists, activists and other civil-society representatives who gathered with the specific goal of protecting an urban forest in Bandung city from the fulfilment of an infrastructure development permit. Under the guidance of their appointed chair, artist Tisna Sanjaya, the collective organised a creative festival and a 'long march' to the town hall, carrying graffitied panels purloined from the developers' zinc fence. Five days later, at an exhibition organised by the Forum, candidates in the upcoming mayoral election signed their commitment to revoke the permit – a pledge honoured by the newly elected mayor.

These oscillating relations with authority are strategically antagonistic *and* ameliorative, again undermining binary interpretations of collective and individual practice in the social and political sphere. Beyond overt social-engagement, the Indonesian art scene also fosters a range of collectives that give succour, peer support and often shelter to artists and their work. Ace House Collective – whose membership includes painter Uji 'Hahan' Handoko – is one example, alongside printmakers' collectives Krack! and Studio Grafis Minggiran in Yogyakarta, and Grafis Huru Hara in Jakarta. In Bali, Klinik Seni Taxu (Taxu Art Clinic) collective was formed out of disillusionment with preceding collectives of Balinese artists who were seen as too self-exoticising. Other collectives, like Kongsi Benang (Thread Syndicate), bring artists together at specific stages of their careers and lives – in that case, textile artists caring for young children – and disband or recede as needs change.

Indonesian artists are developing new and diverse responses to politics, culture, locale and form, claiming a place for distinctive practices that is increasingly recognised at the forefront of global contemporary art practice. The work taking shape in Indonesia represents an exemplar for understanding collective and socially engaged art practice, a lens through which to consider the significance of movements of collectivity and their implications locally and globally: where they have come from, and where they might lead.

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Elly Kent is the editor of New Mandala and the Deputy Director of the ANU Indonesia Institute. Her book, 'Artists and the People, Ideologies of Art in Indonesia', (NUS Press, 2022) examines why so many artists in the world's largest archipelagic nation choose to work directly with people in their art practices. She is co-editor, with Dr Caroline Turner and Emeritus Professor Virginia Hooker, of the forthcoming book 'Living Art: Indonesian Artists Engage Politics, Society and History' (ANU Press).

Curatorial Commons?
A Paradigm Shift
Dorothee Richter

The Future of The Commons—Theoretical Perspectives

Usually, the understanding of the role of a curator is still based on a universal claim of a singular entity. To redefine the role from a concept of individuality to a situation in which all participants are involved in curating means discussing a cascade of different parameters, to find out if a "curatorial commons" can exist and under which preconditions. As curating is subject to certain constraints, such as the project-based organisation of work related to neoliberal economic conditions, for example, the differentiation between a curatorial gesture that exploits others and an actual shared common space is crucial. George Caffentzis addresses precisely this fine line in his essay, "The Future of 'The Commons': Neoliberalism's 'Plan B' or the Original Disaccumulation of Capital?,"[1] which can be transferred to curating: "In other words, the commons brings together pre- and post-capitalist forms of social coordination in a sort of time warp that evades the totalitarian logic of neoliberalism."[2] His aim is to discuss the political implications of a distinction between two kinds of commons: (1) pro-capitalist commons that are compatible with and potentiate capitalist accumulation, and (2) anti-capitalist commons that are antagonistic to and subversive of capitalist accumulation.[3]

In the case of curating, one must always be aware that curating happens under special conditions: curating takes place as part of the representational space, and it therefore develops a biopolitical power, an emanation of specific concepts for a worldview for a bigger part of society. What happens in the curatorial sphere might present a specific problem, a specific solution, or a specific concept of the relationship between subjects and communities. Dagmar Pelger, Anita Kaspar, and Jörg Stollmann discuss contemporary approaches to the commons in relation to the spatial aspect.[4] I think this is particularly interesting for curating because, here, analogously to the medieval sharing of resources—for example, a shared pasture—a certain place can become a common good. How close this is to curating is proved by the concept of the rice barn proposed by ruangrupa for *documenta fifteen*. For Pelger, Kaspar, and Stollmann and their perspective of the spatial commons, sharing of natural and cultural resources should serve a community's wellbeing as a precondition, as opposed to the surplus being consumed by just a few, or a company: "This is because the question of resource availability always extends to the question of the place where such resources are available, or are made available for the community—and therefore to the question of a community's spatial organization."[5] This means that the ones who benefit exclude others, who do not benefit. For curating, it also has to be acknowledged who the benefactor of shared goods/places/spaces is and in what way. To clarify this further: "The term *Allmende* ('common land' or 'commons' in English usage) describes shared ownership stake in a resource. This shared ownership establishes a 'third space' between public resource space, which is potentially freely available, and the privatized space used by individuals or corporations. The common goods extracted from or created within this resource space can be both material and immaterial, and therefore this third space can be either physical or virtual."[6]

For curating, it is precisely this node of spatial, digital, and representational space for the commons that is intriguing. This could also explain why there has been such an interest in collectives in the curatorial field in recent years, compelled, as I argued earlier, by the accelerated alienation caused by the pandemic. Inviting ruangrupa to be the curators of documenta shows that a communal usage of this representational space might be possible, and it also multiplies the principle of sharing and of authorship. Curatorial authorship is here shared with lumbung members and other associated groups and "compost bins." Implicitly, this proposes another way of being in the world, sharing resources, sharing space, and sharing knowledge—a positioning at the edge of the Anthropocene/Capitalocene seems to be of utter urgency for the state of the planet, hence for (wo)mankind.

Pelger, Kaspar, and Stollmann give an overview of the commons discourse in an attempt to reach a better understanding of the principle of the commons, to reveal certain spatial criteria, and to counteract appropriations of the concept.[7] One of the criteria that emerged was that commons are never absolutely fixed: "Commons are being described, on the basis of their historical development, as highly complex and contradictory systems of organization that never actually disappear, but must always be fought over afresh."[8] This implies an ongoing negotiation, as well as an open-access resource space and a self-organised commoner community. Perhaps a self-explanatory point would be the shared use of the yield—which could be in the curatorial field a visual outcome (such as photographic or film-based documentation) as well as cultural capital, if one uses the term coined by Bourdieu.[9] Another interesting point made here is that the owner (if not owned by the community) doesn't necessarily need to have given permission to use the resource—which also might entail some reference to the art field in which visual material is sampled and reused, but within the constraints of rights of images, which are often held by major museums or institutions. This important claim to ignore what is thought of as ownership has many implications; it also makes me think about the paradigmatic phrase "to steal from the university" as proposed in the Undercommons.[10] The university is here understood as the institution of knowledge production, similar to the art institution as another facet of knowledge production—this would imply a more radical understanding that would entail an illegal conversion of property and knowledge, in contrast to the normative ideas presented by Elinor Ostrom. I will discuss later the way in which ruangrupa was very successful in their method of using the institution and at the same time rejecting the institution of documenta.

Ostrom expands—and narrows—the definition of the commons by including a set of elemental principles.[11] These principles call for, among other things, resources to be handled more responsibly and thus by necessity with more regulation—by the commoners themselves. Caffentzis understands Ostrom's standpoint as the major theory of a capitalist understanding of the commons. He criticises Ostrom's endeavour to show how a perfectly "rational economic" agent who is an "appropriator" of a common pool resource can decide on the basis of cost-benefit analysis that s/he is better off with a change of rules that regulates the resource through a common property regime instead of either privatising or shifting the problem of allocation to the government.[12] Again, we encounter the fine line which separates the benefit for the many from the benefit for the few. Commons can therefore become, instead of shared social capital, the surplus of a social position of a specific small group, as the historian Peter Linebaugh argues.[13] Linebaugh compares medieval primitive accumulation with the waves of privatisation in neoliberal economic systems by identifying an ongoing, continuous process of accumulation. In the arts, of course, the art market is in place

and will also buy and sell some of the communal outcomes of mega-exhibitions like documenta. In the case of *documenta fifteen*, this was conducted directly through the Lumbung Gallery, which generally followed the roles of trading like a gallery, with the exception that a part of the revenue would go to the group.[14] So, we should be aware of this; to a certain degree, working in the arts, we are all complicit.

Similar to Silvia Federici, Linebaugh sees the accumulation as continually being produced up to today and a correlated process of new commons, which are threatened in turn by further appropriation. And as summarised by Pelger, Kaspar, and Stollmann, "He describes this dynamic as the action-bound nature of commons, using the phrase 'no commons with-out commoning,' thus expanding the traditional concept of commons by including the act of commoning—in other words, the coordinated social process that first creates the commons and then preserves it."[15] "The real problem here, it seems to me, is not the commons per se. It is the failure of individualized private property rights to fulfill our common interests in the way they are supposed to do,"[16] David Harvey argues, clearly refuting Garret Hardin's ridiculous thesis of the tragedy of the commons. Hardin assumes an inevitable failure of the commons, because the commons would always be exploited and thus exhausted by a few. At the very least, his position makes it clear that rules are absolutely necessary, such as for the use of water and air, and the environment in general, in order to prevent this. Hardin thus unconsciously describes the actual state of affairs in hyper-capitalism that one has to consciously counteract to have common goods as legally common.

Connecting this back to the earlier discussion about Silvia Federici's arguments on reproductive work, Federici not only identifies reproductive work as the necessary but unpaid work for any wage-earning labour, but she further argues that this kind of work is constantly fuelling the process of reproducing the workforce and therefore (unwittingly) the capitalist system. And historically speaking, the suppression of women and the persecution of communal female forms and knowledges through witch hunts and the enslavement of colonised subjects played a major role in forcefully capitalising on work, knowledge, and (wo)manpower.

Under what conditions can curating offer a practice based in the commons? It is already clear that one has to differentiate between the representational dimension of curating and an actually shared process of curating (commoning) and a shared outcome. So, for example, it is possible for a single curator to initiate a project that invites a diverse group of (local and international) people to produce art and knowledge in art institutions? This would mean that the artistic and cultural authorship is expanded compared to the usual situation of a curator and invited artists who are going through a system of evaluations by an agreed-upon process (the art academy, juries, exhibitions, prizes, etc.), but what would it mean to take commoning further?

On the other hand, if the whole curatorial process can be considered a shared project, in which different groups and diverse subjects come together and contribute to a process that might end in a curatorial event, then social demands might also resonate in this project, but not by fixing these social and political problems and related demands, but in negotiating them. To return to some of the abovementioned categories, it would mean that the group, or the individuals and groups coming together, would abide by certain agreements and decision-making processes, and it would mean that the outcome is owned by all who contribute—for example, the cultural capital gained, the right to use or refer to a project as author, possibly also an agreed equal payment. The exhibition space, or even the exhibition institution, would be (temporar-

ily) appropriated by a commoner community. This implies an ongoing process of commoning, in shared platforms of discussions and decision-making. One could claim that an institution for a huge project like *Philadelphia Assembled*,[17] the previously mentioned project initiated by Jeanne van Heeswijk and commissioned by and paid for by the Philadelphia Museum of Art, expanded the range of authors and subjects of curating, and of topics of socio-political relevance. The project redistributed the outcome to a large public, related to the groups of the active participants. Van Heeswijk reached out to existing communities and initiated groups with topics (developed by the groups) such as "Futures, Reconstructions, Sovereignty, Sanctuary, Movement." The groups worked together for three years and developed knowledges, produced art, produced cultural memories, produced shelters, and, as a formal outcome, also displayed the project throughout the museum, including re-organising the café with food connected to the different topics and areas of heritage.[18] The outreach left out the usual bourgeois group of informed citizens. In an interview, van Heewsijk describes what this working process meant for the subject position:

> I don't think a person needs to change. This fundamental understanding, based on Maria Garces' text on letting go of your subject position—to understand that, in my opinion, you are in a world in which there are many subject positions at this moment. And there is also a lot of systematic oppression. So, in order to imagine a possibility of being together otherwise, we need to be able to let go of our own understanding of what it is that creates relationality. […] This idea of letting go of one's own subjectivity is also thinking in line with Hannah Arendt, when she talks of the battlefields of publicness, in which we as persona also have to place ourselves in this public space, in relation to each other, and in that relationship creates that in-between space in which we can operate civic resistance or civic imaginaries. If you think about it like that, then the concern is not only on how do we in one way become a public persona, but also how do we put our subject position at risk in public in order to create new forms of togetherness? This is a fundamental question. At the same time, it's a question of who can afford that. If we then think on a larger scale, there are bodies that cannot afford that risk, that their subject position has been denied forever. How can we create spaces where people can slowly figure that out?[19]

As I understand van Heeswijk here, she refers to the identity politics which might be important for an oppressed group for a certain time in order to be recognised as a group demanding equal rights or demanding reparation—and a safe space would open up the opportunity to go beyond the identitarian thinking. In terms of the economic base, every individual involved in the process of *Philadelphia Assembled* was paid the exact same amount: $18/hour.

documenta fifteen—A Paradigm Shift

The most prominent example of a collective in a curatorial process would be ruangrupa, where we have seen situated knowledges come together analogous to what Donna Haraway has proposed as new forms of knowledge production outside the patriarchal god view of the Western tradition, the central perspective, and the "autonomous" subject. When I read the essay "From the Margins" by Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, I became interested not only in the specific situated knowledges she describes, but also in strategies of resistance. Tsing identifies other forms of knowledge used by the Meratus people and their shamanic female leader Uma Adang.[20] But these forms of knowledge production then culminate in other subtle forms of resistance to a colonial and military power. She uses the term "margins" to signify "an analytic

placement that makes evident both the constraining, oppressive quality of cultural exclusion and creative potential of rearticulating, enlivening, and rearranging the very social categories that peripheralize a group's existence."[21] The group she encounters on her anthropological travels is based in Indonesia, thus close to the region where ruangrupa members come from. Tsing is critical of the moral dichotomies of scholarly debates that create local and global and "the Other," and she asks: "Are notions of *culture* and *identity* a Eurocentric imposition of disciplinary logic and status difference?"[22] Tony Bennett has argued that precisely these categories were installed with exhibitions as way of educating a larger public. He claims that, in the popular world exhibitions and fairs, especially with the innovation at "the Centennial Exhibition held at Philadelphia in 1876, these pavilions were typically zoned into racial groups: the Latin, Teutonic, Anglo-Saxon, American, and Oriental being the most favoured classifications, with black peoples and the aboriginal populations of conquered territories denied any space of their own, being represented as subordinate adjuncts to the imperial displays of the major powers. The effect of these developments was to transfer the rhetoric of progress from the relations between stages of production to the relations between races and nations by superimposing the associations of the former on to the latter."[23] When Bennett points out that, according to the supposed inferiority of certain groups, representations of the latter were "reduced to displays of 'primitive' handicrafts and the like, they were represented as cultures without momentum except for that benignly bestowed on them from without through the improving mission of the imperialist powers."[24] This mechanism sounds familiar to any feminist scholar, as this is the exact same strategy for degrading female connotated cultural production. What especially interests me in Anna Tsing's research is that she discusses the counter-hegemonic methods now used by the Meratus people, and by the female leaders of the group in particular. I want to compare these strategies to the way ruangrupa[25] worked with documenta as an institution (in addition to the abovementioned concepts of the commons), and in retrospect one can understand how ruangrupa prevented the managing director from interfering even when the antisemitic allegations were already justified. It must be made clear, however, that the managing director herself was not willing to limit curatorial autonomy in any way. She acted from a paradigm that was outdated in this case, despite the fact that this paradigm of autonomy was negated by ruangrupa itself.

ruangrupa—Between Joyful Resistance and Strategic Movements

Anna Tsing identifies strategies used by the Meratus people to simultaneously reject and embrace categories that are externally imposed. I summarise the strategies she mentions: 1) feigning compliance to orders; 2) using other parameters and showing the contrast and gap created by other (imposed) value systems; 3) being self-consciously unusual; 4) using parody and exaggeration; 5) contradicting assumptions about gender, "fiddl[ing] with gender expectations and male privileges on every level of otherness"; 6) using the power of imaginary narratives; 7) proclaiming equality as a given and downplaying differences; 8) ignoring boundaries and intermingling rather than demonstrating difference. As argued above, I take the liberty to mirror and project these strategies of resistance onto the way in which ruangrupa dealt with the major Western institution, documenta. Of course, for some of these strategies, one could also argue along the lines of Roland Barthes when he suggests how to deal with a "myth," that is, a message loaded with an intentional ideology. Exaggeration is one of the strategies he proposes. I do not claim that anti-hegemonic strategies are the same in different contexts (like the Meratus strategies versus a Western context or, on the other hand, the strategies of commoning in medieval female knowledge production versus a contemporary practice), but I hope that some strategies are interesting,

transferable, and useful for other contexts. One can argue that their relation to the institution of documenta is to steal from the institution, which has its justification. The flip side of ruangrupa having prevented processes installed in a democratic multivocal civil society was that there was no possibility of entering into a dialogue (neither from the inside nor from the outside); one has to imagine that their strategies were acquired through years spent living under a dictatorship.

We were introduced to ruangrupa (farid rakun) by then PhD student Antonio Cataldo, now director of the Fotogalleriet in Oslo. From our conversations with ruangrupa that began in 2019, we came to understand that, as a group, ruangrupa functions through a continued exchange. ("We" here means the PhD group and students from the MAS in Curating, both diverse groups with different cultural backgrounds but a shared discourse, which evidently should not imply that we are ever of the same opinion.) In Jakarta, the actual group meets every day in "hangouts" (*nongkrong*), an open get-to-gether; they discuss each point and come to a shared conclusion—a clearly continuous form of commoning. Being responsible for documenta, which needs at least three to four years of preparation, they agreed to send two members with their families to Kassel, Reza Afisina and Iswanto Hartono. Nevertheless, the group met once a day at least five days a week in organised live online hangouts, via digital tools. Many members of this core group met at the art academy during the time of dictatorship of Suharto; they would have not been able to speak too directly about politics and structural violence. From our manifold conversations with different group members, we understood that through this situation they developed a strong sense of belonging.[26] The core group is clearly male-dominated. The educational part of ruangrupa, called Gudskul, was founded and is primarily run by a female member. When we asked in a workshop in Zurich about this gender gap, Mirwan Andan and Reza Afisina answered that they especially invited collectives who understand themselves as feminist collectives to become lumbung members, and the OFF-Biennale (Budapest, Hungary) and Trampoline House (Copenhagen, Denmark) certainly have a strong feminist agenda. ruangrupa's concept explicitly includes a shared economy, which is related to a historical Indonesian way of storing and sharing goods in a rice barn (*lumbung*); this rice then forms the staple food of the respective village community. This evocation of a former agricultural society is surprising, if one takes into consideration that nowadays Jakarta is a mega-city; the metropolitan area had an estimated population of 35 million as of 2021, making it the largest urban area in Indonesia and the second-largest in the world (after Tokyo).[27] Here, the ecological problems are even more pressing than in smaller conurbations: "Jakarta's primary challenges include rapid urban growth, ecological breakdown, gridlocked traffic, congestion, and flooding. Jakarta is sinking up to 17cm (6.7 inches) per year, which, coupled with the rising of sea levels, has made the city more prone to flooding. It is one of the fastest-sinking capitals in the world."[28] Is this reconnection to traditional peasant society thus romanticising, and is it a kind of self-othering? This doubt is also uttered by the art historian Elly Kent, who sees the way that the Indonesian art scene developed collectives that inscribed themselves in cultural activities as a broader movement in the arts.[29] In many respects, the avant-garde movements like Dada and Surrealism in the '20s and '30s of the last century, as well as the neo-avant-gardes like Fluxus and the Situationists in the '50s and '60s, experimented with this form of institutional critique as well; they tried to overthrow the isolation of the art object enveloped in disinterested pleasure, and they aspired to overthrow the autonomous sphere of the arts, where anything could happen but without any consequences. They wanted to merge art and life, and what is more, to influence life: to become political. The critique of institutions did not just aim at the art institution, but at societal institutions, what would be called

by Lacan as the "Big Other." One needs to clearly understand that *documenta fifteen* is on the one hand situated in this art historical trajectory. Similar to Fluxus, for example, they also tried to reach out to the masses and overcome the arts as an elitist cultural product. The production processes of Fluxus events, editions, and films were multi-authorial, but Fluxus artist Maciunas held a single proto-curatorial position as chairperson; with ruangrupa, the central position was held by a collective, but some of the artworks appeared to be rather traditional—hence, the saleability via the Lumbung Gallery. ruangrupa also brought their specific cultural background from Indonesia with them, on a surface level through specific wording, but maybe more as very specific forms of resistance.

When we look into this using the strategies developed by Anna Tsing, one could easily state that the first one, "feigning compliance to orders," is a position of resistance that ruangrupa uses: in Indonesia during the dictatorship, it was very difficult to oppose the system directly. This would have been extremely dangerous. Many members of ruangrupa met during their time at university, which is also a highly politicised and hegemonic space, as we discussed previously. Nevertheless, the art university provides some space to act out in dissent, hidden under the guise of "art"—art being positioned as the Other of society, as being situated in an autonomous sphere. This *joyful militancy*[30] was transferred to documenta insofar as they used "other parameters and the contrast and gap created by other (imposed) value systems" with the proposal of *lumbung*. Here, it seems that the art world is more open to accept a system that sounds unfamiliar, a poetic term, than the straightforward demand for new forms of common goods. The downside was that different ways of communicating could also make negotiations impossible—which, of course, might be an effect ruangrupa did welcome. Undeniably, for the pressing issues that came up—antisemitic images and proximity to the BDS movement—an open public discussion—and an open internal discussion—was also hindered.

I think that ruangrupa manage Tsing's third strategy, being self-consciously unusual, very well: every conversation we had with them was extremely polite and agreeable; the only thing that could not be deduced from the amiable conversations was a clear agreement. In my estimation, this works very well as an indirect means of power. In all questions, ruangrupa ultimately remained the decision-maker; due to the lack of clear agreements, nothing was delegated. This kept all cooperation partners in a constant state of tension, making any planning very difficult or even impossible. We dealt with this sort of situation within the framework of the "Composting Knowledge" collaboration, in which selected art academies and exhibition venues were invited by the ruangrupa part of the art education department. In these circumstances, we decided at a certain point to simply start our activities in Zurich, about 100 days before the official start of *documenta fifteen* in Kassel. The idea of "composting," a topic proposed by ruangrupa for this part of the art education program, was included to distribute ways of working together on "composting knowledge" for the main operational field of different partners in this network.[31] In this way, we organised a rather independent series of events at the OnCurating Project Space in Zurich. Parts of the project— including the compostable "furniture" by Stirnimann-Stojanovic—we later brought over to Kassel for the spaces used by the compost group. In this setting, back in Kassel, we included a video in which we critiqued the antisemitism that also clearly became part of *documenta fifteen*.[32]

Composting Knowledge space, *documenta fifteen*, Hafenstr. 76, Kassel

In my perspective, this nature metaphor of "composting," however, can prove to be a double-edged sword and backfire as a naturalising narrative if the topic remains a festival of feel-good ecological contributions. Metaphors like ecosystem and composting can be easily connected with existing structures in colonial discourse; the equation of the wild, other, or unknown subject with nature metaphors occupies a prominent space in the hegemonic justification of postcolonial power structures. I also believe that our wild programming of events at the OnCurating Project Space in Zurich in line with the concept of "composting knowledge" was ultimately infected by a certain arbitrariness, which one could see in the documenta generally. Usually, we try to accompany projects with intensive research and reading; however, being very unclear about what was supposed to happen, this important preparation was not as intensive as one could have wished. Our main literature did speak about aspects of the commons, but the ecological topic was not prepared in depth and worked through. Again, we introduced the concept to be developed with young curators and aspiring curators, who proposed and invited artists, activists, and ecological experiments, which included karaoke sessions and DJane sets. We took up the themes of documenta, but more as a chain of associations, and then transformed them into an artistic event series.

For our second format, "Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education," a fourteen-day summer school, we were able to carry it out because this time we chose to have direct communication with documenta's art education department, and the programme "CAMP, notes on education."[33] In a way, it is a bit embarrassing to admit this, because one could say that we basically relied on the existing power structures of the documenta institution. One must also take into account that the administrative apparatus has also been deliberately reinforced since *documenta 14*. For whatever reason, Adam Szymczyk came under such harsh criticism, not least by the local politicians, that the conclusion was that the artistic direction should be limited in its power. My conclusion is that Szymczyk and the curatorial team must have got something right, since the political problems of Kassel were somehow tackled, most importantly by Forensic Architecture.[34] Forensic Architecture's piece conducted architectural forensic research on the murder of Hali Yozgat:

The Society of Friends of Halit is presenting documentation of their investigation, research and activism into the murder of twenty-one-year-old Halit Yozgat on 6 April 2006 in a family-operated internet cafe in Kassel, Germany. Halit became the ninth victim in a string of racially motivated murders of immigrants conducted by the Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund (NSU, or National Socialist Underground). A Hessian secret service agent, Andreas Temme, was present during Halit's murder but claimed that he neither heard the gunshots, noticed the sharp smell of gunpowder, nor saw Halit's body behind the counter when he left. The Society of Friends of Halit situates the shots that killed Halit Yozgat within a long history of racist violence that is deeply rooted in German society. We use the term "NSU Complex" to describe this combination of neo-Nazi terror and institutional and structural racism.[35]

Sadly, this has proven to be true once again, as a politically motivated murder took place in Kassel in 2019: right-wing extremist Stephan Ernst murdered the Regierungspräsident [district president] Walter Lübcke.[36] Walter Lübcke, himself being a member of the Christian Democratic Union party, uttered publicly that refugees have a guaranteed right in the German Constitution to obtain a residence permit and that everyone who was not okay with this could also leave (Germany, he meant). Thinking about the powerful right-wing groups in and around Kassel, we proposed (in vain) to ruangrupa that they work with the artist Chris Alton, who developed an effective response to right-wing public gatherings and marches, with the format English Disco Lovers, EDL—the same abbreviation as the English Defence League. The English Disco Lovers call people to action: they organise spontaneous queer disco sessions on the street opposite these marches and gatherings. This had, at least in the UK, a very lasting effect of resisting with joyful militancy until there were more hits online for the English Disco Lovers than for the English Defence League. The film that shows the project briefly also explains disco as a queer cultural activity. This musical genre was a successor movement to jazz, which was banned by the Nazis, with both music genres suggesting freedom beyond racist or gender-oriented limitations.[37]

Chris Alton, *English Disco Lovers (EDL)* 2012–15, HD video with sound, 14 minutes 18 seconds, 2019

In accordance with the minimising of the power of the curatorial directorship of *documenta fifteen*, the Advisory Board, which selected the ruangrupa collective, was supposed to act in an ongoing advisory capacity in principle. One could see this as one of the precautions of the local politicians.[38] However, this did not happen, either because the Advisory Board itself had no interest in doing so (and considered it paternalistic) or because ruangrupa successfully fended it off with their polite and ultimately confusing communication. This way of communicating, one could safely state, was sometimes at the edge of using parody and exaggeration. The people leading university programmes and research projects who were asked to contribute to mediating *documenta fifteen*, either by ruangrupa members, curatorial assistants, or the official art education department (we were involved in both categories), often felt overwhelmed by the great impact of this exhibition, and also caught up in the

impossibility of establishing clear communication about dates, locations, and budgets—perhaps until we started to self-organise with 100 days of composting knowledge—before the official start of documenta. Later, "bad curating" was claimed by Gregory Sholette as a resistance technique. But I argue that it was not necessarily a dissemination of power; everything was therefore concentrated in the centre, which was ruangrupa. Of course, being asked to work with documenta means an important acknowledgement—an acknowledgement of work which is often not recognised or appreciated by the institution where one is situated. Academia is a slippery slope, and the working conditions have deteriorated greatly in the recent years of neoliberalism. Lecturers or professors who dare to be involved in unusual projects and take up decidedly left-leaning positions are often situated at the edge of the institution. Or, to rely on the Undercommons by Fred Moten and Stefano Harney: "After all, the subversive intellectual came under false pretenses, with bad documents, out of love. Her labor is as necessary as it is unwelcome. The university needs what she bears but cannot bear what she brings."[39] Therefore the acknowledgement of a certain way to work (like our experiments with commoning) by ruangrupa was important, especially as this is often denied in University surroundings. So, our invitation to documenta turned out to be honourable, but ultimately unpaid—and then less honourable, when the first clearly antisemitic tropes were discovered, which also left us shocked and confused.

The fifth point proposed by Anna Tsing is "fiddling with gender expectations and male privileges on every level of otherness." As mentioned, I did not experience this as something ruangrupa was especially engaged with. As for the sixth point, "using the power of imaginary narrative," ruangrupa certainly uses imaginary narratives; the notion of a pre-industrial sharing community sets into motion a special field of connotations. In addition, the notions of care and healing have a certain chain of associations. Nevertheless, I wonder how easily this could be recuperated. I fear that this could also lead into progressive neoliberalism, which, as Nancy Fraser has developed, ends in the recognition of difference but without any further possibilities concerning the distribution of wealth.[40] Or, could this turn out to be the left-wing populism that Fraser fantasises about? How to reach the masses, who obviously vote in so many countries against their interests, is a question that the left has been dealing with in increasing despair.

A possible redistribution of wealth was at least performed and enacted by ruangrupa, as they split up the sum allotted for the exhibition to all the different lumbung members equally. The art education section, on the other hand, was not taken into account from an economic perspective. In the theory-practice relationship, art education was not seriously taken into consideration from the artistic director's perspective. There was a clear concentration on the exhibitions and events put together by lumbung members. The money for lumbung members might have also had the double effect of stabilising the collectives in their respective cultural and political contexts. Another clever and effective move was to use the homeless magazine *Asphalt* to announce the artist list, and to use it as a publication platform. This meant a tremendous increase in attention for this magazine; it also meant an unprecedented financial gain. This gesture turned out to be sustainable when ruangrupa used this magazine as a publishing platform several times. Rancière's much-invoked "distribution of the sensible" has here been transformed into a tangible redistribution. One could claim that the two categories, "proclaiming equality as a given and downplaying differences" and "ignoring boundaries and intermingling rather than demonstrating difference," were performed to a new degree in the art field. This intervention not only

points out the class-specificity of visual art, but it also mocks and relativises it. ruangrupa has used strategies to evade the implicit power of documenta as an institution; they have thus also expanded the canon. In many respects, ruangrupa has managed to use new and unconventional methods to install other power structures, other channels of distribution, new forms of distribution, and a commoning of resources, as well as a commoning of outcomes, or "harvest" in their nomenclature. And they might have proposed a new way of reaching the masses, as high and low culture were now merged into one another, like a Fluxus dream.

Left-Wing Populist Propaganda or Vulgar Ideology?

Of course, this possibility to influence "the masses" comes with a lot of responsibility, which in one way might be used in the sense of proposing and producing commons and in other ways might be rather problematic: there remains the question of antisemitism at *documenta fifteen*. I consider the exclusion of Jewish Israeli artists to be hurtful and problematic (in contrast to artists with an Israeli passport who want to go under the label of Palestinian.)[41] This exhibition is additionally framed by its historic constellations in Germany; it is implicitly framed by the most horrible, unprecedented genocide of deviant-positioned subjects, mainly Jews, Roma, queers, and political enemies of the Nazi regime. Like in many areas, a certain continuity of fascistic personages is evidenced in the early editions of documenta, as Nanne Buurman has researched.[42] A continuity of right-wing positions is still lurking underground, ready to rise to the surface as violence towards subjects identified as migrants or as violence towards democratic politicians or as violence against Jews. Crimes motivated by antisemitism dramatically increased in the years before *documenta fifteen*.[43] To show something here, in Kassel, Germany, always means having a stance in relation to the crime against humanity, the Holocaust.

So, if *documenta fifteen* only invites artists with an Israeli passport, who claim to be registered as Palestinian (and who do not live in the autonomous Palestinian regions for good reasons), and if *documenta fifteen* does not invite Israeli artists who would be understood as Jewish, then I consider this to be not just problematic, I see this as a clearly antisemitic position; it is a BDS position, but it went unacknowledged. To understand the problems of the spontaneous ideology of the art field and its antisemitic tendencies, I recommend Oliver Marchart's publication on hegemony machine which has recently been published by OnCurating.org in the book section.[44] Some of the spontaneous ideology Marchart analyses in his book has this tendency of a vulgar positioning because the prejudgments are based on a shattering lack of knowledge about the Middle East and its history, beginning with a lack of knowledge of which region was called "Palestine" at the time of the Balfour Declaration. Or who the colonial power in the region was and if Jewish people there were, along with the Arab population, subject to oppression (by the British colonisers). By contrast, in this vulgar ideology, for example, the Jews emigrating to Israel/Palestine are considered the colonisers, ignoring the fact that a colony needs a motherland from where it colonises, as well as the fact that there have been Jews living in that area for thousands of years. Today, the population of Israel is extremely diverse, Arab Israeli (Palestinians with an Israeli passport), Jewish Israeli (with a background of more than 100 countries from where they were exiled), Christian Israeli, and so on. Representatives of the Arab Israelis are in the Knesset, act as judges and so forth, and the Jewish Israeli population consists mainly of Mizrahi, many of them coming from Arab countries, where they were forced to leave. The historical constellations are also often ignored by European/Western pseudo left-wing position, which also ignores the close collaboration of the Palestinian Arab leadership with the Nazi regime, the mufti did personally intervene to

hinder 3000 Jewish children leave for Palestine, who then died in concentration camps. He additionally helped to install a gigantic radio transmitter that was directed towards the Arab countries. Today the Palestinian administration of both Gaza strip and the West Bank can hardly be called democratic, as the elections have been suspended for a long time, as Hamas and Fatah act often as competitors, the Palastinian administrations have their problems, for example sadly also femicides and murders of homosexual people happen in high numbers in Gaza.
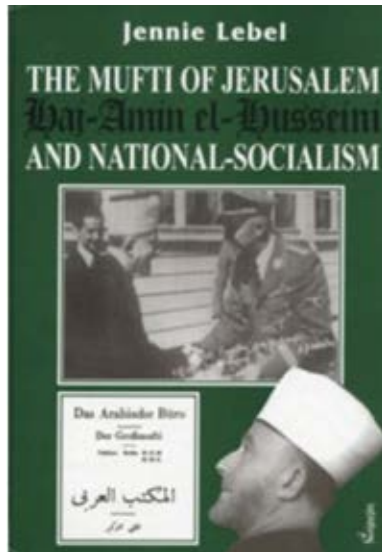
Jennie Lebel, *The Mufti of Jerusalem and National-Socialsim,* book Cover
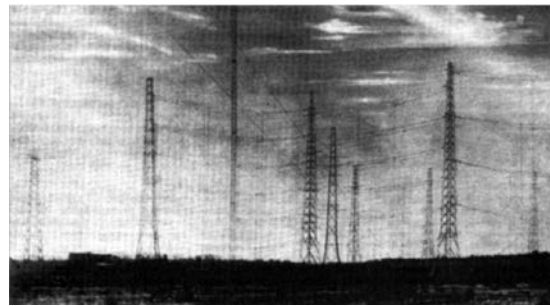
Transmission masts near Zeesen, Berlin, later destroyed by the Russian army

These regimes are legitimised by some pseudo left-wing groups in the West as well as the Palestinian slogans of a Palestine between the river (Jordan) and the sea, which obviously does not acknowledge Israel's right to exist. This ideology (I think it is even difficult to name it a position) is also unaware of the camps in Jordan and Lebanon, in which Palestinians have been forced to live for decades, and they are not allowed to integrate into the culturally close societies. The misery of Palestinians is fixed in this way. The Palestinians in the camps in Lebanon and Jordan (to say it here and there), as well as in the so-called occupied territories in Israel administered by Fatah or Hamas, are not doing well. That is very clear. But why this should now be caused exclusively by Israel? Neither Fatah nor Hamas have had democratic legitimacy for years. Mahmoud Abbas, the head of the more moderate Fatah, outed himself recently at his visit in Germany as a blatant Holocaust relativizer.[*] The BDS movement started out being supported by some left-wing Israelis as well, to enforce the rights of Palestinians in the occupied and self-administered regions, but over time the boycott of Israeli artists and cultural producers has increasingly become an instrument through which to exclude Jewish Israelis from participating in international events and exhibitions. Of course, it also prevents any cooperation between Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian artists. The BDS movement is now de facto excluding Jewish artists, and this in my view is therefore clearly antisemitic, which is never okay, but it is even more shocking when this exclusion manifests itself in Germany.

Détournements

Our involvement with *documenta fifteen* culminated in the summer school "Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education."[45] We proposed a workshop in which the participating students and lecturers prepared workshops for each other; additionally,

we invited speakers who presented projects and thoughts around commons and commoning: Hammad Nasar, David Behar Perahia and Dan Farberoff, Jennifer Deger (FERAL ATLAS), Sandy Hsiu-chih Lo and Hongjohn Lin in conversations with lumbung members, Gilly Karjevski (Floating University), Philip Horst & Matthias Einhoff (ZKU, Center for Art and Urbanistics), Speculations on Funding (as a Day-long Symposium), Bassam El Baroni, Avi Feldman, Ariane Sutthavong and Lara van Meeteren (Inappropriate BOOK CLUB, Bangkok 2021), Jeanne van Heeswijk (on *Philadelphia Assembled*), Dagmar Pelger and Jörg Stollmann, Public Movement (Dana Yahalomi), and Oliver Marchart. We deliberately invited Jewish Israelis (and at least no one hindered us from doing so) and ended the summer school with Oliver Marchart's book launch, with a very critical review of the antisemitic and anti-Israel attitudes at different documenta editions. The allegation of a secret BDS and antisemitic position by ruangrupa was discussed on many occasions in the summer school; the atmosphere had touches of hysteria, as the managerial head, Sabine Schormann, lacked the ability to bring diverse sensibilities and positions together at one table. Art educators were obviously overwhelmed, as well as finding themselves in a rather difficult position, and some internal fights happened within this group. Artists also felt threatened by right-wing individuals and local people reacting to queer or foreign outfits, and by a general neglect of their needs. (Some artists did not want to have their space guarded by the police and would have preferred antifa. The problem is that antifa is, of course, also divided in relation to issues around Palestine/Israel and generally leans more towards anarchism, which means that yet again a mediation between the artists and German entities was missing, which should have come from the core team of documenta under the head management). Of course, the problems were evident if one thinks about the different collectives bringing with them a multitude of artists, which cannot be handled in the same way as a regular curatorial project. In a way, ruangrupa actually did not curate the show; obligations and decisions were handed over to the invited lumbung members or, as in the case of our other affiliation, to the compost group in general. "The art of being not curated so much," as one slogan says, definitely came true. Many different international and local collectives did indeed run the show, but on the other hand some basic rules that needed to be established for commoning were completely lacking.

Reactions

Actually, ruangrupa did try in different ways to react to the antisemitism claim. For example, and probably not registered in art historical or curatorial circles, David Zabel (associated with ruangrupa, Kassel-based) and Reza Afisina (ruangrupa) organised a football game between an Israeli second division club and a Kassel-based club. On a local TV station, a report was recorded and sent. Perhaps this is a good example of strange double messaging and contradictory twisted arguments: the German trainer of the club emphasised that nobody in Kassel was in any way antisemitic, therefore not implicating either the population or *documenta fifteen*—which was in itself was an interesting equalising and reminds us of the artwork by Martin Kippenberger from 1988: *Ich kann beim besten Willen kein Hakenkreuz entdecken* (I can't for any reason detect a swastika). Kippenberger points to the inability of the population to face crimes against humanity as a source of guilt and a legacy of the German people, not as individual guilt but guilt as a society which has formed the blueprint for an authoritarian character (as coined by the Frankfurt School of Social Research) capable of running an industrial killing machine.[46] The short reportage on the football game culminates in the awkward scene when the German trainer hands over an antique coffee set to the Israeli trainer, saying that he wants to return something that Jewish fellow citizens had given to his wife's grandparents (or great-grandparents) before their deportation. He

had always wanted to give this back and would now take this opportunity. The Israeli coach pats his German counterpart reassuringly on the shoulder but does not comment in the report. The players are then also seen standing around at documenta, and the voiceover informs us that a visit to the nearby concentration camp was also part of the programme, but whether this was the case for all the players remains open.

Needless to say, a friendly football match cannot cancel out the omission of Jewish Israelis from one of the most important European exhibitions. Especially since, in reference to the "no antisemitism whatsoever" remark, violence against Jews in Germany has dramatically increased in recent years. It is dangerous to walk around with a kippah in Berlin. So, to legitimise an anti-Israeli position does something in this situation.

To come back to the arts, Nora Sternfeld has argued: "We know what being stuck in capitalism means; cynicism, art as branding, and fine artistic practice as a form of entrepreneurship. We know that our survival depends to a certain extent in its affirmation, we know it and do it with every line, with every click, but we want to insist and persist with imagining other possible structures for education and for technology."[47] In this respect, curating as a meaning-producing machine is also bound not only in many different ways to the art market, but also to the market of ideas; therefore, it is so dangerous to visually propose antisemitism. It spreads, like Umberto Eco shows in his 2010 book *The Prague Cemetery*,[48] in which he describes the genesis of antisemitic conspiracy theories, like the "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" in frightening and disturbing detail. Oliver Marchart sees extreme criticism of Israel as a metonymic shift of antisemitism from the imagined "Jew" to the imagined reality of Israel on a global level. Framed by Germany's past, it is particularly necessary and inevitable to critique the antisemitic incidents at documenta.

Sadly, the whole complex of antisemitism and extreme criticism of Israel has obscured documenta's paradigmatic shift from a show of individual artistic works to a show of collective artistic and curatorial projects. Collectivity alone is not enough; it must be clear what political goals collectives are working for. In a certain way, however, the incidents also give credence to the scepticism about communities formulated by Jean-Luc Nancy, Giorgio Agamben, Roberto Esposito, or Maurice Blanchot, in which their ambivalent understanding finds expression in formulations like "community without community," or the "unavowable," the "inoperative," or "coming community."[49] Community as such can lead to propagandistic, unexamined, sweeping statements. It can also lead to harsh exclusions. As cultural producers, we must always critically examine this and mistrust the ideology hidden in claims of community.

A Short Conclusion on Curatorial Knowledge Production as Ideology
I see curatorial knowledge production as a space for the negotiation of social, political, cultural, and economic conflicts, which understands curating as agency from which new constellations emerge.

This involves a critical review of contemporary curatorial practices and theories and a critical reflection on the rise of a so-called curatorial class. By engaging with these trajectories, the conditions and the foundations of knowledge production in the curatorial field become the subject of critical research leading to their re-positioning. Futurist curating, "curating for the not now," will therefore remain a movement of searching, a movement that takes up social questions and puts them up for discussion in the present, a movement that involves further segments of the population, a

research movement that experiments with new forms of economy and social life, with collectivity, with the expansion of gender ascriptions, with decentring the West. Perhaps the problems described above have also shown the importance of reading curation against itself, that is, having it permeate on a theoretical level and rewriting parts of its paradigms. The theoretical grounding translates into practice and vice versa—a theory of a practice and a practice of a theory—and this is necessary in order to understand and to undertake a politics of display, a politics of site, a politics of transfer and translation, and a politics of knowledge production in a relevant and conscious way. In such a way, curating will be a history of the present, as well as a presence of the future.

The journey of curating began with some rebellious moves conceived in the underfinanced off-spaces and small institutions. It concludes with the arrival of collective curating and the inclusion of non-white artists and publics and experimental formats at major institutions like documenta. Gregory Sholette accurately titled an article "A short and incomplete history of 'bad' curating as collective resistance,"[50] just as I tried to analyse more in detail above, where ruangrupa used different techniques to withdraw from the governmental aspect of the institution. But this also led to a situation in which a crude ideology could take over. Sholette sees the antisemitism as just one or two chance discovered caricatures—collateral damage. In his eyes, the real threat to Western ideology—why neo-bourgeois commentators were so enraged—was that Western paradigms like the individual, autonomy, male genius, and the art object were dismissed. For me, this is, of course, not the problem; indeed, it was quite the reverse. The problem is that the space of negotiation was actually not there, and in this way *documenta fifteen* was quite reactionary.

There is another reactionary move in this exclusion of Jewish artists, which has not yet been broadly discussed: in some ways, *documenta fifteen* was closely related to *documenta 1* in 1955. Just recently, an exhibition at the Historical Museum in Berlin documented that half of the initiators and members of the organisational team of the first documenta were either a member of the Nazi party, a member of the SA, or a member of the SS. Other than Arnold Bode, Werner Haftmann was documenta's most important founding figure. He was a member of the NSDAP from 1937 and still wanted by Italian authorities as a war criminal in 1946; beginning in 1955, he played a decisive role in deciding who was shown at the documenta—and who was not. He uttered this short-sighted, historically inaccurate sentence as late as 1986: "The artist was [...] born as the existential anti-fascist [...] more than the racially persecuted, [...] more than the politically persecuted." Walter Grasskamp has already mentioned that there were very few Jewish artists represented in the first issues of documenta, this is now underscored by the aforementioned recent Berlin exhibition *documenta. Politik und Kunst*.[51] One example: the name Rudolf Levy appears on an early invitation list for documenta 1955; later, however, it is dropped. (Levy was even a neighbour of Haftmann's in Florence).[52] Today, hardly anyone knows him anymore, while Emil Nolde, who was shown several times in Kassel, became famous—not least because of his repeated representation at documenta. Nolde's position was recently shown as fascist, as opposed to the whitewashing done by Haftmann, who helped Nolde be conceived as being persecuted, despite Nolde's attempts to be of service to the Nazi regime and despite him being fiercely antisemitic.

Nora Sternfeld, who has held the documenta professorship, explains that the real scandal is that documenta has not faced its Nazi history. And the renewed scandal is that this has not been worked through and that neither ruangrupa nor the managing director had positioned themselves in relation to this past. This is all the more astonishing given that Ayşe Güleç was even part of the side programme of the

abovementioned exhibition, her role meandering between the organisational level of documenta and being part of the artistic team. So, why was this new knowledge not carried back to ruangrupa? Or why was this ignored? The perpetuated official narrative instituted by the first three editions of documenta was that, in Kassel, "real" modernity was being shown, which should prove that Germans had overcome Nazi ideology with the international style of abstraction, as I argued previously. However, this modernity was constructed on the basis of excluding Jews. With this trick, the concept of "misappropriated art" which was coined in the catalogue of *documenta 1*, so-called persecuted art, was thus in retrospect Aryanised through documenta, as Sternfeld explains—a clear distortion of the victim-perpetrator positions. Jewish artistic positions were extremely marginalised, which means that we learnt through this historiography the racist (*völkische*) underlying message: Haftmann claimed that there were no relevant German-Jewish artists, and therefore the misappropriated, persecuted, murdered Jewish artists were erased from the historiography. We have a first incidence of exclusion of Jewish artists (not acknowledged, of course) in *documenta 1*. This was also intended make forgotten the deeds and the guilt of those involved in the murder of the persecuted. It is proven that Haftmann himself was involved in the conviction of partisans in Italy. The second severe incidence of exclusion has now happened in 2022.

A short lived information at *documenta fifteen*

This edition of documenta made clear that any form of community can forcefully enact inclusions and exclusions if the internal conflicts and those in a specific context do not find platforms and spaces to be negotiated, which is what happened at *documenta fifteen*. The process of installing these platforms was actively undermined by ruangrupa; they demanded support from the artists for the unacknowledged BDS politics. It was an important gesture by Hito Steyerl to withdraw her work, because ruangrupa presented the participants with an impossible choice. Jörg Heiser pointed out in a radio feature that it is dangerous to separate the battles against antisemitism and neocolonial engagement, especially since the right-wing white supremacists don't do so.[53] In Halle, a white supremacist tried to kill Jews in a synagogue; when he failed to get in through the massive, barricaded door, he first shot a woman outside and then individuals he considered marked as otherwise "different," namely people with a migratory background.[54] According to Patrick Gensing in the *Tagesschau* (daily news), in the livestream of this crime, the shooter, Balliet, denied the Holocaust and claimed feminism led to fewer births, leading to mass immigration; he blamed "the Jew" for

those issues.[55] I know, this crazy sequence would sound ridiculous, even funny, if it wasn't so deadly serious.

As I had predicted in an interview,[56] a large part of the international curatorial scene continues to enjoy a pseudo-revolutionary attitude and pats each other on the back in a nice old boys' network formation. Funnily (or not so funnily) enough, someone sent me a picture in which Charles Esche,[57] ruangrupa members, Philippe Pirotte, and Bart De Baere, director of the Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp, are literally hugging. Welcome to the new patriarchy. Pirotte suggests that the real goal of the critique of antisemitism is to discredit collective structures and the non-profit approach. I would argue inversely that the idea of commons was stuck in the performative mode; commons structures have to be taken seriously and to be instituted by commoning, and disputing rules, conditions, and content should be discussed by all participants. One could argue that what was proposed with this documenta was a new male-dominated form of governmentality, and it is not by chance that many artists complained about not being treated well and not having been looked after—was this curating without care? The desire to close the wound in the subconscious, that is, to make the Shoah finally disappear into nothingness, is overwhelming. The historian Dan Diner notes the negative relationship between Germans and Jews, whose self-image each tries to come to terms with in light of the unimaginable events: "Beyond the murder of Jews, Auschwitz was a practical refutation of Western civilization. In the face of a purposeless extermination for the sake of extermination, the purpose-rational consciousness bounces off such an unimaginable act. Such action cannot be integrated into the mind determined by secular forms of thinking—or it shatters." This mechanism is what Lacan would have called the register of the Real, insofar as the Real is not to be integrated; it stays as a continuous thread for the psyche, for the psyche to be overwhelmed by the trauma and to disintegrate. Dan Diner compares the attempt to confront this horrible void: "A comprehension of Auschwitz in view of Auschwitz is comparable to the attempt to stare open-eyed into the sun. The victim, the human being, equipped with defense mechanisms protecting him and turned toward life and survival, had to evade this horrifying reality."[58] Some (his)-stories of those involved, including the board who invited ruangrupa, may explain this further. The other hegemonic move is legitimizing Boycott and Sanctions against Israel further, and instituting this approach as being part of a general left-wing agenda—which in my view is a dramatic misconception of the actual situation. As documenta produces cultural capital for the participants, and the art field no longer has long-term contracts, a "pseudo-radical" position, or an ideological attitude, might bring benefits for those in constant need of a new job. This is the obtaining of distinction for some which I mentioned in the beginning.

So, conversely, my demand for curating, curating which understands curating as a politics of display, a politics of site, a politics of transfer and translation, and a politics of knowledge production is to scrutinise the interpellations of curating both theoretically and practically.

It means looking into subjectivities/communities that are proposed, it means looking into the material infrastructures, the institutions, and the media conglomerations of curating, and it means being responsible for the production of meaning through curating and being accountable for the ideology that is produced. And, of course, it means being aware that we are producing the world collectively.

Notes

1 See George Caffentzis, "The Future of 'The Commons': Neoliberalism's 'Plan B' or the Original Disaccumulation of Capital?," *New Formations* 69 (Summer 2010): 23-41.

2 Ibid., 24.

3 Ibid., 25.

4 See Dagmar Pelger, Anita Kaspar, and Jörg Stollmann, *Spatial Commons: Urban Open Spaces As A Resource* (Berlin: Universitätsverlag der TU Berlin, 2021).

5 Ibid., 2.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., 5.

8 Ibid., 8.

9 See Pierre Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993).

10 Stefano Harney, Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study,* (Wivenhoe, New York, Port Watson, Minor Compositions).

11 See Elinor Ostrom, "Reformulating the Commons" in *Protecting the Commons: A Framework for Resource Management in the Americas*, eds. Joanna Burger et al. (Washington, D.C.: The Island Press, 2001), 23-28; Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Elinor Ostrom, Roy Gardner, and James Walker, *Rules, Games, and Common-Pool Resources* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994).

12 Caffentzis, "The Future of 'The Commons,'" 24. "Indeed, many of the examples of commons Ostrom and her co-workers use are integral parts of the capitalist system, from the lobster fishers of Maine to the farmers using irrigation systems in India to the real estate developers who are commonly appropriating the ground water of Southern California. There is no conflict in this understanding of these kinds of commons with the smooth functioning of the "market." A study of the "design principles illustrated by long-enduring CPR [Common Property Resource] institutions" that Ostrom has used from the beginning of her studies of the commons to the present certainly do not show that there is any necessary conflict with capitalism." p. 30.

13 Peter Linebaugh, and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001); Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

14 Read more about this system in an interview conducted by the author with Martin Heller in the soon upcoming issue of OnCurating on funding.

15 Pelger, Kaspar, and Stollmann, *Spatial Commons*, 9.

16 See David Harvey, "The Future of the Commons," in *Radical History Review* 1 (Winter 2011): 101-108.

17 See http://phlassembled.net/, accessed 1 December 2021.

18 See interview with Jeanne van Heeswijk, led by Ronny Koren, in *OnCurating* 43: *Revisiting Black Mountain: Cross-Disciplinary Experiments and Their Potential for Democratization*, eds. Dorothee Richter, Ronald Kolb (December 2019), https://on-curating.org/issue-43-reader/jeanne-van-heeswijk.html#.YcoX78YxlsE.

19 Ibid.

20 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, "From the Margins," *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3, "Further Inflections: Toward Ethnographies of the Future" (August 1994): 279-297.

21 Ibid., 279.

22 Ibid., 280.

23 Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*.

24 Ibid.

25 ruangrupa members: Reza Afisina, Indra Ameng, Farid Rakun, Daniella Fitria Praptono, Iswanto Hartono, Ajeng Nurul Aini, Julia Sarisetiati, and Mirwan Andan.

26 See Wikipedia: "As president, Sukarno moved Indonesia from democracy towards authoritarianism and maintained power by balancing the opposing forces of the military, political Islam, and the increasingly powerful Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI). Tensions between the military and the PKI culminated in an attempted coup in 1965. The army, led by Major General Suharto, countered by instigating a violent anti-communist purge that killed between 500,000 and one million people. The PKI was blamed for the coup and effectively destroyed. Suharto capitalised on Sukarno's weakened position, and following a drawn-out power play with Sukarno, Suharto was appointed president in March 1968. His "New Order" administration, supported by the United States, encouraged foreign direct investment, which was a crucial factor in the subsequent three decades of substantial economic growth.
Indonesia was the country hardest hit by the 1997 Asian financial crisis. It brought out popular discontent with the New Order's corruption and suppression of political opposition and ultimately ended Suharto's presidency. In 1999, East Timor seceded from Indonesia, following its 1975 invasion by Indonesia and a 25-year occupation marked by international condemnation of human rights abuses." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indonesia, accessed 1 December 2021.

27 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jakarta.

28 Ibid.

29 Elly Kent, "The History of Conscious Collectivity Behind Ruangrupa", in Ronald Kolb, Dorothee Richter, documenta fifteen – Aspects of Commoning in Curatorial and Artistic Practices, OnCurating Issue 54, Zurich 2022.

30 See Carla Bergman and Nick Montgomery, *Joyful Militancy: Building Thriving Resistance in Toxic Times* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2017).

31 The main organisers of this part were Yuki Immamura and Giulia Rossini, together with Reza Afisina and Iswanto Hartono from ruangrupa.

32 Here, it can at least be said that we were not prevented from showing this video; however, it was unclear at times whether the rooms even remained open the whole time due to a lack of money. This again shows that new forms of art education did not have a prominent place in ruangrupa's concepts.

33 See https://camp-notesoneducation.de/.

34 See https://forensic-architecture.org/programme/events/77sqm_926min-at-documenta-14.

35 See the talk at Parliament of Bodies programme, https://forensic-architecture.org/programme/events/77sqm_926min-at-documenta-14.

36 See https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mordfall_Walter_L%C3%BCbcke , translation by the author, "The murder of Walter Lübcke took place on 1 June 2019 in Istha: Hessian right-wing extremist Stephan Ernst killed Kassel District President Walter Lübcke

(CDU) in front of his home with a revolver shot to the head from close range. Ernst was arrested on 15 June 2019 as an urgent suspect and was convicted by DNA traces on the victim's shirt and the murder weapon. He later recanted his first confession and presented his aide Markus H. the executing perpetrator. In his criminal trial, however, he confessed that he himself was the shooter; H. had been present.

On 28 January 2021, the Higher Regional Court of Frankfurt am Main sentenced Ernst to life imprisonment and found that out of his "fundamental racist, völkisch-national attitude" he had increasingly projected his hatred of foreigners onto Lübcke and finally shot him in order to punish him for his stance on refugee policy and to dissuade others from a "policy of cosmopolitanism." H. received a suspended sentence of 18 months for violating the weapons law.

37 See Chris Alton's website: https://chrisalton.com/English-Disco-Lovers-EDL-2012-15 .

38 The Advisory Board is composed of the following members: Frances Morris, Amar Kanwar, Philippe Pirotte, Elvira Dyangani Ose, Ute Meta Bauer, Jochen Volz, Charles Esche, and Gabi Ngcobo. The website states the function of the Board as advising in development, and the board members are clearly presented showing their present position: Ute Meta Bauer, Gründungsdirektorin des NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore; Charles Esche, Director of the Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven; Amar Kanwar, artist and filmmaker, NewDelhi; Frances Morris, Director of Tate Modern, London; Gabi Ngcobo, Curator of the 10th Berlin Biennale, 2018; Elvira Dyangani Ose, Director of the Showroom, London; Philippe Pirotte, Professor at the Staatliche Hochschule für Bildende Künste – Städelschule, Frankfurt am Main; Jochen Volz, Director of the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, see https://documenta-fifteen.de/documenta-kommission/.

39 Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 26.

40 Fraser, *The Old Is Dying and the New Cannot Be Born*.

41 Surprisingly little is known about Israeli society—for example, that Arab/Palestinian Israelis are represented in the Knesset, that some Arab Palestinian Israelis join the Israeli army, and that there are many internal problems in the self-governed regions, ruled by Arab Palestinians, Fatah, or Hamas. For example, no elections have been held since 2006. In contrast, Israel is after all a democracy, in many aspects a problematic one, as most other democracies are. So, the Palestinians with Israeli passports have chosen to live in Israel, use the education system there and the relative freedom of speech there.

42 Nanne Buurman, "The Exhibition as a Washing Machine: Some Notes on Historiography, Contemporaneity, and (Self-)Purification in documenta's Early Editions," *OnCurating* 54: *Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Practice*, eds. Ronald Kolb and Dorothee Richter (2022).

43 An intensive research project published by the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Unabhängiger Expertenkreis Antisemistimus*, Antisemitismus in Deutschland—aktuelle Entwicklungen* (Independent Group of Experts on Antisemitism, *Antisemitism in Germany—Current Developments)*, conclusions in English begin on page 274. http://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/publikationen/themen/heimat-integration/expertenkreis-antisemitismus/expertenbericht-antisemitismus-in-deutschland.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=7.

* At a press conference with Chancellor Scholz, Abbas said, when asked if there was an apology for the Israeli athletes killed in the 1972 Olympics, that Israelis had committed 50 massacres, that is, in his words, 50 times the Holocaust.

44 *HEGEMONY MACHINES*.

45 Shared campus, art education documenta and OnCurating, Partners: City University of Hong Kong/School of Creative Media, Hong Kong Baptist University, Kyoto

Seika University, LASALLE College of the Arts (Singapore), Taipei National University of the Arts, University of the Arts London, Zurich University of the Arts, University of Reading.

Summer School and Public Talk series, Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education, 23 June – 7 July 2022, at CAMP notes on education, *documenta fifteen*, Kassel. The two-week summer school "Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education," as part of *documenta fifteen*'s educational format CAMP notes on education, sets up experiential workshop formats, reading and discussions, performances, exercises with and in the city, "diversity dinners," and a variety of events in connection with *documenta fifteen*. Participants were asked to propose a three-hour workshop to co-teach and teach each other by sharing and discussing their situated experiences of practice and theory in an open and trustworthy way, true to the motto of this summer school, "Commoning starts here."

Concerning the commoning aspect of this summer school, we considered theoretical approaches like that of the feminist thinker Silvia Federici. She identified commons as the shared goods and knowledges of deviant groups. A renewed thinking about the commons is linked to movements of self-organisation and resistance and is now inspiring, as we see with ruangrupa, different cultural, artistic, and curatorial events. Can the art field introduce, together with activist movements, the projection of living together in a communal way, sharing resources and knowledges? Or as ruangrupa would pose the question: how to compost knowledge together and make it fruitful for a multiplicity of partial practices and for a multitude?

46 Erich Fromm coined the notion of the "authoritarian character"; he was part of the Institut für Sozialforschung (Institute of Social Research) which was led by Max Horkheimer.

47 Grégoire Rousseau and Nora Sternfeld, "Educating the Commons and Commoning Education: Thinking Radical Education with Radical Technology," in *Post-Digital, Post-Internet Art and Education: The Future is All-Over*, eds. Kevin Tavin, Gila Kolb, and Juuso Tervo (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

48 Umberto Eco, *The Prague Cemetery*, trans. Richard Dixon (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010).

49 See also *OnCurating* 7: *Being With, Ontological and Political Perspectives,* eds. Elke Bippus, Jörg Huber, and Dorothee Richter (2011).

50 Gregory Sholette, "A short and incomplete history of 'bad' curating as collective resistance", in Art Agenda Reports, *e-flux*, 21 September 2022, https://www.art-agenda.com/
criticism/491800/a-short-and-incomplete-history-of-bad-curating-as-collective-resistance .

51 See *documenta. Politik und Kunst*, Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, 18 June 2021 to 9 January 2022.

52 See website of the programme accompanying the exhibition: https://www.dhm.de/
veranstaltung/die-ermordeten-und-die-verdraengten-die-documenta-und-der-ns/

53 Jörg Heiser in conversation with Mahret Kupka, see https://www.deutschlandfunk-kultur.de/documenta-112.html.

54 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Halle_synagogue_shooting: "The Halle syna-gogue shooting occurred on 9 October 2019 in Halle, Saxony-Anhalt, Germany, and continued in nearby Landsberg. […] After unsuccessfully trying to enter the synagogue in Halle during the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur, the attacker, later identified as 27-year-old Stephan Balliet, fatally shot two people nearby and later injured two others. […]
Federal investigators called the attack far-right and antisemitic terrorism. The federal Public Prosecutor General took over the investigation and declared it to be a 'violation

of Germany's internal security.' Balliet, a German neo-Nazi from Saxony-Anhalt, was charged with two counts of murder and seven counts of attempted murder. […]
On 10 November 2019, Balliet confessed to the charges before an investigative judge at the Federal Court of Justice. On 21 December 2020, he was sentenced to life imprisonment with subsequent preventive detention."

55 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Halle_synagogue_shooting#cite_note-54.

56 See interview conducted by Tibor Pesza with Dorothee Richter, "'Antisemitismus auf drei Ebenen' Expertin: Boykottbewegung wirkt rassistisch ausschließend," *Die Hessische/Niedersächsische Allgemeine (HNA)*, 13 September 2022; the interview was republished in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* under the title "Dorothee Richter widerspricht Pirotte – 'Das Modell Documenta wird modifiziert werden müssen,'" *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 15 September 2022, https://www.fr.de/kultur/gesellschaft/documenta-antisemitismus-dorothee-richter-widerspricht-philippe-pirotte-interview-91788410.html.

57 The Advisory Board/Appointment committee was composed of the following members: Frances Morris, Amar Kanwar, Philippe Pirotte, Elvira Dyangani Ose, Ute Meta Bauer, Jochen Volz, Charles Esche, and Gabi Ngcobo. The website states the function of the Board as advising in development, and the board members are clearly presented showing their present positions: Ute Meta Bauer, founding director of the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore; Charles Esche, Director of the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; Amar Kanwar, artist and filmmaker, New Delhi; Frances Morris, Director of Tate Modern, London; Gabi Ngcobo, Curator of the 10th Berlin Biennale, 2018; Elvira Dyangani Ose, Director of the Showroom, London; Philippe Pirotte, Professor at the Staatliche Hochschule für Bildende Künste – Städelschule, Frankfurt am Main; Jochen Volz, Director of the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo; see https://documenta-fifteen.de/documenta-kommission/.

58 Dan Diner, "Negative Symbiose. Deutsche und Juden nach Auschwitz," *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte?*, ed. Dan Diner (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1987), n.p. Translation by the author.

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We need to talk! Art, offence and politics in Documenta 15
Wulan Dirgantoro and Elly Kent

Conflict, disappointment and fear have followed the opening of the major quinquennial art exhibition Documenta 15 in Kassel, Germany on 18 June, as accusations of anti-Semitism were levelled at participating artists' collective Taring Padi and, not for the first time, at artistic directors, Indonesian collective ruangrupa. Both groups reject the accusations of anti-Semitism and have apologised for failing to recognise the offensive nature of the image/s within the enormous and densely populated banner *The People's Justice*. After initially being shrouded in black cloth, it has now been dismantled.

The fallout has been severe and the reactions strident and emotive, both in Germany and in Israel. On Twitter the Israeli embassy derided the artwork as "old-style Goebbels-like propaganda" while German Minister for Culture stated that she had been "betrayed" by Documenta's management and the curators, who had undertaken to ensure anti-Semitism had no place in the exhibition. In Indonesia and elsewhere the incident, and more particularly the response from authorities, has reignited paranoia about Zionist conspiracies and fuelled a growing sense that organisers are beholden to conservative xenophobic forces that are disinterested in, and actively repressive of, constructive dialogue.

When their selection as artistic directors of Documenta 15 was announced in 2019, ruangrupa called attention to the festival's origins: "If documenta was launched in 1955 to heal war wounds, why shouldn't we focus documenta 15 on today's injuries, especially ones rooted in colonialism, capitalism, or patriarchal structures, and contrast them with partnership-based models that enable people to have a different view of the world." Including collectives from around the world, and especially those societies impacted by colonialism, ruangrupa proposed a curatorial framework they called "lumbung," a term borrowed from the Indonesian word for a communal grain store.

Their approach aimed to be horizontal, cooperative, community-oriented, inclusive and experimental. But from early 2022, the inclusion of Palestinian artists' collective "The Question of Funding" and the Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center attracted the attention of a blog accusing the artistic directors of anti-Semitism, based on the inclusion of "anti-Israeli activists". These accusations were discredited but were nonetheless repeated in mainstream media. Ruangrupa rejected what they described as "racist defamations" and affirmed a commitment to "the principles of freedom of expression but also a resolute rejection of antisemitism, racism, extremism, Islamophobia, and any form of violent fundamentalism are the underpinnings of our work."

There is no doubt that parts of *The People's Justice* draw on anti-Semitic imagery. In amongst the images of skeletons, weaponry, soldiers and spies from the Cold War's major geopolitical players and their victims—intended to critique the globalised military machine that did indeed conspiratorially support the massacre of hundreds of thousands of Indonesians in the "anti-communist" purges of 1965—is a suited figure

with sidelocks and a hat typical of orthodox Jews—alongside these stereotypical attributes the figure also sports red eyes and pointy teeth and worse (and perhaps tellingly anachronistically), the SS insignia on his hat.

How an image like the one described above escaped the attention of organisers, who had publicly committed to ensuring there were no elements of anti-Semitism, is worth interrogating. Further, the mistake raises important questions about the artists' creative process, the curatorial framework adopted by the artistic directors, and the organising institution's reactions to external pressure exerted through the media, government and diplomatic representatives. The latter are questions for those responsible to consider seriously. Here, as art historians, we will foreground the context from which the artwork, and the curatorial framework, emerged and what opportunities and challenges are presented in its transposition to Germany.

Lumbung as curatorial practice

"As a concrete practice," write ruangrupa on the Documenta 15 website, "*lumbung* is the starting point of documenta fifteen: principles of collectivity, resource building and equitable distribution are pivotal to the curatorial work and impact the entire process—the structure, self-image and appearance of documenta fifteen."

Artists were grouped into collaborative "*mini-majelis*" (councils) of half a dozen or so artists and collectives, who met regularly (virtually) in the months before the exhibition proper to discuss their respective work and how to distribute the funding "pot" allocated to them. Larger "*majelis akbar*" or plenary meetings were held every few months and acted as a forum to which each mini-majelis reported back. According to Christina Schott, within the *mini-majelis* that Taring Padi belonged to, artists were challenged by the sudden expectation to make decisions about matters with which they have no experience. Schott quotes Setu Legi from Taring Padi as saying: "... the needs are very different. But what I like about the system is that no one is left behind, while others become the highlight, simply because they have the better resources."

This communitarian approach is typical of agrarian and indeed urban communities in Indonesia, where the collective is a common form of social organisation and often, social surveillance. It forms a protective bubble which at times can lead to insular perspectives and naivete of the broader context—whether that be the experiences of those outside the bubble, or the social milieu in which it is situated. In our conversation with Taring Padi a few days after their banner was removed, they had no recollection of discussions on the sensitivities of the politics of representation in Germany or the specific historical context that led to it, either in their mini-majelis or the larger meetings. This seems discordant with the artistic directors' earlier commitments to ensuring no such sentiments would emerge; basic intercultural sensitivities should have been a point of discussion, especially considering the visceral threats of racist violence that were evident when The Question of Funding's space was vandalised in May.

The experimental *lumbung* framework promulgates admirably horizontal egalitarian values and breaks down the institutional hierarchies that have allowed art events around the globe to be hijacked by banality, elite vested interests and empty spectacle. It allows artists to connect their work more directly to audiences and to connect to each other. Artwork is no longer filtered through the lens of curatorial thematics and silos of selectivity, and relational forms are not dictated by public program professionals.

But these great rewards come with great risk. Cultural institutions are notoriously risk-averse, with the primary motivation being to avoid reputational damage. A side-effect of this reputational risk aversion is that contextual and cultural sensitivities are usually managed, and creating a safe environment for audiences, artists and artworks is prioritised. All of this is achieved through a hierarchy of responsibility which ultimately means the institution has a duty of care to all its stakeholders. Artists, at the bottom of the institutional hierarchy but simultaneously the most visible part of it, are somewhat off the hook. It's a paradox that also deserves scrutiny, and experimental methods like *lumbung* take this on.

Although it is not an unusual approach to creative and curatorial practice in Indonesia, the *lumbung* framework does not appear to have found an adequate mechanism to distribute risk and responsibility within the heightened tensions of Germany's own struggles with present day Islamophobia, and the historical burdens of the Holocaust. While this context produces a particular sensitivity, any context unfamiliar to artists and curators will do the same; the politics of representation and its attendant taboos exist everywhere in different forms. Whose responsibility is it to ensure these are understood and incorporated into alternative models of knowledge-sharing when they are imported into a new context?

There are also important questions to be asked about how the visual is accounted for in this framework. While the focus on process, concept and dialogue is paramount to opening art events up to more diverse and pluralistic voices and revealing the experiences of those not accounted for in hegemonic social discourse, it is nonetheless true that the vast majority of visual art involves representation and sensate experiences that viewers will receive subjectively. Critical discussions of image, representation and power should always be a part of preparations to exhibit, both to manage risk and to ensure the works are tested against a variety of potential interpretations. Artists deserve no less than the opportunity to ensure their artwork does not unintentionally misrepresent their position.

Taring Padi: collective practice and its socio-political context
In our interview with Taring Padi, they were at pains to stress that they did not hold ruangrupa or the *lumbung* framework responsible for the chain of events that allowed the banner to be displayed despite its triggering imagery. They remain apologetic for the offense caused but insistent that it was unintended, both in the original rendering of the image for the also-controversial 2002 Adelaide Art Festival and in the failure to identify its potentially inflammatory reception in Germany 20 years later.

Whatever the weaknesses of the *lumbung* approach, its open platform has allowed Taring Padi to receive a groundswell of support from visitors to Documenta 15 and residents of Kassel, who have brought gifts, food, love and solidarity. Members of the group told us that one visitor undertook to go through many of the works on display with them, looking for other images that might cause offence and openly listening to their explanations whenever a query was raised. In this way, lumbung may also allow dialogue to continue outside the institutional and media frameworks that seem intent on stifling a nuanced discussion of what has taken place. This conviviality, at least, is familiar territory for Taring Padi, whether in Germany, Indonesia or elsewhere.

Taring Padi's own convivial, collective approach to art is crucial to understanding why there are no simple answers to the question of how the offending image appeared in the banner in the first place. Not only does Taring Padi have many members who are

involved in the creative process, but they also often invite non-members such as workshop participants to contribute to works in progress. While large-scale works are planned through discussion, notes and sketches and the division of labour is coordinated (though not strictly enforced). It is a process that deliberately eschews authorship—works are not signed by individuals but instead stamped with the collective's distinctive logo. As Bambang Agung wrote in *Taring Padi: Seni Membongkar Tirani* (Art Dismantles Tyranny), "Collective artworks, in other words, are a critique of the reification of art and the commodification of its artists."

The imagery delivered through this process is inevitably derived from a diverse range of sources and linked to the leftist ideologies embraced by the collective, which is by nature amorphous. They deploy caricature and humour and shared this visual strategy with many Indonesian artists, including Apotik Komik, Heri Dono and Eddie Hara. Their overall approach is direct and focused on delivering a political message. Their woodblock prints, made on cheap brown paper and often pasted up on walls or distributed through social networks, often feature imagery that echoes the social realism of Kathe Kollwitz. Their murals share the compositional strategies of Mexican Muralists like Diego Riviera; in short, their visual influences are also political. The collective also deploys a reductive strategy in which figures are represented as (stereo) "types" (farmer, woman, politician, preacher). Meanwhile, the anthropomorphising of pigs and dogs into figures of derision echoes cultural and linguistic attitudes to these animals in Java and in global parlance (capitalist pigs, watchdogs etc.). It is in this social context that the depiction of Jewish figures with fang-like teeth and blood-red eyes is likely to have originated. In Muslim-majority Indonesia, where pro-Palestine attitudes are normative, such imagery would barely raise an eyebrow. But as Documenta 15 demonstrated, it is a different story when the work is displayed in the country responsible for the Holocaust.

Nevertheless, the question of social context is vexed. Of the dismantled work, Taring Padi says: "'People's Justice' was painted almost twenty years ago now, and expresses our disappointment, frustration and anger as politicised art students who had also lost many of our friends in the street fighting of the 1998 popular uprising that finally led to the disposal of the dictator." Moreover, the content of the work drew on then-emerging scholarship that revealed the complicity of Western democracies in the systematic exacerbation of political and social instability in Indonesia in the 1960s–designed to bring down the Indonesian Communist party and the incumbent president who sympathised with their agenda. These tensions, of course, led to the 1965-66 massacre of at least half a million citizens, the detention of many more without trial, and the installation of the authoritarian New Order military regime. Taring Padi's controversial banner explicitly implicates Mossad as a supporter of the New Order, a fact confirmed by Israeli Foreign Affairs documents unsealed in the state archives.

Yet, while a reference to modern Israel's intelligence agency may be seen as legitimate criticism of Israel's role in Cold War politics, the other image that has drawn the ire of German and Israeli commentators is more slippery. The depiction of a side-locked, suited figure clearly draws on the kind of anti-Semitic propaganda that has long circulated widely in Europe. For those whose education and social context have taught them to critically evaluate such imagery for this specific expression of hate, the reference is explicit and obvious. For artists embedded in a different social context, it may be less obvious. Given that Taring Padi has long been known to espouse values of religious tolerance and humanity, however, it is important to ask how such an image could appear in their work?

Anti-Semitism in Indonesia

As one of the largest Muslim populations in the world, Indonesia does not have diplomatic relations with Israel. Anti-Semitic sentiment can be traced back to colonial officials and European travellers in the 19th century who systematically applied European stereotypes of Jews to local Chinese populations across Southeast Asia. Compounded by such legacies of colonial rule that deny many Indonesians education in critical thinking, unfortunately, anti-Semitic sentiments are quite widespread. In 2002, when the world was awash with post- 9/11 Islamophobia, the response in Indonesia to the events in the US was different. Compassion for victims soon gave way to anger and fear that Islam as a whole had been made a scapegoat. It was a turning point that emboldened already active terrorist groups and inspired the Bali bombing in October 2002.

A frightening dichotomy between Western imperialists and the rest of the world gained traction, and stereotypical images of capitalists, imperialists, and Zionists were—and continue to be—disseminated uncritically through certain circles. It is not beyond comprehension that in this environment a poorly understood—or indeed completely unrecognised—image of a nefarious man in a suit seemed an appropriate image to represent the state of Israel, alongside a giant pig wearing an Uncle Sam hat, and another pig wearing a *peci* (also known as a *songkok* or *kopiah*). The jarring and confusing application of the S.S runes deepens the image's shock value but also begs more questions: what is the intention of the image and how informed was its author? Was there any real comprehension of the symbology or was it uncritically borrowed from the mass of imagery circulating in a public discourse that conflated anti-Semitism with anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism?

There's a lot to unpack there and it's a wonder that imagery in this work hasn't triggered negative reactions from other audience segments in the past. Taring Padi acknowledges that their approach may have been "sloppy and careless". This experience, they told us, will lead to a more careful approach to the impact of images. Unfortunately though, Documenta is now unlikely to provide a platform for the artists to explain what such a more careful approach may look like. Hyperbolic accusations that the artwork reflects Goebbels-style Nazi sentiment have fuelled extremist, reactionary responses and created a dangerous atmosphere in which artists' safety is threatened. Institutional and governmental reactions have prevented constructive discussions that contextualise the politics of representation from diverse perspectives. It's important to acknowledge that vast systems of knowledge and praxis have been violently oppressed and distorted by colonialism, and the work to repair that damage has barely begun. Documenta 15, with its horizontal strategies and open platforms, however perilous they may be, offers us the opportunity to be involved in real conversations about our received wisdoms, our cognitive biases, our vested interests and our positions of privilege. Those conversations will at times be uncomfortable, hurtful, and offensive. That is what deliberative democracy requires of us: an inevitably flawed struggle for an elusive, even impossible, consensus. Experimenting with the role of art within that struggle and the distribution of power within the art world is an admirable and aspirational enteprise that is being executed now, imperfectly, around the world. Documenta 15 brings some of those experiments to its audiences. It is an opportunity for dialogue about some of our time's most important social, political and human rights challenges.

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documenta fifteen's Lumbung: The Bumpy Road on the Third Way: Fragmentary Thoughts on the Threats and Troubles of Commons and Commoning in Contemporary Art and Knowledge Production
Ronald Kolb

This text presents fragmentary lines of thought on the ramifications of commoning practice in the exhibitionary complex, exposing threats to the art market and art discourse that unfold between hegemonic maneuvering and friendship.[*]

Early on—when the road to the next documenta was not yet rocky or hardened—ruangrupa explained the concept of *documenta fifteen* in terms of "lumbung"—the famous rice barn in small village communities from Indonesia and their practice of collectively managed resources (originally rice) that are freely shared with all community members. Lumbung is a practice of the collective sharing of resources, common ownership, and common means and methods of production. In their June 18, 2020, press release, ruangrupa described "lumbung as a collectively-governed architecture for the storage of food serves a community's long-term well-being through communal resources and mutual care, and it is organized around a set of shared values, collective rituals, and organizational principles."[1] Lumbung, however, should not be seen as a mere concept or metaphor for *documenta fifteen's* large-scale exhibition project—curatorial concepts for biennials tend to embed their exhibitions in a larger political and social picture, although they often do not incorporate any of these ideas into the exhibition practice itself, resulting in a more traditional formula of knowledge display. The lumbung practice proposed by ruangrupa for this large-scale exhibition was extensively incorporated into all processes of artistic direction for *documenta fifteen*—as far as it was possible.

From that moment on, various conflicts loomed on the horizon, not to mention the internal difficulties of "scaling up" a resource infrastructure and its sharing principles, originally intended for a rather small village community or small group of people, to a global scale.[2] At this point in time, around one month after *documenta fifteen* has ended, it is still not easy to grasp the impact of this very different approach toward the representative exhibitionary complex, even on the more flexible and less traditional models of the art field—recurrent major exhibitions such as biennials and documenta alike.

This text aims to address the empowering aspects of commoning strategies for exhibitions and their impact on the broader public and also aims to analyze possible fault lines. My critique attempts to avoid antagonistic criticism and relies instead on a reflexive mode of theory, that is, on the practice of self-reflection, of understanding one's own privileged position as situated knowledge with all its blind spots and

exclusions. Following Donna Haraway's slogan, "staying with the trouble,"[3] we must also critically engage with practices we endorse.

The commons approach challenges the established art field on many levels: in addition to removing the separation between fine art and craft (high/low art dispute)[4] and addressing the still prevailing issues of inclusion/exclusion in a globalized art world that still mostly only "adds" non-European artistic practices to the established art field,[5] I would like to focus on the specifics that the commons idea can bring to the exhibitionary complex. I would like to analyze this under two crucial aspects: deaccumulation of capital and collectivization. The former poses a serious threat to aestheticized commodification in line with the established distribution of the art market and singular artistic figures at the top.[6] The other poses no less of a threat to the "modern autonomous individual,"[7] and thus to a much criticized and critiqued model of the "Western" ideal of the subject as author-figure, but one that is quickly resurrected against a supposed collectivity of the "other," as postulated by Bazon Brock,[8] among others.

fig. 1: Diagram at the Fridskul area, in the Fridericianum, Kassel

Commoning practices in the exhibitionary complex have far-reaching consequences and force thorough reconfigurations—besides the look and feel of the actual exhibition in itself:
– for the relationship of contemporary art to its economic base, especially to the neoliberalism of capitalism and its elaborated critique of precarity;
– for the representational function of art institutions and their non-coercive proposals of conduct within their established learning environments and epistemologies;
– for the hierarchy of responsibilities and accountabilities;
– for modes of production (collective practices vs. cooperation);
– and there might even be changes in art vis-à-vis the established critical discourse that accompanies the major art world industry.

But before I address the fraught effects of commoning practices on art institutions, I want to situate the commons discourse. Ten years after the peak of the (revived) discourse on commons,[9] strategies and initiatives related to commons and the idea of shared ownership and collaborative practice found their way into the "most important major exhibition" documenta in Kassel, Germany, in 2022.

Short History of the Commons

The commons cannot be considered a form that is easy to define and can take different (self-)governmental forms today, ranging from very strictly horizontally governed community projects to loose formations led by a core group with peers and partners attached in lesser responsible roles. One can rather think of differing forms on a scale. Historically, commons can be seen as communally shared and cultivated (farm)land within a territory that is used but not owned or in which there is common ownership. Through Silvia Federici[10] and Peter Linebaugh,[11] one can learn how these relatively resilient, self-organized formations of pre-accumulative production have often been forcibly dissolved from the outside for primarily economic reasons throughout history. Contemporary projects of commons combine urban life, ecological issues, and autonomous desires.[12] These commons typically run parallel to a capitalist system and create spaces where community life can be economically sustained, often leading to long-term infrastructures and networks. The newest forms of commons can be found in the digital realm, where the shared production of software and building of digital communities goes hand in hand with the vocabulary of commons but does not provide a community life with physical interpersonal interaction that could be considered crucial.[13]

Nonetheless, commons can be seen primarily as non-fixed conglomerations (or governmental assemblages[14]) with practices of commonly shared and governed goods and resources that defy profit-oriented capitalism—in this offering of resistant practices to the individualization of neoliberalism—though they neither dissolve nor universalize property relations as a whole, but rather shift them from sole ownership to collectively shared ownership by a group. Commons can be seen as ambiguous in this sense, as often these projects can be quite easily situated within capitalist or state structures. They do not place themselves in total opposition to capitalism, nor do they crystallize into an ideology of all-encompassing public means of production. There is a certain practicability to the commons projects: DIY and DIWA practices are an integral part, decision-making goes hand in hand with gatherings, subsistence takes precedence over ideology, etc.

In 2010, George Caffentzis pointed out the ambiguous relations of the commons (and its plural forms) to the capital system in his essay "The Future of 'The Commons': Neoliberalism's 'Plan B' or the Original Disaccumulation of Capital" with the aim of strengthening certain forms of commons while rejecting others.[15] For him, certain commons can be used as repair for neoliberalism's devastating neglect of social relations. And specifically because the practice of commons can take care of communities—they even actively produce them—, by forming social interconnections between people that would be otherwise suspended in a capitalist system, commons seem to be a good fit for a neoliberal agenda of Western nation-states, aiming to outsource their social responsibilities. I have argued elsewhere that neoliberalism should not be viewed as a unitary development, as it adapts to different contexts and appears in different forms and represents a fusion of the ostensibly capitalist logic with a progressive agenda ("self-actualization," etc.).[16] Nonetheless, some desire for belonging is crucial to the formation of commons and any society—in a neoliberal framework or otherwise. The moments of belonging—which are still so strongly directed toward a national community dovetailed with capitalist logic (individualization, meritocracy, cooperation)—seem, at best, to find their new home in smaller, self-selected networks or are locally anchored in microcultures. In this sense, a renewed concept of citizenship—and its aspects of self-selected forms of belonging beyond the legal framework—can develop into a collective process of community building.

For the notion of citizenship and its creation beyond a nation-state, I may draw our attention to one of *documenta fifteen*'s very ambitious projects called *citizenship*. This participatory project is being conducted by ZK/U Center for Art and Urbanistics and aims to create a community through an elaborate constellation: the participatory project turned the roof of the ZK/U building literally upside down to become a ship—though it's more like a raft—to "sail off in it to *documenta fifteen*—a trip of 650km, fueled entirely by people power."[17] The boat trip relies completely on the help of communities along the way (small village societies), volunteers and friends, who help with moving the boat, but also with sustaining the crew with food, accommodation, and other needs. A project like this interlocks different groups of people in new ways—even for the experimental field in contemporary art—and creates an alternative form of an open community with its own fabricated formation of belonging—at least temporarily. And, of course, these artistic practices always come with a risk of getting stuck, and of falling apart. On June 28, 2022, in a contribution for the series of talks "Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education,"[18] we[19] learned from the artists behind *citizenship*, Philip Horst and Matthias Einhoff, about their current troubles with low water levels and defunct machinery.[20] On a heartwarming side note, Horst and Einhoff asked the audience for a skipper in the discussion following their talk. They lost their skipper due to the changed timeline, and by change, Dan Farberoff, from Common Views, another lecturer from the series attending their talk, was able to help out by recommending a friend of his. I consider this act as a type of participation in this project of citizenship, and therefore as a form of belonging to this temporary community.
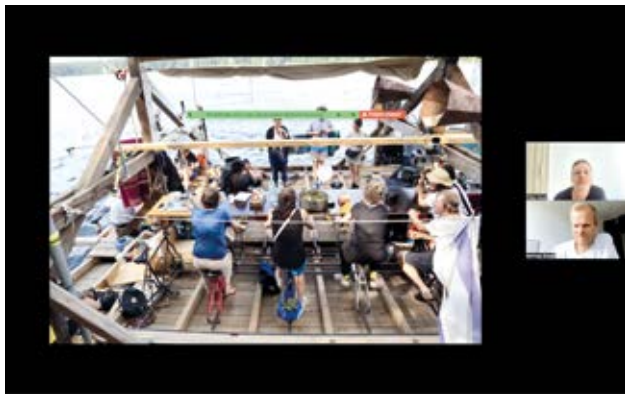
fig. 2: Talk via Zoom by Philip Horst and Matthias Einhoff on *citizenship*, at Hafenstraße 76, Kassel, June 28, 2022.

To stay with Caffentzis, his wish for the commons to become "the Original Disaccumulation of Capital" is less clear-cut than his critique of the neoliberalist reading of the commons. He refers to capitalism's ability "to organize the reproduction of our lives outside of its structures,"[21] pointing to the enormous degree of organization of global relations that the capitalist system and the neoliberal agenda have created over the past forty years. In a broader—one might even say enormous, because world-changing—framework, we would need to examine the history of globalization and how neoliberal policies (the last stage of Western-driven globalization) have succeeded in organizing and rationalizing trade and finance on a world scale, largely by privatizing public enterprises and deregulating economies—both in the direction of individualization and individual ownership, and in dismantling structures of public projects established by states in a national framework. We should not dismiss globalization as a whole or think that globalization is only a result of neoliberal policies. Other versions

of a globalized world without the hegemony of profit are certainly conceivable and may have to develop sooner rather than later, as neoliberal policies are unable or unwilling to deal with our current global crises.

lumbung, or Commoning Applied to the Large-Scale Exhibition Called *documenta fifteen*

In order to get closer to understanding what a commons-driven practice can produce in a large-scale contemporary exhibition, I would like to mention some insights into ruangrupa's practices and methods, some of which I have experienced through my participation in two networks related to documenta[22] and various meetings with them, as well as through several visits to the exhibition and related events myself.

I would like to suggest this quote from Peter Linebaugh from a historical perspective as a blueprint in order to understand commons thinking for the exhibitionary complex:

> Commoners think first not of title deeds, but of human deeds: how will this land be tilled? Does it require manuring? What grows there? They begin to explore. You might call it a natural attitude. Second, commoning is embedded in a labor process; it inheres in a particular praxis of field, upland, forest, marsh, coast. Common rights are entered into by labor. Third, commoning is collective. Fourth, being independent of the state, commoning is independent also of the temporality of the law and state.[23]

First: Translated for the exhibitionary complex, **"Commoners think first not of title deeds, but of human deeds,"** speaks of subsistence over representation. It changes the mode of representation of and in exhibitions. It shifts the power of representation and its vertical mode of establishing a certain understanding of the world, of establishing knowledge through a universalized "objective" public display directed toward a public to a more horizontal interpersonal exchange that offers direct participation enclosed in contact zones. I will later argue that both methods of exhibition-making—the "traditional" representational mode, and a full-body participatory mode of knowledge exchange—have their advantages and disadvantages, the former enabling precise articulations often with the costs of higher levels of exclusion, while the latter enables a fully engaged public with the risk of flat levelling and relativizations. Both have their weaknesses and their strengths.

"[H]ow will this land be tilled?" relates to both a localized analysis of the situatedness in which one finds itself embedded and a working methodology for possibilities of future display. In commons thought, with the definition provided by Linebaugh, tasks are clear: **"What grows there? They begin to explore."** At least since 2020, ruangrupa began to form networks on three different levels: "lumbung inter-lokal" (the international networks ruangrupa already had relationships with), "Kassel ekosistem" (initiating and connecting various projects, off-spaces, and association in Kassel's civil society) and "lumbung Indonesia" (the collectivizing process conducted respectively in locations in Indonesia). This establishment of a network of networks embedded through local practices in a trans-local network on such a scale is unparalleled in the art field. In our globalized world—and specifically for exhibitionary projects like documenta and other biennials—working the local depends on global trajectories, inter-local interconnectedness, and trans-local alliances. ruangrupa's vision for *documenta fifteen* was a very compelling enactment on this front. The exclusions of its own that it produces will be discussed later.

To establish the "Kassel ekosistem," two members of ruangrupa, Reza Afisina and Iswanto Hartono, moved to Kassel with their families in 2020. Though the claim to "localize" biennials is an often-promoted curatorial statement, it more often than not falls short. What ruangrupa set out to achieve by situating two of its core members in the city of Kassel in order to create the Kassel ekosistem, has never been done in documenta's history, and for the most part, is very unusual for biennials. This level of engagement in a city and its society is unmatched. Okwui Enwezor's similarly major impact on the large-scale exhibition as a whole with *documenta11* in 2002 directed much-needed attention toward artists of non-European locations, yet it was not inclined to ground this global endeavor in local issues to too great an extent.[24]

"**You might call it a natural attitude**" points to a non-formalized way of working: from my experience in the newly established network of "Composting Knowledge," relationships developed casually—"naturally"—over a period of time. There were no representative or formalized arrangements at play—for better or worse.

Second: "[…] commoning is embedded in a labor process; it inheres in a particular praxis of field, upland, forest, marsh, coast."
Commoning practices prefer doing, rather than contemplating or representing. For the exhibitionary complex this means a shift away from the representational mode of display to an active involvement of artists and public alike, artists and public as present bodies on display in the exhibition. In this sense, performativity takes on a new meaning. For example, our workshop group of the Summer School "Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education" was often viewed as an artistic performance. The workshop space of the summer school was placed inside the exhibition space and on more than one occasion, our group was considered part of the exhibition by the visitors. On an intentional level, many artists present at their given exhibition space were constantly engaged in discussions. The performative aspect of art was expanded to the body of the artist, and the body of the visitor—a fuller embodiment within the exhibition than the traditional contemplative "viewer's gaze." The integration of the relation between audience and the art institution was set out to change, hence given practices of art mediation and interpellation. We learned that ruangrupa proposed art mediation as the activation of artists and collectives present in the exhibition space. I experienced this in the first weeks of *documenta fifteen*, where the exhibition was activated by the artists and collectives present on site. For example, the gudskul area at Fridericianum was curated as a contact zone or—in the terminology used on the official website—"gathering space."[25] Different artist collectives from Indonesia were invited to actively engage with the audience on a playful manner, yet with the aim of creating a co-learning environment. In their words: "Gudskul is open to anyone who is interested in co-learning, developing collective-based artistic practices, and art-making with a focus on collaboration."[26]

fig. 3: Fridskul area, activated at that time by La Tabebh.

ruangrupa's reticence towards art mediation could also be rooted in the reflex of seeing art mediation as a hegemonic function of the art institution: in this framework, a constellation might occur where artists in the exhibition space engaged with the audience are confronted with art mediators who additionally "explain" the works to the audience from a seemingly institutionalized point of view. This could become uncomfortable and undermine the direct exchange between art, artists, and the audience and trigger problematic forms of "Otherings."

From the proposal of a commoning practice in exhibition-making **"embedded in a labor process,"** a "radical" other form of interpellation of the audience in a museum emerges. It brings the individual spectator—still prevalent in museums—into a collective process. We experienced ourselves how easy it was to engage in a discussion over tea, cooked and served as a tool for starting a discussion in the gudskul area at Fridskul. In this way, the museum space is not only a constellation of display, media and (art) objects, or where labor is shown (in form of artworks), but it also becomes a space to be used. For an incisive experience, we can see Fridericianum's left wing dedicated to toddlers with a sandbox and resting area, and children with an installation of a children's playground and daily program organized by RURUKIDS.[27] One has to ask why no biennial or museum addressed parents and their children in this inclusive way inside the exhibition space as an integral part of the exhibition—and not as something offered outside of the exhibition to bridge the time.

figs. 4: Playground at Fridskul area.

Our learned behavior in museums as primarily reflective intellectuals engaged in aesthetic judgment produces an "autonomous individual subject"; it sets the audience in front of a complex artwork. A collective interaction—let alone a loud discussion—is unwanted in the most traditional sense of museums. Although participatory practices have entered the museum for a while now, I would argue there are significant differences between participatory forms that are located in the relation between audience–museum. There is socially engaged art that addresses the audience—even with participatory means—as reflective individuals only, which is different than an activated public in museum spaces that co-produce exhibitions by engagement as part of a community-building practice.

ruangrupa's aforementioned shift away from a more traditional form of art education did not play out well. Art mediation was still established, yet late, since the institution insisted. Finally, the sobat-sobat ("friends" in Indonesian) were introduced as a separate grouping specifically with the task of art education. In the context of art mediation, sobat-sobat took over the more traditional guided tours and mediation efforts that a more traditional audience expects. In our conversations with members of sobat-sobat, however, it became clear that the mostly young and eager art mediators initially had other forms of mediation in mind and wanted to engage in encounters with the public in a more experimental way. Besides other issues,[28] the friction in the sobat-sobat group towards the institution for a more experimental form of mediation is an indication of the opposition of art institutions' mode of representation over direct engagement. It shakes the foundations of the function of museums to produce, reproduce, and control a hegemonic narrative. Despite the initial refusal for art mediators, these very instrumentalizing aspects of art mediation, which can adopt an integrated institutional formation to convey a specific reading or narrative to the public, was later taken up by the artistic team itself, it seems.[29] Coming back to the practical-curatorial field, I wouldn't want to dismiss representational mediation at large, as it can provide a highly informative and precise articulation of knowledge, yet accompanying forms of collective engagement can produce situated knowledges in non-canonical ways. The question is always how these forms of mediation are embedded and executed, between ideologically instructional and open to discussion.

Coming back to Linebaugh's definition, I would like to briefly hint here at the particular and situated practices of the commons. At least as I understand this: **"it [commoning] inheres in a particular praxis of field, upland, forest, marsh, coast."** A commoning practice is specific and situated, it needs a precise understanding of the "land" or in our case the fields of knowledges in contemporary artistic practices that are on display and put on exposition. Transported to *documenta fifteen*, some locations and areas felt neglected, or less formulated and embedded than others, or perhaps I couldn't experience it due my presence at the wrong time, where no activation occurred. But it could also be the case that among the many invited artists and collectives and their varying experiences on exhibition-making, some were less prepared for a precise exhibition practice, and its mediation, especially with these complex global entanglements brought to *documenta fifteen*.[30]

Third: "commoning is collective."
This category speaks not only of more "horizontal" forms of decision-making or at least of more flexible transversalities within power structures or organizational procedures, but also aims at collectivizing economic benefits. For collective decision-making, ruangrupa established the "lumbung inter-local" network—the largely established network with which ruangrupa already had close ties. The network met and discussed in so-called *majelis* in 2019 in physical form, first in Indonesia and in Kassel, and later online.[31] An economic restructuring was initiated within three trajectories: first, the fourteen lumbung members were given two budget pots, the "seed money" (€25,000) and the production budget (€180,000).[32] While the latter was obviously directed to production costs, the "seed money"—transferred upfront—could be spent freely as decided collectively by the respective lumbung members without any attachment to *documenta fifteen* whatsoever. Lumbung members used this budget to pay rent or buy land—to strengthen and sustain their own projects "at home." Needless to say, this type of artist fee without conditions is rather unusual and unique, even in the particular field of art and its rather opaque compensation in the form of speculative distributions through an increase in recognition.

Second, they established alternative distribution models with the "lumbung Kios"[33] (localized self-run shops to trade goods and resources with low environmental impact), and the "lumbung Gallery." The latter is a collaboration with *TheArtist*, a non-profit organization run by professionals from the art field.[34] This collaboration was organized by the lumbung Gallery working group and aims to set up a distribution model beyond *documenta fifteen* with lumbung principles of collectively shared resources—in this case, of sold art objects. The pricing of the artworks is instead determined by "the collective's basic needs and artists' basic income in addition to production costs and other material condition variables rather than speculative market prices,"[35] while 70% of the sales price is aimed to go directly to the artist or collective, and 30% stays with the lumbung Gallery for sustaining the platform.[36] This sales platform—ultimately it is nothing else—comes with a different distribution model embedded in collective needs in the background but mimics a rather slick gallery aesthetic on the front—and is another example of commons compatibility or indifference to capitalist structures, but with a different idea of distribution in mind: not towards an individual artist, but towards a collective.

On this note, *rasad,* the artwork by Britto Arts Trust, a re-creation of a stand with food and other goods replicated in artistic material in ceramic, embroidery, and metal displayed prominently in the documenta Halle—next to the wonderful halfpipe by Baan Noorg, set up to be used—adds another dimension when realizing that every single replicated object can be bought via the lumbung Gallery platform.[37] I don't want to mock this economic procedure. In a lot of large-scale exhibitions, sales and other non-monetary remunerations—like recognitions, promised exhibitions in other museum shows, speculative promises all in all—advance in rather well-covered areas, carefully hidden from "regular" visitors, whose contemplative experience shouldn't be distracted by the vile power plays of speculative and profit-oriented business. However, despite Britto Art Trust's collective and valuable activist practices, that is also negotiated in other works at *documenta fifteen*, *rasad* seems to me to play with art and its exhibitionary practices—with its enormous empowering function—on a mere economic level of redistribution with its aim to sell each single art piece one by one—and there are plenty of them—via the lumbung Gallery platform.

From a broader perspective, the underlying "de-accumulation of capital" might not be easily achieved even with the Lumbung gallery idea of price calculation according to the needs of the artist collectives—a value calculation detached from the usual evaluation mechanisms in the art field. On the one hand, it creates a platform to place artworks on the market and through that redistribute the profits for the collective, but it cannot prevent the secondary circulation in the art market's speculative mode.

fig. 5: rasad, installation by Britto Arts Trust

fig. 6: Britto Kitchen, installation by Britto Arts Trust. A kitchen to be used: every day at lunchtime, different people activated the kitchen and cooked for the public.

Third, the working group *lumbung Currency* and its lumbung members initiated experimental so-called *community currencies*: the *BeeCoin* by ZK/U—Center for Art and Urbanistics, the *Cheesecoin* by INLAND, the *Dayra* by The Question of Funding, and the *Jalar* by Gudskul. The goal for these separate alternative currency proposals is to connect them in the long run.[38] Understanding and analyzing the concept and differences of these alternative currencies will be undertaken another time, but what all of these concepts have in common is that they become more independent and resistant to funds that often come with certain conditions, be they funds directly from governmental state institutions that follow a national identity logic or funds from companies that follow a logic of capital. This fascinating project could be one of the greatest impacts of those initiated by *documenta fifteen*, but we will have to wait and see.

Fourth: "being independent of the state, commoning is independent also of the temporality of the law and state."
This relation across a superordinate structure that navigates commoners in a position dependent on the state and institutions is shaped by an (embodied) experience of violence and control imposed by states or other sovereign entities throughout history—historical struggles of commoners and current struggles of minority communities in various contexts around the world. The wish to stay "independent" gives us insights into ruangrupa's artistic-curatorial method. It's their approved practice we can observe from their artistic participation at the 31st Bienal de São Paulo, where they ran a "home"-like spatial infrastructure called "ruru" in 2014[39] and in the exhibiting platform *Cosmopolis #1 Collective Intelligence* at Centre Pompidou in 2017, where they again created a space inside the institution—called "ruangruparasite,"[40] in order to make it a living space but also a permeable space to the urban surroundings. For both exhibitions, they established a resilient practice challenging the institution and curators who invited them: a parasitical practice—resistance as a method—that undermines the traditional functions of art institutions, as well as its proposed set of behaviors for audience and artists, and its economic structure and so on.

For *documenta fifteen*, and with the primary managing position of artistic director, this resistant practice toward (and in playful opposition to) the institution is actually impossible to sustain. This is how I read ruangrupa's gesture to invite documenta back to its own "institution" in Jakarta, Indonesia. A complexified notion of an institution would clearly frame collective practice—especially long-term, and self-sustained ones—as an institution itself and as an institutionalized practice, as it follows a set of (self-given) rules, but still embedded in general or even universalizing frameworks (e.g., the art field, trade, politics). The desire for the independence of institutions does not only result in the rejection of contractual obligations. It also pits the commoner's wish for independence—sustained or recreated as an artistic practice—all too easily against institutions of contemporary life, art, and culture. A simplistic juxtaposition of institution-artist (or perpetrator-victim?) can occur, portraying the institution as a predetermined formation of state hegemony and control—unable to change—, and in the process, recreating artists as pure, resisting people struggling for a self-determined life. I would have wished for the many invited collectives not only "to bring and activate their practice to Kassel," but also to use this amplified stage in contemporary art and culture for a critical introspection of their own practices, too. However—how the events have turned out—this openness and permeability could not be established. In a rather classical formula, a hegemonic struggle between the so-called "documenta gGmbH"[41] and its alliances in German news media outlets and the lumbung collectives and their alliance came into being.

The Threatening Scenario of Commons for the Exhibitionary Complex and Beyond

For the first time in the history of documenta, a collective—predominantly based in artistic practice—was entrusted with the artistic direction of this major exhibition. The methods and strategies derived from commoning that ruangrupa adopted have been explained in detail above. To a large extent, *documenta fifteen* was carried out as a festival—not a classical exhibition—with many public and informal events, with open networks formed in numerous meetings before and during documenta, with chance encounters in the many locations scattered throughout the city of Kassel. In this sense, documenta can be seen as close to those early forms of spectacle in the 18th century that helped shape the institution we call the public museum, if we are to follow Eilean Hooper-Greenhill and Tony Bennett.[42] Already these early forms of exposition were set up as a learning environment with more or less hidden agendas and hegemonic formations attached. What also played out like a spectacle was the various utterances—a rumor-filled buzz—in social media and mass media with regard to *documenta fifteen*, long before the antisemitic iconography in *People's Justice*, a work by Taring Padi, was on view and was removed.

It is difficult to say in what way the challenging and even threatening aspects of this documenta will change the established exhibitionary complex, the established art, its discourse and history in the long run. However, I would like to look into some of the basic principles that might see readjustments in the future, concentrating on the following:

a) serious changes in the function of the curator and a serious threat to "authority," accountability and responsibilities;
b) changes in the mode of representation in the arts that create a different relationship between the audience and art, under commons-guided direct engagements—ultimately a threat to the "modern autonomous individual"—;
c) a new proposal of the modes of production (collectivity vs. cooperation).

The first two points stem from the collectivization practices at work. The third position speaks against a capitalist logic. Yet, obviously these threats are entangled, just as the "modern autonomous individual" is interlocked with the capitalist system.[43]

A) The Function of the Curator and the Anxiety of the Authoritative

ruangrupa's artistic–curatorial collective practice is rooted in their personal situatedness in Indonesia from the foundational year 2000 and is therefore—even in terms of their artistic and curatorial experiences on a global level—not imbued with the so-called "global art discourse" of Western influence and its, at times, universalized terminology and concepts. An early description of the collective's practice and context was formulated by David Teh in 2012: "To profile ruangrupa is to describe an event: time-based, immediate and loosely structured; with a sense of purpose, yet more celebratory than agonistic."[44] The developed curatorial positioning of ruangrupa was established independently of the art market, and—even if artistically based—it appropriated curatorial function and thought early on.[45] And for *documenta fifteen* as well, their invitation policy for artists, projects, and collectives can be described by the construction of loose networks—of a "collective of collectives"—and is primarily based on trust, a position in contrast to a targeted selection of artworks and its framing within a wider art discourse from a single authorial position. In that sense, their decision not to follow the—still today—hegemonic rules of a curatorial complex of representation that dominates Western art history can be said to be intentional.

fig. 7: Banner "Collective of Collectives," Fridskul, gudskul area, Fridericianum, Kassel.

In ruangrupa's curatorial practice, the curator as the main figure of an exhibition—set up by Harald Szeemann and crystallized in *documenta 5* in 1972—is clearly called into question, and with it the so-called gatekeeper function that excludes certain art from entering galleries, museums, and ultimately art history.[46] I would argue that this poses a serious threat to what I would call a traditional curator function—traditional and still prevalent, especially in public museums connected to state structures.

Nonetheless, in 2022, we should be aware of the contested field of the artistic-curatorial complex. Curatorial work has continued to expand in contemporary discourse, merging into a rather collaborative relationship and should not be reduced to a mere (extractivist?) scheme of "the curator selecting artworks from within a (usually) already legitimized art field." In the rather academic-led discourse on the curatorial function, whose main protagonists in recent years have been, among others, Simon Sheikh, Paul O'Neill, Irit Rogoff, Dorothee Richter, and Nora Sternfeld, differentiations of curating have not only been discussed in terms of the concepts of "curating," "the curatorial," "post-curatorial," and "paracuratorial." Yet, at the same time, relationships between artist–curator–institution have been questioned practically, and thus curating beyond Institutional Critique comes into being. Expansions of curatorial practices towards knowledge production, philosophical discourse, and research-based public expressions as part of the exhibitionary complex or even post-exhibition formats outside of traditional infrastructures of art institutions have been conceptualized and established.[47]

Within this expanded field, curatorial practice is not only occupied with the caretaking of art and its spatial exhibition, but is working, researching, and developing (self-) critically together with artistic practitioners and with and sometimes against institutions towards a "making things public." I would like to emphatically add to this discourse the governmental aspects of exhibition-making, emphasizing the understanding of one's own embeddedness in society, in its institutions and economy, and the embeddedness of art and artists in a learning environment. This will lead to situated and more responsible positions with regard to expressions in the exhibitionary complex and expand curating again for a broader social responsibility towards the public and society, one that is aware of its own entanglements in a comprehensive governmental framework.

Astonishingly, this complex and entangled relation of artist–curator–institution is captured poetically in the video installation *Smashing Monuments* by Sebastián Díaz

Morales at Hübner Areal. The work is projected—slightly over life-sized—in the first area of the exhibition space, accompanied with simple wooden seating arrangements and depicts five members of ruangrupa in a dialogue—or rather inner monologue—with and in front of iconic Indonesian monuments in Jakarta. On *documenta fifteen*'s website, it states: "Indonesia's history of independence and ruangrupa's own path as young citizens of the new republic mingle in these half-improvised and intimate dialogues. The monuments symbolize several lumbung values."[48] I may add that these dialogues between the members of ruangrupa, and their dispute over the representation of a nation-state and its national community were brought up from each member's individual perspective—a perspective that is, of course, informed by their collectivity. Nonetheless, the discussed subjects came from each one's personal background. I would like to think of this artwork as exemplary of an articulation of individuals—in our case, of artist-curators—towards their superstructure, embedded in governmental formations from personal life experiences to state structures and their own interpellations in state institutions, and in this case, additionally expanded in a global and post-colonial framework.[49]

fig. 8: Installation *Smashing Monuments*, on the right side.

While ruangrupa's refusal of the traditional role of the curator is well understood, the expanded curatorial function that introduced situated, critical, responsive, and responsible modes of knowledge production—internally and externally—may have also gotten discarded due to their clear anti-authority stance. To contextualize and complexify this (old) tension between artists and curators and the disdain towards the curator—but which type?—that was expressed on a few occasions during *documenta fifteen*[50]—I would like to draw attention again to David Teh's words:

> However ruangrupa might seem to embody the disciplinary merger [of artistic and curatorial practices], then, in attributing to the group the form of a curatorship to come, with or without the italics, we run the risk of mistaking tactical moves for a strategic programme. And however appealing the image of their 'contemporaneity', the group should first be seen in another light, a light in which modernity and nation still matter, and instrumentality is not (yet) the arch-enemy of art; a light in which artists make artworks and curators curate, and it is possible to do both. Perhaps ruangrupa is more a spirit of curatorship—not limited to a single body, yet somehow tied to a place—that would defend the autonomy of artists, singular or plural, but not necessarily that of the artwork.[51]

Teh's pointed articulation of ruangrupa's stance towards curating is ten years old, but might still hold true, as there seems to be a clear division set up between the artists and the curator as an authoritative figure and agent of the institution.

From a post-curatorial perspective, Simon Sheikh argues with regard to exhibition-making that, "Ideas must thus not only be enacted, but embodied, which always accepts a lessening of curatorial authorship and authority. Such post-curatorial approaches take place on a dual background of lack and loss, however."[52] In terms of lack, he is referring to what is literally lacking in the exhibitionary complex, in theory and practice, meaning its exclusionary mechanisms, marginalized knowledges, and the un- and underrepresented. Loss, however, speaks to what might have to be given up, e.g., the well-running infrastructure of institutions and its actual publicness.

There are many implications here between the two arguments by Teh and Sheikh—arguments uttered in different contexts, and in specific cultural discourses—, but it might be fruitful to look into this in greater depth, yet elsewhere. Nonetheless, it exposes that a withdrawal from authoritative positions in an assumed oppositional structure (artist–institution) comes at a price: one internal risk that arises from an open and authority-diverting curatorial practice, like the one ruangrupa chose for *documenta fifteen*, can be found in the organization of responsibilities (as in being able to respond) and responsiveness, resulting in a rather opaque mélange of relativisms. State structures and (art) institutions are rightly called to their responsibilities—being responsive towards a society they represent or aim to govern. The same must be demanded of para-institutions. A call for the artist's (social) responsibility—as in able to respond—and responsiveness is urgently needed in this regard, too.

Another aspect that arises from shying away from the tough, authoritative curatorial tasks of representation and their entanglements with state policy is the takeover of the void left behind. The representational space in the exhibitionary complex does not disappear just by refusing to take on the central position—and at the moment this is the established "traditional" curator. What it creates is a blank space, a void of a trajectory or a proposed reading, which has thus far usually been taken up by the curator as the main author. This void left a space for amplifications of fractional agendas and hidden trajectories within the many participants of *documenta fifteen* and also led to the external rumors and cheap explanations of uninformed or ill-intended actors. I consider these utterances—both from the "inside" and the "outside" —violent acts of representation. By this, I am not referring to the important heterogeneous multiplicity of artistic practices and their situated knowledges that were expressed at *documenta fifteen*, rather, that this heterogeneous multiplicity was not secured in a representative sense through an expanded curatorial function as the central frame-work. Instead, the heterogenous multiplicity had to "close off" in solidarity under pressure. In fact, (post-)curatorial struggles test and contest, between representational and critical and deviant practices, the status quo of museums and its exclusions, as do artistic practices. If you withdraw from this position, you will not be able to influence it.

To conclude (for now) this discussion on curatorial discourse and practice on a high note, I want to return to the benefits that an expanded curatorial practice would bring, a practice that holds on to the uncomfortable position of representation and authority, but with different, inclusive, and open forms and empowering ways of carrying them out: a transparent, open-invitation policy for large-scale exhibitions with a distinction-reduced access to contemporary art, an embodied practice for artists and audiences, a "contact zone" that needs trust, openness, and a willingness for solidarities over hegemonic politics. This could be a sketch for an ideal infrastructure that has not yet been achieved.

B) (Apparent) Threat to the "Modern Autonomous Individual" aka "Author"

The division between (modern) art and craft (or culture)—with each their separated specific infusions in cultural contexts in infrastructural dimensions in knowledge production and value systems—can still be observed in the 21ˢᵗ century. On this matter, and speaking from the position of the Western "subject" and free individual's aesthetic judgment, Bazon Brock criticized *documenta fifteen* by claiming that "*documenta fifteen* stands for the end of the Western idea of authority as the author function,"[53] or—I might say—the "modern autonomous individual" in its entirety. He sets up culturalism ["Kulturalismus"]—relating to the collective practices of the invited lumbung members—against the free and individual artist in Western Enlightenment tradition, who can critically challenge the great ideological machines like the Church, religion, kings, and capital through the hard-won "freedom of art." In a more comprehensive and rather fatalistic lecture entitled "On the power-grotesque appropriation of the arts by cultures," subtitled "A dispute about the whole, the end of Europe,"[54] which Brock delivered prior to *documenta fifteen* in March 2022 at the University of Art and Design Linz, he is concerned with saving the European author, the at least one exceptional achievement of Western philosophy that needs to be universalized, it seems. He thus positioned art as a recurring European tradition of individuals and authors, of authorship and authority against a—rather reductionist—conception of collectivity as a totalizing instrument. It is quite obvious that Brock speaks too easily of what I would call the idealizing and romanticizing—apparently—Western achievement of the "autonomous individual subject," brought into being by the Enlightenment. We might be aware that within the Western discourse, many critical analyses by French philosophers alone—Foucault, Barthes, etc.—have been undertaken on this position of the subject. As a counter-note, in alluding to similar ideas that idealize and romanticize an innocent notion of indigeneity or collective practices—as ruangrupa is aware[55]—that are seen as non-hierarchical and non-exploitative *per se*, I want to emphasize that there are neither innocent perspectives nor universalized positions but that all positions come with privilege and one cannot bail out to the "good" side.

fig. 9: Works by Gazan artist collective Eltiqa at WH22.

I would agree with Brock in his description of the Enlightenment as an immense endeavor of the people and individuals against the Church and sovereign structures—a massive amount of resistance and liberating effort at that time. But I'd like to bring up the problematic sides of the author function and how it is established and maintained, mainly by diminishing and obscuring context and sources, and its exclusions of the "Other" (Foucault's famous "madman"), who is not allowed to speak—both inside the Western system and outside of it with the ripple effects of European colonialism—, and of its gendered formation in cultural articulations, since the author was established as a male figure. In reference to the poststructuralists and their critiques about the author ("The Death of the Author," etc.), I would add that the vision of the author as

a male figure (individual, universal, free, powerful) might be over, but maybe not the author as a feminist figure (interdependent, situated, connected, accountable).

There were other less grand criticisms uttered against the collective concept of *documenta fifteen* (and their situated concept of collectivity) as a form of an idealized "We." Those critics usually spoke from their own art historical frame of reference—of "Western" artist circles and friendship networks from the 1980–90s. They had little knowledge of (or did not want to engage with) the contemporary collective artistic practices that were established by many lumbung members in very different contexts.

In trying to understand positions in a postcolonial context, I can imagine that the positive effects of Enlightenment—and the rise of the author as a powerful agent—were not experienced as an empowering or liberating movement from a perspective outside of protected Western identities. Instead, this author function came in formations of colonial power and domination with (real) acts of violence, but also implemented through non-coercive, "persuasive" hegemonic machines in education and culture. The situated experience of the origin of the figure of the author, a self-empowered individual who uses critical tools to procure authority over ideology as a resisting practice against the Church and monarchy, does not match the situated experience of an externally determined, authorized Other, an Other who experiences this—once resistant—authority at best as a condescending gesture or at worst as a mechanism of control. The subtle difference between "learning" and "teaching" gives an indication of the dilemma we face. Learning is an activity of the self, while teaching requires a teacher. Ultimately, I would suggest reading Brock's argument in a universalizing way, as he projects his own worldview onto another position. The problem stems primarily from this shift in position. It lacks, at a much deeper level, an understanding of a different way of thinking structured in another historical and cultural background. We find ourselves in the classic thought of Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.[56] Foucault analyzed the system of knowledge and its development in the European (French) context, but systems of knowledges are plural and situated, and produce slightly different subject constellations through slightly different systems of thought and slightly different discursive formations within different situated contexts.[57]

In the—let's call it for now—Western[58] episteme, the author is set up to be foremost autonomous and critical. The same goes for the artist. In this line of thought, art and artists are positioned against the Church and religion, against the sovereign, and—one could add—later against capital. At least this is my learned understanding of the role of artists I obtained in my higher education in Germany: art is a critical activity directed against the capitalist system. That's why artists need to be autonomous, and art objects need a specialized form of representation, always embedded in critical discourse, separated from handicraft, design, and other applied creative disciplines. Of course, artists' autonomy can be seen as rather hypocritical, since all the well-known artists who have entered the annals of art history and relevance in contemporary exhibitions—besides their undoubtedly refined and complex articulations—are heavily complicit in a distributional art market that generates profit in speculative financial strategies.[59]

Considered as specifically embedded artistic practices, the strict separation of (critical) art and craft cannot be sustained. Art under current "Western" conditions could be described as ideologized object production—an abstract token ready for fetishization or speculation—, and easily, yet in a disguised way, implanted in capitalist structures of profit-making. Art practices "outside" of this position might fall under the category of creativity or handicraft and are more inclined to be attached to daily commerce and

directed to subsistence. These different notions of artistic practices fit well with what farid rakun said at the workshop "Practitheorizing Counterinstitutions" organized by The Question of Funding and OFF-Biennale Budapest in Kassel on September 10, 2022.[60] rakun mentioned the contested art field in Indonesia, where art is not considered autonomous. In Indonesia, art, creative economies, and industrialized culture are not separated. Many artists work between the field of autonomous art—hence critical and detached from capital—and of creative practices in the economic sphere. This indifferent approach to the specifically "Western" field of art might prove to be another threat, not only to the "Western" concept of art, but also to the "Western" discourse of art, a highly differentiated, critical, and self-critical theory built around art as object.

fig. 10: Picture taken at the workshop "Practitheorizing Counterinstitutions" organized by The Question of Funding and OFF-Biennale Budapest in Kassel on September 9-10, 2022.

ruangrupa's avoidance of "theory" can be explained by this logic. They proposed—instead of theory, something they did not have a lot of experience with according to rakun[61]—stories and storytelling as a distinction-reducing approach to subjective readings of art, one that allows multiple entries into the discursive formation of art and reduces the full-blown, professional theorization of art discourse. In colonial entanglements, "theory" according the logic of "Western" epistemes, with their production in discursive formations through exclusionary apparatuses and reproductions of superiority through distinction, might not hold the promise of freedom, nor the promise of (self-)empowerment. But—and this is a big but—theory, in its most profound form—apart from the distinguishing apparatuses that create and keep power structures alive—, understood as a critical mode of self-reflection, of critical reflection on one's situatedness, must not be abandoned.

I would like to propose reconsidering the relationship between art and craft, economics and artistic practices, by acknowledging—not comparing—the differences embedded in different frameworks and not universalizing one epistemology over the other.

Cooperation and Collaboration

To better understand the new mode of production proposed by *documenta fifteen*, I would like to contrast collaboration and cooperation: the former being an intertwined and flexible production mode of collective effort with a shared common goal, and the latter being a solidified process of working together in distinct roles to achieve someone's goal. While cooperation is very much integral to industrial capitalist production, collaboration on the other hand—although it sometimes enters capital's start-up economy linguistically without a collectivized goal, let alone economic structure—usually remains separate from organized work and labor and in the realm of non-organized production apart from large-scale industry. One could say this is for good reasons, since the collaborative condition comes with rather time-consuming efforts of horizontal decision-making. In farid rakun's words, "Collective work is not

the most effective, efficient, or even productive way of doing things."[62] Here, communication is direct and interpersonal, operational range is not strictly separated, roles and responsibilities are flexible, every collaborator almost needs to have an overview of the overall project. There is no assembly line order. Communism—or rather socialism—relies likewise on cooperative modes of production yet subordinates the processes and results of production to a universally shared entity. In real socialist terms and in the words of Lenin, the results of production go to the working-class and the "political power [that] owns all the means of production."[63] Both forms of cooperative practices—on the one hand, capitalist cooperative practice and its enormous apparatus of exploitation, with its need for cheap labor, the still gendered separation of production and reproduction, and "recruitment" of people believing in the system, and on the other hand real-life socialists' needs for a universalized work force, turning all people into workers, and transforming individual property into societal property—are not the same as collaboration in commons project, I would argue.

This specific collective practice proposed by ruangrupa with the many *mini-majelis*—meetings in smaller focused groups of around eight people—and *majelis akbar*—larger gatherings with lumbung members, lumbung artists, and other participants of around fifty people— not only challenges a capitalistic logic of cooperation, but is also not the most tried and tested way for artistic practices—be it from the perspective of a single artist or from collective practices with different methods:

> Not all documenta fifteen participants are enthusiastic about the Majelis system. Some artists complain that too much time is wasted on lengthy presentations and discussions instead of using it for production. Still others find the bureaucratic hurdles too high that Documenta as an institution sets in order to actually release the collective money.[64]

This experience was related by Christina Schott**,** a journalist who attended some of these meetings. The quote also points to problems that a collective practice might create vis-à-vis the stakeholders and their evaluation systems, as money is only paid out when clear project descriptions are met. Furthermore, collective practices complicate a clearly delineated ownership relationship, which is quite important for an aestheticized commodification process in line with the art market.[65] There is tension between a collective practice—which creates almost no fixed roles, but instead builds formations with utmost flexibility and decentralized authority—and the institutional framework of cooperation—even in the more flexible areas of the art field, the recurrent large-scale exhibitions—based on a clear structure and hierarchy that comes with its titles, with deadlines to be met, and one overarching goal to be pursued. We can note that capitalist cooperation and commons collaboration are accompanied by different modes of ownership and utilization. One corresponds in an exaggerated way to a neoliberalist logic of individual maximization and profit, while the other aims more at subsistence and "living well." To avoid binaries, I do not want to pit collaboration and cooperation against each other, with one being "good" and the other "bad." Both practices need to be considered in terms of their specific situated formations.

To exemplify the complexities that arise with collaborative practices, I would like to direct the attention to Taring Padi's artistic practice and its elaborate methodology, which will show at the same time the susceptibility of—strategic?—misuse and toxic contraband:

Taring Padi's own convivial, collective approach to art is crucial to understanding why there are no simple answers to the question of how the offending image appeared in the banner in the first place. Not only does Taring Padi have many members who are involved in the creative process, but they also often invite non-members such as workshop participants to contribute to works in progress. While large-scale works are planned through discussion, notes and sketches and the division of labour is coordinated (though not strictly enforced). It is a process that deliberately eschews authorship—works are not signed by individuals but instead stamped with the collective's distinctive logo. As Bambang Agung wrote in Taring Padi: Seni Membongkar Tirani (Art Dismantles Tyranny), "Collective artworks, in other words, are a critique of the reification of art and the commodification of its artists."[66]

This quote from Wulan Dirgantoro and Elly Kent, published on June 29, 2022, followed the take down on June 21 of *People's Justice*, Taring Padi's 8-meter x 12-meter banner that was placed in front of documenta Halle, and showed classical stereotypes of antisemitism.[67] This quote provides us with a rather complex constellation of a collective practice, neglecting authorship and the artwork's distribution as a commodity.[68] It also points to the open and relative process of production that obfuscates responsibilities by rendering its own positionality unlocatable inside a collective. I refer to responsibility not in a manner of "find the culprit"—which can be much more easily done in cooperative production—, but in a manner of performing a position that is locatable and is able to speak from a position, without tricks of relativism.[69]

There are two relational nodes to be mentioned in this field that might help to understand the deep implications of the different modes of production—cooperation and collaboration—and its implementations in a larger system: Competition–Interdependence and Flexibility–Precarity. For a closer look at the notion of competition and interdependence I would like to refer to Lynn Margulis, whom I have written about elsewhere.[70] On flexibility vs. precarity, I want to briefly hint at Biao Xiang, who complicates the notion of precarity as a universal critique of unstable labor conditions triggered in Western societies by the neoliberal economic agendas of individualizing working conditions and the consequent outsourcing of many social security programs with it.[71]

To return to the exhibitionary complex: with this understanding of the concept of precarity, not only would the critique of precarious labor in the artistic field have to change its conception to align it with other forms of oppression, but it might also be a misconception of specific "precarious" forms to argue that all flexible labor conditions—self-realization and DIY/DIWO practices alike—are a universal form of management of the self and a forced entrepreneurial orientation concerning all aspects of one's life in the "Western" neoliberal logic.

Problematizations of Commoning in *Lumbung One*
So far, I have discussed the various threats that could have been seen on the horizon with ruangrupa's proposal for a documenta with methods of decentered authority, of disengagement of the art market and art history, with a focus on collective practices, and a strong impetus toward the formation of webs of solidarities that establish a system of redistribution rather than of recognition. Needless to say, this endeavor, with its multiple threats, presents an enormous challenge. In the next part, I would like to problematize a few subjects that might pose a challenge to the proposal and its actual realization. I want to state here that I am aiming for a critique that is a truthful and thorough analysis of concepts and phenomena. I will do so using the methods I know

best from cultural studies and its authorial referencing and thinking with other sources that are available to me at the time of writing.

Complexities of "Scaling Up"

The problems of "scaling up" commons are often discussed in the discourse on commons and also present a challenge for *Lumbung One*. The intimate collaboration based on interpersonal exchange is easily lost when the number of the commoners is increased from fifty to 1,500 people. Suddenly, the emphasis on the artistic-curatorial practice is occupied foremost with setting up managerial infrastructures to feed in all the contributions by the various participants. A responsive position is nearly impossible to sustain, given the time and financial constraints of every exhibition project. However, this also gives the "strategic" agents enough space amid the vast number of participants in this network for their own agenda. The insistence on an unconditional form of trust[72] in the network makes it difficult to find nuanced ways to deal with "strategic friends," "critical friends," or "toxic friends" for an exhibition that is always a "product" of a representation—even if only temporary. At a very basic level—in daily life, in work environments, and on the political stage—, we all are confronted with our problematic friends, with grandparents' traditionalist worldviews, with ideology-imbued peers with racist, antisemitic, misogynist, etc., thought patterns. One way to deal with this is to withdraw. However, I have learned that this is not ruangrupa's method, which is instead a "radically" inclusive one.

The Question of (Un)conditional Solidarity

The "scaling up in solidarity" can become an even more seriously problematic function, as it holds the danger of universalizing solidarity in relativizing ways and equalizing struggles at the global level without their complex, situated contexts and practices. It runs the serious risk of ideologizing the specific practices of resistance under the lowest common denominator and produces—reproduces?—a rather dusty image of an antagonistic, binary world structure in an old-school geopolitical counter/hegemonic sense. Solidarity is then yet another universalist tool to produce trenches. Trenches that cannot be overcome. This is the last stage so far—this text was finalized shortly after the end of *documenta fifteen* at the end of September—of the final twists and turns of the conflict between *Lumbung One* and its apparent counterparts.[73] A state that, despite all odds, hopefully can be overcome!

The community formations at play at this documenta are based on shared experiences of resistance against many scenarios of oppression, but primarily uttered toward the capitalist system and the logic of the nation-state. This is evident on many levels, in the many works on display that speak of oppression and communal struggles against large corporate and state structures, and in many written contributions and interviews by ruangrupa and other lumbung members. This is also evident in the decision to omit the mention of the nationalities of the artists and collectives, instead situating the artists and their practice in their place of residency and using time zones to indicate where they are located. Apart from being a rather helpful side benefit for the various online meetings that had to be organized across different time zones, it also points to the refusal of the classical funding scheme, where all artists have to indicate their national identity and are immediately placed in (postcolonial?) hierarchies. Consequently, informational materials on the artists' biographies most of the time only mention their place of residence, never their national identity. It is even more surprising that—throughout the whole exhibition and the accompanying texts—one name of a nation-state (at least its project to become a nation)—Palestine—is repeatedly mentioned.

1. Prompt: Re-Location
Imagine transporting _documenta fifteen_ as a whole, with all its works and activities, to another city, another country, another context...
Answer the question: what would be found as offensive? What would have been urged to be taken down. Which works? Which practices?

Different Methods of Counter-Hegemony

But let's take a step back. In all the interviews and announcements and personal encounters, ruangrupa talked about their own non-conflictual way that has developed in the culture of Indonesia, where antagonism is rather unknown. In Geronimo Cristóbal's article in _Third Text_ on October 26, 2020, he cites from an interview of farid rakun conducted by Pedro Lasch:

> 'We have different sensibilities'. Cultural differences, however, have diversified their modes of activism, which the group notes in Indonesia lacks the kind of antagonism with government seen in other parts of the world. Such antagonism is 'not the strategy that can work in our context... There's less violence.'[74]

And even in our encounters and meetings with various members of ruangrupa, I never felt an antagonistic approach was at hand. Rather, our encounters could be described in terms of contact zones, where open discussions and thoughts could be uttered and picked up, or not. Conflictuality in discourse is a tool developed more in "Western" thought, and adding cultural hegemony struggles to violent real-life contexts takes conflict and its connotations to another level. Speaking from a commons perspective, a—perhaps—tamed contact zone might be better suited to creating a common ground for understanding, exchange, and solidarity. And I still consider this approach ruangrupa's intention, after all. However, this did not prevent other forms from entering _documenta fifteen_, especially with ruangrupa's open approach: besides many specific and situated collective practices of resistance, and the creation of solidarities between lumbung artists and the public, there was also an ideology-driven community mobilization project to be found. It unfolded over time and ended with the compartmentalization of lumbung (as an entity) in solidarity, which exposed the problematic sides of community building by establishing a clear line between "we" and "them," the one-to-one of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic strategies.

2. Prompt: De-Radicalization
Create a gathering as a contact zone that discusses a relevant local issue. Avoid weaponizing identities and avoid instrumentalizing speech acts and other utterances.
Be sensitive to these words: "they," "them," "us," "we," "comrades," and comparisons or other tricks of whataboutism.
Expand the list of words and phrases that trigger enclosures.
Share your experiences.

Recalling the initial impact by ruangrupa, it is surprising, paradoxical, or even schizophrenic how the scandal and scandalization unfolded throughout _documenta fifteen_, which began in January 2022 with—to make a long story short—a troll attack. The first accusations against _documenta fifteen_ were voiced in a blog of "The Alliance Against Anti-Semitism Kassel," which spoke of "involvement of anti-Israeli activists" and alleged support for BDS and condemned documenta as a purely antisemitic project.[75] These accusations were picked up by media outlets in Germany and elsewhere and repeated—it is fair to say—without doing any research of their own on the

matter. In this dynamic, a response letter was put forward, distributed via *e-flux Notes* on May 7, 2022.[76] And I would argue that with this letter, the counter/hegemonic machinery was set in full force. The long letter dealt in length with a rather academic argument about definitions of what antisemitism, anti-Zionism, and criticism of Israel are. In all its details and specific context, it does not so much pursue the goal of openly explaining the struggles of Palestinians from the perspective of civil societies, but rather served to set its own agenda, namely, to attempt to redefine the boundaries between what counts as antisemitism and legitimate criticism of the state of Israel:

> The Working Definition of Anti-Semitism, often just IHRA definition for short, is a definition originally developed informally for monitoring purposes. Attached to it are practical examples that refer primarily to common examples of criticism of Israel. It has been adopted, sometimes without the controversial examples, by numerous organizations, from governments to soccer clubs. The definition has been heavily scrutinized, one of the authors, Kenneth Stern, has publicly bemoaned its political "weaponizing". […]
> A [sic] a reaction, internationally recognized scholars from the fields of Holocaust studies, anti-Semitism studies, and Jewish studies have developed the "Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism" in order to more clearly delineate between positions critical of Israel, including anti-zionist, from anti-Semitism (https://jerusalemdeclaration.org/).[77]

And it also made its own accusations that Germany was incapable of a "neutral"(?) discourse on the Israel-Palestine conflict. It was such an extensive piece written in such detail that the "normal public" was clearly overwhelmed. And between the lines, it seemed like too strong a response to an accusation that was said to be unfounded. Simply put, it seemed to have struck a nerve. If one had not wanted this conflict to be amplified in such a hegemonic way, one would have had to write deflectively and generalize. An all-encompassing response letter against all forms of racism (naming antisemitism, ableism, misogyny…) was precisely what was presented after the first letter, but it was too late. Experienced in digital communication, we all know: do not feed the troll. Unless you want to end up in a never-ending dispute, no one can "win." And the first response letter felt exactly like that, an intentional "trolling back"—by someone taking over a public discourse? So, the question of who wrote the first letter is to find out the intentions and the respond-able position. It is not about pointing fingers at someone, but about understanding the context from which we speak. This is a prerequisite for situated knowledges and mutual understanding through exchange—which should not be disguised as something else.

A Short Excursion into (Counter-)Hegemony

Historically, the theory of hegemony describes nothing other than the relationship between the dominance of one party (state, cities, milieus) over other parties (other states, other cities, society at large). It is a framework for looking at the geopolitical power relations between dominance and subjugation. It occurs in different forms in different places and times. In this sense, hegemony can also help describe the colonial power of European states over their colonies, both back then and in today's post-colonial dynamic. Oliver Marchart applies this idea to the cultural realm with Antonio Gramsci's further development of the theory of cultural hegemony—Gramsci analyzed the modern nation-state in the early decades of the 20th century and its fascist tendencies with what he called "cultural hegemony"—and Marchart specifically applies this to the history of the last six documentas.[78] It is essential to understand that these large-scale exhibition projects—the many European biennials and docu-

menta—come from the tradition of the "Western" public museum,[79] and—to keep it short—are set up infrastructurally within the art field and society in national frameworks as tools to convince society at large—not by blunt force, but by persuasion—of a dominant worldview. This worldview was historically attached to nation-building, and in contemporary global terms, large-scale exhibitions might still serve "civil, national, occidental, or Europeanist dominant culture," according to Marchart, which he therefore calls "Hegemony Machines."[80] But like any other not fully determined "public" space, there will be unauthorized behavior:

> On the other hand, however—and herein lies the irony—major exhibitions of this kind will never succeed in keeping the effects they produce completely under control. Wherever resources are available, they will also be tapped by unauthorized persons."[81]

A large-scale exhibition in this sense—precisely because it is embedded in a hegemonic cultural infrastructure—can be changed from the dominant perspective by "unauthorized" persons. Hegemony is not to be confused with the dominant position but describes the "unstable balance of forces, in which there are always dominant and subordinate forces, […] consolidated by the civil society's institutional network in favor of one side."[82]

Following this thought, we might be in the fortunate position of being observers of a major hegemonic shift and its impacts on the art field at large with its artists, curators, cultural producers, and publics… Marchart sees these "Tectonic Shifts in the Art Field" starting to occur already with *dX,* the 1997 edition of documenta headed by Catherine David, and with Okwui Enwezor's *D11* in 2002. Others would rather point to *documenta fifteen* as a bigger breaking point in history. This becomes clear when one follows the director of the Van Abbemuseum, Charles Esche, who calls *documenta fifteen* "The 1st Exhibition of the 21st Century."[83] In contrast to established critical practices within the art field, this documenta exceeded criticality as a passive practice and built its own infrastructure of friendship (with an inclination towards subsistence), before art and its embeddedness in modernity; hence, "Make friends, not art." But I would shy away from following Esche's argument entirely, which ends in a highly reductionist trenching of the mechanisms of oppression of the "White Male Power," realized in "German mass media" and their "scandalization" of *documenta fifteen*. Esche spoke of the "calcification of Europe," as a metaphor for the inability to move or open one's own epistemological system. Ironically, this can be seen as the flip side of Brock's "End of Europe." Seen from a distance—or maybe just from a specific feminist perspective—both (Esche and Brock) are powerful hegemonic locutions in the logic of name-making and in the promotion of the self, yet another "Western" practice of the author in cultural capital, an attention-guaranteeing practice that "Western" artists, and "non-Western" artists alike, have perfected. Seen benevolently, Esche entered into defense mode for ruangrupa and the lumbung community—and ultimately for his own cause, which will be picked up later—an effect of the pressure ruangrupa and *documenta fifteen* had to endure.[84]

But on a structural level, with a good counter/hegemonic strategy, Esche took on the task of creating the dominant narrative for this very multi-vocal documenta—together with Philippe Pirotte and Nikos Papastergiadis, I might add. All were invited to speak at the symposium. Pirotte and Esche—both important veterans in the European cultural field, as curators and directors of museums and art institutions—spoke from a rather similar anti-imperialist perspective: can this "taking over" be called a form of

representation in extractivist logic? Meanwhile, Papastergiadis complicated the relationship between multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism.[85] And I don't want to miss this opportunity to mention Nuraini Juliastuti's presentation on the last day of this symposium, since these situated and complex attempts of positioning fall more than often into oblivion. I would argue that she spoke from a non-universalizing position, presenting four situated stories—and yet theorized: critically and in attempt to connect to a larger infrastructural thinking—that used a different epistemological method.[86]

Which Ways of Counter/hegemony?

Esche's critical thoughts on strategies to "humble" modernity—embedded, I would say, in the critical discourse that the art field has had to offer in recent decades—aimed at a new alliance (or front?) very much in line within counter/hegemony theory, ultimately re-introducing the narrative of the "West and the rest" with slightly altered frontlines. Esche and Marchart report on a huge hegemonic shift in which we find ourselves: Esche is eager to dismantle "European" modernity and its multiple and deep-rooted effects around the world, seeing primarily its exploitative aspects. Marchart emphasizes the shift in the art field from apolitical consumption and contemplation of a purely aesthetic experience to a critical, political and theory-driven presentation of art that is open to a broader public sphere. Both perspectives may have been seen on the "same side" before *documenta fifteen* but find themselves in different areas between the trenches afterwards. Yet—to complicate matters by introducing a new perspective—I would like to focus for a moment on questions of the hegemonic methods at play: is the process of forming new alliances carried out through means of manipulative propaganda and antagonistic and vigorous campaigns—choosing "sides"—in any way a good way? Is this form of trench-building valuable beyond creating temporary majorities for dominant opinion? In its current form of radicalization and weaponization, it seems to be the dominant method. But in the long run, it seems more destructive, as forms of reconciliation are ruled out in this scenario, so it appears. Even in the discourse of hegemony theory, there are suggestions of acknowledgments—not without criticism within the discourse of hegemony, of course—that opponents should not be seen as "enemies," according to Chantal Mouffe:

> A central task of […] politics is to provide the institutions which will permit conflicts to take an 'agonistic' form, where the opponents are not enemies but adversaries among whom exists a conflictual consensus.[87]

But let us not get into the inner theoretical discourse of hegemony theory here. The current dominance of a certain type of propagandistic method in hegemonic struggles is real and a problem. It is worth examining the current evolution of this radicalization and its multiple effects on the social fabric. A projected future of scarcity, a feeling of losing power and wealth—for a dominant group of people who have never known it any other way—, the essentialization of identity and the weaponization of speech acts in political formations of identity, a profound transformation of interpersonal communication, and forms of social relations shaped by digital mass media, all of this accelerated by a global pandemic beginning in March 2020—all of these can be starting points for answers. But on a more profound level, and to put it naively, are these counter/hegemonic strategies—old or new—even capable of producing a "better" world for all—or at least for more? Or—more elaborated—are hegemonic strategies capable of "making meanings, and [of making] a […] commitment to faithful accounts of a 'real' world, one that can be partially shared and that is friendly to earthwide projects of finite freedom, adequate material abundance, modest meaning in suffering, and limited happiness."[88]

Hegemony Formed by Contemporary Propaganda

Unfortunately, however, we have to deal with the propagandistic methods of the hegemony of today. *documenta fifteen* proposed—among other things—highlighting and amplifying many oppressed struggles by inviting various artists and activist collectives who came with their specific practices of resistance. It was hoped that a complex multiplicity of "partially shared" solidarities would emerge, and so it did. But there was another hegemonic instrument at play that shaped a political solidarity movement in ideological formation. It is one thing to—also—highlight the struggle of Palestinians' lived experience in Gaza that contains also experiences made under military rule in the Israeli-occupied territories. It is another thing to (re-)establish an ideological framework that sets out to (re)create the myth of Palestine as the ultimate and universal placeholder for a struggle against oppression. Considered individually, important contextualization of Palestinian struggles—e.g., the displayed texts and documentation material alongside the works of Eltiqa at WH22, a location curated by Question of Funding—is made.
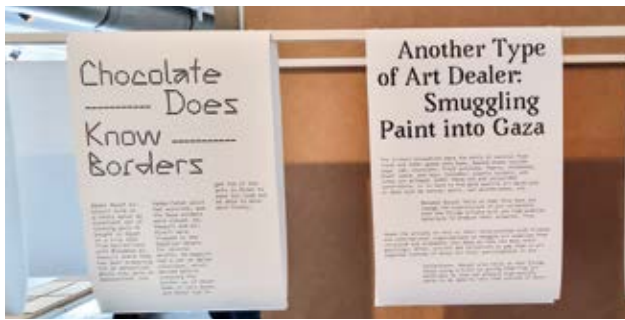
Fig. 11: Picture taken at the area curated by Question of Funding at WH22. You see texts that describe the situation in Gaza through artistic practice is possible.

However, seen in its entirety—which is not an easy task to do in this immense documenta—, there is a clear ideological structure at work: the aim is to position Palestine as a universal imaginary of resistance and anti-colonial struggle, and further to link the Palestinian struggle with all other collective struggles—in order to form a united front, which some claim is the lumbung community. This was finally expressed publicly by Lara Khaldi, a member of the artistic team of *documenta fifteen*, in a symposium organized outside of documenta by Framer Framed, the Van Abbemu-seum, and the University of Amsterdam, one day before the end of *documenta fifteen*. Khaldi said: "Many of the artists and collectives of documenta included [Palestinian struggle] […] this is anti-colonial struggles in solidarity. The Black Archives had an amazing shelf of books in the exhibition about solidarity between the black struggle and Palestinian struggle. […] It's an intersectional struggle, and it will [now, after *documenta fifteen*] come up everywhere, in queer struggle, in the anti-colonial struggle, it keeps coming out. […] How will the institutions deal with it?"[89]
If this is not a successful hegemonic maneuver, then what is?

Fig. 12: Images taken of the installation by The Black Archives at Fridericianum.

Hegemonic "Winners"

Curating and curatorial practice then becomes a practice of ideological propaganda. And a new role of the curator emerges as the leader or shaper of hegemonic movements, able to shape new alliances and create a bigger narrative. This capacity for narrative influence and myth-building—not a new capability for curatorial discourse, but one that works unashamedly in a propagandist way—usually pays off. Khaldi was appointed the new director of de Appel, a curatorial program in Amsterdam, the day after *documenta fifteen* ended.

Mastering hegemonic maneuvers not only leads to personal gain, it also likely (re-) produces stereotypical structures. At least this is how I understood the oppositional comparison by Gertrude Flentge—also a curator in the artistic team of *documenta fifteen*—after Khaldi's input, when she stated: "Speaking about Israel and Palestine—[pauses] the institution and the lumbung." Israel stands for institution, and institution stands for capitalism; Palestine stands for lumbung, and lumbung stands for resistance in friendship and solidarity. This shows a clear old and deeply rooted stereotypical pattern that was reinvented at *documenta fifteen*—with the help of few agents.

Fig. 13: Screenshot of the panel discussion "Other Ways of documenting: Democracy, Inclusion, and Decolonised Models of Art" with speakers Charles Esche, Ade Darmawan, Lara Khaldi, and Gertrude Flentge, moderated by Wayne Modest. The symposium "(un)Common Grounds: Reflecting on *documenta fifteen*" took place at Framer Framed at the Akademie van Kunsten in the Trippenhuis, Amsterdam from September 23 to 24, 2022.

Far from searching for "culprits," I would like to bring these hegemonic struggles, which are fought with specific propagandistic means, to a structural level. Let us assume that in hegemonic thinking the—temporarily—dominant forces can simply be called "winners." The "winners" are those who can shape the reading of *documenta fifteen* and produce meaning and a narrative in a larger public framework. You might see these "winners," at least in the art field, sitting on the panel I mentioned before. But from the perspective of discursive formations, it is not so much the Palestinian artists shown, but rather their spokespersons who can be called "winners," and also the spokespersons of the imagined "other side"—the Israeli state? Or the defendants of a Jewish community?—since *documenta fifteen* ultimately gave vocal expression to the Israel-Palestine conflict. And basically, not much has changed in the creation of the speaker position, almost fifty years after Michel Foucault's fundamental critique of exclusions in discursive formations. It is once again approved intellectual actors in a discursive formation, this time from "oppositional sides." In order to break up this well-oiled oppositional framework,—still—other actors have to be able to enter the stage.[92] From a perspective of situated practices, *documenta fifteen* might have benefitted by starting with ruangrupa's own embeddedness in the Indonesian context.[93]

"Documentation" as Propagandist Tools

For a better understanding of the various propaganda methods enacted at documenta and alongside it, and in response to it, I would like to look at one of the controversial works exhibited, the *Tokyo Reels*. Before doing so, however, I should point out that other forms of propaganda were active at documenta, for example, in form of caricatures in the works by Taring Padi,[94] or the collages by Eltiqa,[95] or in Richard Bell's and

INSTAR's activities, to name but a few. Some resemble an "old-school" leftist kitsch aesthetic and indulge in nostalgic gestures of resistance, others reduce complexity to make a pointed statement, still others "propagate" important issues to make them visible and sayable. Nonetheless, there is a discernible line that runs throughout documenta that places some works in an ideological lineage. This is pretty obvious if you count all the references to nation-states or to national projects. Avoiding nation-state logic was yet another call-for-change idea by ruangrupa to avoid categorizing artists under a national flag. For me, this is a strong sign against the determination of a national identity. It speaks not only to commons' desire for independence within national frameworks, but also to a post-migrant idea of belonging, of situated knowledges in collective practices.

> **3. Prompt: Counting Names of Nation-States**
> Count the names of nation-states (or names of nation-state projects) in a large-scale exhibition (like documenta). Include the names within works, in excerpts, in descriptions…
> Which name was mentioned most often? Which name appeared second most often […]? Which name came in last place?

Trolling, Dog Whistling, and Revival of (Leftist) Kitsch?

Tokyo Reels[94] is an interesting work in propagandist terms, since it cleverly brings together an assemblage of themes and aspects—politics of documenting and archiving, themes of solidarity and propaganda, issues of artistic freedom and curatorial contextuality—that may not be immediately apparent and turn out differently depending on the viewer's position. *Tokyo Reels* is a ten-hour screening consisting of approximately twenty historical propaganda films on 16mm by different auteurs. The individual film works come from different contexts and were produced for different audiences. There is lot of promotional material in a tourist point of view, produced from "Western countries" for "Western audiences" to find. Other films depict war-like scenarios, reporting from Israel-Palestine for a national TV audience—for Japan, the United Kingdom, and others. Still others cover highly ideological war propaganda and political speeches from a Palestinian perspective. Among the conglomeration of material—a few of them interesting case studies to be analyzed and contextualized for cultural and postcolonial studies, e.g., along the line of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, and as cultural forms of the Othering of the "Orient" by "The West," and subsequently self-othering mechanisms—even the "neutral" perspectives uttered in public media, find "propaganda in the form of exaggerations and untrue insinuations regarding the Israeli 'enemy' […] that are 'carried out in places in the films'. These are '[…] only understandable against the background of the armed Israeli-Palestinian conflict at the time, with its flaming rhetoric on both sides."[95]

The curatorial context, with its aspects of spatial representation, adds nothing to the historical contextualization: the screening is installed with the largest projection of *documenta fifteen*, in a darkened and rather emptied space reserved solely for the works of the artists' collective Subversive Films. Between the individual films, Subversive Films comments unagitated— almost whispering—on the material shown. There are subliminal insinuations of criticism of the archive's function vis-à-vis toxic material, but otherwise little contextualization or positioning occurs. For example, I heard a comment between two films that stated, "It might be a question if these kinds of materials should be archived, but we think it's worth it." But given the ten hours of material, no one can form a comprehensive impression of the works on view, and the lack of any contextualization in the whole installation cries for outrage. Intentional?

Fig. 14: Installation view of *Tokyo Reels* by Subversive Films at Hübner Areal.

Fig.15: A warning sign was put up at one point. By whom?

The accompanying text—on the back of the screening wall and on the website—likewise provides too little to help contextualize the works in their historical contexts and their original fields of use. On the contrary, it obscures or downplays the contexts of their distribution and archiving, by "shedding light on the overlooked and still undocumented anti-imperialist solidarity between Japan and Palestine."[96] The footage apparently belonged to Masao Adachi, a former member of the Japanese Red Army whose life story should certainly trigger warnings and require a careful introduction. Adachi was active in the "Japanese New Wave" film movement in Japan, making films with "leftist" political themes, but went on to join the Japanese Red Army in 1970, radicalized, and moved to Lebanon. Calling the Japanese Red Army's actions "solidarity relations between Tokyo, Palestine, and the world" is euphemistic at best. I can't help but read this as a huge trolling move, as it calls for solidarity under cheap, "old-fashioned" agit-prop effects of a "transnational militant cinema"—echoing a tried-and-true avant-garde-style shock aesthetic disguised as documentary footage. Mohanad Yaqubi, one of the members of the Subversive Film collective, prefers to define these propaganda films as "solidarity films" or "Restoring Solidarity."[97] In the long run, this could be problematic for a peaceful solidarity network like the one lumbung is aiming for.

My impression of being trolled—a speech act invented merely to provoke outrage—or mocked (is Subversive Film trying to poke fun at the rather aesthetic effects of these old-school agit-prop materials?) would point to a historical lineage in radical avant-garde and post-avant-garde artistic practices that reinvented shock and tricksterism. Then the work would subtly comment on the violence of some "Western" avant-garde artistic practices that exploited attention effects and shock as mere gestures for hollowed-out social change. This reading would correspond to a distanced art thinking deeply embedded in the "Western" art discourse of postmodernism of the 2000s.

Another reading might be to call it simply "dog whistling," a precisely coded articulation for a politicized group under the radar, a politicized speech act masquerading as harmless to the uninformed. Along this line, the soft-spoken, fluffy statement can be taken in: "Subversive Film proposes to collectively reflect on possible processes of unearthing, restoring, and momentary disclosure of the imperfect archives of transnational militant cinema. By bringing back into circulation these moving images, they carefully reactivate present-day solidarity constellations, reflecting the lively utopia of a worldwide liberation movement"[98]. What does "carefully reactivate" mean in a militant framework? And what does "worldwide liberation movement" actually mean, given the history of real acts of violence within the history of Red Army Factions? Ultimately, Subversive Film can turn out to be a place for dark tourism.

It would do no favors to the many other works and resistant practices, as it would discredit the significant and relevant issues articulated in *documenta fifteen*: Trampoline House has also created an installation at the Hübner Areal—not far from *Tokyo Reels*—that tackles the European and especially the Danish "treatment" of migrants. But there are many other aspects of migration and marginalized struggles to be found throughout *documenta fifteen*. There are science and ecology-related works to be found (*Water System Project* by Cao Minghao and Chen Jianjun,[99] and the Kiri project[100]); issues of property relations (*Who Is Afraid of Ideology* by Marwa Arsanios,[101] an ongoing film series showing very complex entanglements of de-commoning threats in Lebanon), confrontations with religious (re)reappropriation (the entire exhibition at the Roman Catholic Church of St. Kunigundis by Atis Rezistans | Ghetto Biennale) and many gender-related issues, especially the struggles of LGTBQI+ (see the works by New Zealand collective FAFSWAG at Stadtmuseum Kassel) and feminist struggles (Archives des luttes des femmes en Algérie's archive of the women's movement in Algeria, or Saodat Ismailova's work *Chilltan*, depicting the collective of forty genderless beings—a core of Central Asian spirituality), etc.

Fig. 16: Installation view of the area occupied by Trampoline House at Hübner Areal.

Fig. 17: Picture taken in the Roman Catholic Church of St. Kunigundis curated by Atis Rezistans | Ghetto Biennale.

These heterogeneous and complex issues are ultimately dominated by a hegemonic maneuver that produced a subtle red thread with Subversive Film's *Tokyo Reels* as its central point, taking a turn from societal and communal forms of solidarity to a solidarity in militancy. And ultimately all the efforts to show the practices of situated collective artists and activists—concrete and relevant struggles—are discarded and shifted to the map of a (supposedly leftist) vintage kitsch-agit-prop struggle, still entrenched in the logic of the Cold War.

Two Types of Artworks
Broadly speaking, there are two types of artworks on view here: you will find contemporary (i.e., current) artistic collective artworks that are situational, and relational, and aim to create new relationships beyond the realm of art. As an example, I would like to refer to the non-profit collective Baan Noorg Collaborative Arts and Culture. Baan Noorg built an impressive installation at the documenta Halle called *Churning Milk*, with a video work, a skateboard ramp, and pieces from the Thai shadow puppet theater *Nang Yai*—both for use. Baan Noorg has also managed to create a dairy farm exchange program between a farm in Kassel and Nongpho.[102] There are plentiful other "artworks" oriented in the same way, which I will not list here. Other artworks—usually more traditional works of art that are also traditionally exhibited—follow a more binary logic. These works do not refuse to speak to the power of representation that an institution like documenta holds. And so, in the best hegemonic structure, these works—and its curated placement in display—use the power of representation to (re)produce myths, to establish a dominant narrative—to naturalize and universalize it—

within the rules of the exhibitionary complex as an educational machine that we all had to learn and constantly question.

Fig. 18: View of documenta Halle: In front the print workshop, in the middle Baan Noorg's skateramp, and in the back Britto Art Trust's *rasad*.

Fig. 19: Baan Noorg's theater pieces in use.

Ways Forward

One can assume that the entire *documenta fifteen* has been envisioned by ruangrupa as a staging of various struggles—a staging that is not exhausted in a mode of representation but aims to strengthen the many collectives—also financially—and to create deeper relationships between the many participants of *documenta fifteen*, especially the artist groups and activists, but also the public. Many of these struggles spring from the artist's own first-hand experiences with marginalization and can understandably lead to hate towards the oppression. Other works on display speak to learned or mediated, generational second-hand experiences, most of which can be seen in archival material. And there are also large collective stereotypical narratives touched upon—imaginary, historically (re-)produced over a longer time and naturalized. These are embedded—not only in right-wing propaganda, but also—in the fabric of anti-imperialist movements and the aspects of their global conspiracy: everything comes together and is on display in this documenta. One could argue that this amalgamation is nothing new, as it mirrors the mindset of most people around the world on a daily basis with varying degrees. But precisely this amalgamation was the core problem that led to the scandal and scandalization of *documenta fifteen*, as the different struggles did not stand on their own but were subsumed under a greater narrative. Some see only their specific struggle in front of them, others see a stereotypical ideology that potentially incites hate crimes.

How to Go On From Here?

Charles Esche's strategy of "humbling European modernity" turned out, it seems, less humbling in its approach. Rather, he argues for compartmentalizing and moving forward with a unified alliance of (forced?) solidarity for "a" change. In his talk at the symposium "(un)Common Grounds: Reflecting on *documenta fifteen*,"[103] he concluded his statement by saying: "The conservative radical, conservative left, who says, we want a change [of value], we have to have change, but not *that* change, and every specific change is always excluded in the desire of being [colonial? The last word was muffled]. And lumbung is a change, and what Hito Steyerl from the conservative left and those people say, 'Yes, we want change, but not your change,' and that is as negative a response as any from the far right."

Esche spoke out at a delicate moment, in a time of heated awareness in the midst of the hegemonic struggle. His utterance might be a response to the ongoing criticism by rather conservative newspapers, judging *documenta fifteen* as a whole as antisemitic, among other things. Yet, it exemplifies a particular mode of operation, which is to establish the dominant narrative by excluding other positions and "closing ranks." Esche derides the calls for change expressed in the contemporary and progressive art discourse—for decolonial practices in the exhibitionary complex, for repatriation, for "radical inclusions"— as critiques not willing to be realized. He seems to have lost faith in these discourses, or simply does not want to wait for the change—maybe under-standably. But! But how can "change" be produced with these tools of propagation? And what change is produced with that? We have to insist—always—to ask and question "what change"!

In a pointed question posed by Maayan Sheleff to Oliver Marchart during the lecture he gave on July 7, 2022, as part of the Summer School "Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education" at the *CAMP notes on education* format at *documenta fifteen*, in which he mainly presented the arguments of his book *Hegemony Machine: documenta X to fifteen and the Politics of Biennalization*, Sheleff asked Marchart: "You wrote [in your book *Conflictual Aesthetics*[104]], 'Curating politically means organizing, agitating and propagating.' If you are ruangrupa, what would you suggest we do in order to enable conflict in different ways as the ones in the moment?" This question puts a finger in the wound of political curating as agitation. Marchart responded by pointing to a more open design of conflictual formations. Despite the concept of conflictuality discussed in hegemony theory as the main driving force of political movements with an agonistic debate that allows for different opinions, he sees the problem of current forms of activism in the avoidance of inner-group conflicts and rather in the externali-zation of conflicts through exclusion mechanisms and even more through the pressure to "choose a side." He argued for an emancipatory form of activism that develops a new sense of how conflicts can be acted out rather than suppressed internally. But even with its expanded version of hegemony theory, the political theory of hegemony historically builds on war vocabulary, it speaks of trenches, parties in constant struggle for new alliances for a dominant hegemonic front—a never-ending battlefield that becomes a political playground in culture for majorities. A "game" played peacefully and without reconciliation only when unlimited resources are available. The image of today's hegemonic propaganda machine leads to an entrenched scenario—in leftist Kitsch?—detached from reality and to winners by distinction. So, the question is, how can we solidarize without radicalization? Without essentializing identity and without weaponizing every speech act into ideology? Possible answers would have to address how these new formations, which challenge the traditional infrastructure of culture and life—and subsistence—can be constructed in such a way that they are not easily hijacked—or appropriated—by hegemonic maneuvers from within and from outside. Answers need to find a way, how to de-essentialize identity—since identity is nonethe-less a contingent formation—, how to avoid gestures of innocent positioning as safe rescue zones, and how to share responsibilities in all positions.

5. Prompt: Propositional Exhibition
Consider *documenta fifteen* as what is shown and implemented (and not what would be if, or what is missing or needed, or what went wrong).
What does *documenta fifteen* make possible? What can we not do with it?

I strongly believe that we can only achieve this if we re-evaluate our critical tools and situate, contextualize, and—try to—translate positions. Concepts developed in theory

and scientific methods in supposedly "Western" thought can be reappropriated for our own use. An utter dismissal of so-called "Western" knowledges is whimsical. I dare to say that I would rather opt for a renewed "discourse of truth" in feminist objectivity than to call for "the end of history" in a postmodern "hegemonic" game that renders all utterances as equally valid[105]—or equally opinionated.[106] Picturing theory as "only" a mechanism of exclusion and oppression fails to recognize the empowering effect of theory as a useful and practical tool for understanding one's own position within society and how it is shaped. It denies the primary function of criticality to help to overcome one's impulses of a naturalized common sense. It imagines a method only in patriarchal logic but dismisses its potential efficacy in feminist thought.

documenta fifteen presented many different positions, which was rather foreign in this form of a "Western" large-scale exhibition—linked to the logic within a nation-state, and modernity in general. It was a proposal that was difficult to "read"—or decipher— for "Western" publics, audiences, and press. In this sense, it was a radical—unapologetic—ostentation that not only shook the normally well sheltered art field—despite claims of "radicalization" on display—, but also caused cracks in the mode of representation of exhibitions by shifting from politics of recognition to a politics of redistribution. This proposal is something profoundly different from what we call "socially engaged art" or participatory art in the art discourse. And for better clarification—in this untested field, which has also made its own problems visible—I would call "Lumbung One" rather "Lumbung Zero."

In terms of the exhibitionary complex, we could call it the "propositional transition" of museums. It can mean developing propositional exhibitions with social formations that take and display specific positions—not universalized ones. But these propositions must be equipped with (self-)critical tools. These propositions must be in permeable solidarities, in constant exchange and dispute, not in an enclosed framework of a new hegemony. In contrast to a view that sees the exhibitionary complex primarily through conflictuality, I would argue for emphasizing a framework for a political contact zone: a space where different world views, lived experiences, and situated knowledges come in contact to be shared and discussed. As conflicts in societies, communities, small groups, families, etc.—in their various forms from micro- to macro-politics—are inevitable anyway, a practice of "commoning" might be a better filter through which to see. It involves "learning" by doing, listening, showing, and discussing and trying to understand the situatedness of others, perhaps leading to an agreed understanding of a "truth." In this way, it is in indeed a matter beyond the politics of the "left" or the "right."

Once again, I want to refer to Donna Haraway's words that so aptly summarize the idea of an infrastructure for a feminist objectivity in power-sensitive, rational, and situated knowledges that is critical and responsible—and desirably resistant to ideology and simplification:

> Rational knowledge is a process of ongoing critical interpretation among "fields" of interpreters and decoders. Rational knowledge is power-sensitive conversation. Decoding and transcoding plus translation and criticism; all are necessary. So science becomes the paradigmatic model, not of closure, but of that which is contestable and contested. Science becomes the myth, not of what escapes human agency and responsibility in a realm above the fray, but, rather, of accountability and responsibility for translations and solidarities linking the cacophonous visions and visionary voices that characterize the knowledges of the subjugated. A splitting of senses, a confusion of voice and

sight, rather than clear and distinct ideas, becomes the metaphor for the ground of the rational. We seek not the knowledges ruled by phallogocentrism (nostalgia for the presence of the one true World) and disembodied vision. We seek those ruled by partial sight and limited voice-not partiality for its own sake but, rather, for the sake of the connections and unexpected openings situated knowledges make possible. Situated knowledges are about communities, not about isolated individuals. The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular. The science question in feminism is about objectivity as positioned rationality. Its images are not the products of escape and transcendence of limits (the view from above) but the joining of partial views and halting voices into a collective subject position that promises a vision of the means of ongoing finite embodiment, of living.[107]

This text was finalized November 1, 2022. A longer version of this text is available at academia.edu: https://zhdk.academia.edu/RKolb.

Notes

* This text is elaborated further in my dissertation, "Curating in the Global World."

1 *documenta fifteen* press release, "documenta fifteen and lumbung practice," June 18, 2022, accessed August 22, 2022,
 https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/press-releases/documenta-fifteen-and-lumbung-practice.

2 It is said that around 1,500 artists were exhibited or participating in *documenta fifteen*, accessed September 29, 2022, https://news.artnet.com/art-world/documenta-15-preview-2130857.

3 See Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

4 Even though these high/low art distinctions have been tackled for at least two decades—since *d11* by Okwui Enwezor—, they still trigger many misunderstandings and judgmental assessments.

5 The press coverage framed the focus of the invited artists for documenta under the label of the "Global South," though I would like to reject this terminology, since it produces a simplified and streamlined understanding of the various, utterly diverse art and practices invited to *documenta fifteen*. I would even say that even the curatorial team of documenta did not do enough to emphasize the specificities of the invited collectives and their contexts.

6 Few gallery artists were involved in *documenta fifteen*. Most of the art on display was created outside of the regular distribution channels set up by galleries.

7 For an early critique on the "modern autonomous individual," I would like to refer to Michel Foucault's lecture at the Collège de France on neoliberal govern-

mentality, subsequently published in *Economy and Society* 30, no. 2 (May 2001): 190–207, 191. For Foucault's thoughts applied to the exhibitionary complex, specifically for biennials, see Ronald Kolb, "The Curating of Self and Others: Biennials as Forms of Governmental Assemblages," *OnCurating* 46: *Contemporary Art Biennials—Our Hegemonic Machines in States of Emergency,* eds. Ronald Kolb, Shwetal A. Patel, and Dorothee Richter (June 2020): 67–74.

8 For a curiously ideological and apologetic stance against collectivity and for the single author, I would like to refer to a talk by Bazon Brock called "On the power-grotesque appropriation of the arts by cultures," subtitled "A dispute about the whole, the end of Europe." The title was translated by the author. Lecture at the Kunstuniversität Linz, March 16, 2022, accessed August 30, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOFuQg-zyZQk.

9 See Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides, "On the Commons: A Public Interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides," *e-flux Journal* 17 (June 2010), accessed August 29, 2022, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/17/67351/on-the-commons-a-public-interview-with-massimo-de-angelis-and-stavros-stavrides.

10 For a specific insight into violent enclosures and the destruction of communal life in female populations, see Silvia Federici, *Silvia Federici's Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2019).

11 For a historical analysis of commoners' struggle in relation to the power of the sovereign from the perspective of the Magna Carta, see Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2009).

12 Common projects might have started in a "Western"-known context with the Italian *autonomia* movement of the 1960s, and with kibbutz projects in Israel as a kind of enclosure for communist ideas on a small scale.

13 For a stance towards (post-)digital commons, see Cornelia Sollfrank, Felix Stalder, and Shusha Niederberger, *Aesthetics of the Commons* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

14 Kolb, "The Curating of Self and Others."

15 George Caffentzis, "The Future of 'The Commons': Neoliberalism's 'Plan B' or the Original Disaccumulation of Capital?," *New Formations* 69 (2010).

16 See Ronald Kolb, "Situated Knowledges and Interdependence in the Exhibitionary-Educational Complex, *OnCurating* 53*: Situated Knowledges in Art and Curating*, eds. Ronald Kolb and Dorothee Richter (June 2022): 44.

17 For more information to this project, I want to refer to the project website of *citizenship*: https://citizenship.zku-berlin.org/about, accessed August 29, 2022.

18 The two-week summer school and public talk series "Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education" organized by Dorothee Richter and Ronald Kolb took place from June 23—July 7, 2022, by the Shared Campus Platform, Zurich University of the Arts, as part of *CAMP notes on education* for *documenta fifteen*. Among other invited lecturers, we had a contribution by ZK/U live from their boat journey with *citizenship*.

19 By using "we," I am referring to the group that was established by the participants and the staff of the summer school "Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education" that Dorothee Richter and I organized. We not only visited many exhibition areas together, but also talked intensively about what we saw and experienced. All participants conducted a workshop derived from their own practice.20 You will find most of the presentations by the guest lecturers here: https://camp-notesoneducation.de/events/commoning-curatorial-and-artistic-education-6-philip-horst-matthias-einhoff-einhoff-zku-zentrum-fur-kunst-und-urbanistik, accessed August 29, 2022.

21 Caffentzis, "The Future of 'The Commons,'" 26.

22 Dorothee Richter and I were invited to the Composting Knowledge Network and organized the Summer School "Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education," as explained above.

23 Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto*, 45.

24 The *Bataille Monument* by artist Thomas Hirschhorn comes to mind as a localized project at *d11*, though one could question the form of the relationship between the local public and the artist and the public's "participation." One crucial problem I have with specific forms of socially engaged art is its practice of rendering the audience "material" for the artist's work.

25 *documenta fifteen's* description of the Gudskul area on the website: https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung-members-artists/gudskul,.

26 Ibid.

27 *documenta fifteen*, "Fridericianum as a school. Fridskul," accessed September 29, 2022, https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/fridskul.

28 We learned that the many art mediators were seriously underpaid or had contracts in rather precarious forms. These problems were considered structural ones, since previous documentas had the same policy towards the art mediators giving guided tours.

29 Among the many rumor-riddled processes backstage at *documenta fifteen*, one story thread around Emily Dische-Becker was "leaked" in a hidden recording that might show how the sobat-sobat were given specific guidelines in preparatory events on how they could react or deflect problematic questions on the issue of Israel-Palestine, and hence accusations of antisemitism, after they had previously been given workshops on antisemitism by the Anne Frank institution. For a chronologically well-prepared and thorough insight into this incident, see Dirk Peitz, "Am Rande," *Zeit Online*, July 29, 2022, accessed September 22, 2022, https://www.zeit.de/kultur/kunst/2022-07/documenta-antisemitismus-emily-dische-becker/seite-2.

30 According to Christina Schrott, some *majelis* participants were challenged to make certain decisions: "According to Christina Schott, within the *mini-majelis* that Taring Padi belonged to, artists were challenged by the sudden expectation to make decisions about matters with which they have no experience." Wulan Dirgantoro and Elly Kent, "We need to talk! Art, offence and politics in Documenta 15," *New Mandala*, June 29, 2022, accessed October 21, 2022, https://www.newmandala.org/we-need-to-talk-art-offence-and-politics-in-documenta-15/.

31 *documenta fifteen*, "documenta fifteen announces exhibiting lumbung artists" accessed September 29, 2022, https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/news/documenta-fifteen-announces-exhibiting-lumbung-artists/.

32 ruangrupa, *documenta fifteen Handbook* (Hatje Cantz, 2022). 21.

33 *documenta fifteen*'s description of "Working Group lumbung Kios," accessed September 25, 2022, https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung-kios.

34 See the "about" page for information on the responsible personnel: https://www.theartists.net/about-us, accessed September 25, 2022.

35 For more information on "LUMBUNG GALLERY", see

https://www.lumbunggallery.theartists.net/mission, accessed September 22, 2022.

36 Not unlike artist-run "Produzentengallerien" from the 1970s in German-speaking areas, the self-governing desires of artists seeking to avoid the gallerist comes to mind. Not only can artists avoid a not-so-small cut taken from the gallerists, which provide the infrastructure that brings not only space and exposure, but—more importantly—cultural capital and, ultimately, legitimation. Gallerists usually also provide powerful collectors and can make an artist's career. But they can also neglect artists and their works.

37 Artworks by Britto Arts Trust on sale at the Lumbung Gallery, see https://www.lumbunggallery.theartists.net/artist/britto-arts-trust, accessed September 25, 2022.

38 *documenta fifteen*, "Working Group lumbung Currency," accessed September 25, 2022,
 https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung-currency.

39 ruangrupa, "ruru, The 31st Bienal de São Paulo, Fundacao Bienal de São Paulo," Sept. 7–Dec. 7, 2014, accessed September 29, 2022, https://ruangrupa.id/en/2014/09/06/ruru-the-31st-bienal-de-sao-paulo-fundacao-bienal-de-sao-paulo.

40 ruangrupa, "COSMOPOLIS #1 COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE," Oct. 18–Dec. 18, 2017, accessed September 29, 2022, https://ruangrupa.id/en/2017/10/18/ruangruparasite-cosmopolis-1-collective-intelligence.

41 The phrase "documenta gGmbH" is used to denigrate the "real institutions" as accomplices of capital and the state. And, of course, documenta as an institution is directly linked to state policy, as a "limited liability company (Germany)"—although not profit-oriented in its status.

42 In my PhD, I will work out the points of connection between a contemporary commons-led exhibition festival and the early World Fairs that Tony Bennett referred to in defining the birth of the public museum. Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum, History, Theory, Politics* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995). For a first more historical outlook, see Ronald Kolb, "The Curating of Self and Others: Biennials as Forms of Governmental Assemblages."

43 I'm not saying that the "Western" author figure—the ""modern autonomous individual" sketched out during the Enlightenment is inextricably fused with capitalist structures, but it was clearly formed within this structure. I hope that important ideas of this subjectification can be resurrected in different formations.

44 David Teh, "Who Cares a Lot? Ruangrupa as Curatorship," in *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*

30 (Summer 2012): 108–117, accessed September 22, 2022, https://www.afterall.org/article/who-cares-a-lot-ruangrupa-as-curatorship.

45 Early on, ruangrupa organized/curated events and exhibitions like *OK Video Festival* and later the *Jakarta Biennial*.

46 How art enters art institutions and art history and ultimately makes an artist's career, and maintains it financially, is a rather complex and often opaque process. A process where friendships and networking, ownership and financial speculation, and aesthetic expressions and evaluations—again embedded in societal and situated contexts—are intertwined.

47 For an overview on the artist-curatorial discourse, see Simon Sheikh, "From Para to Post: The Rise and Fall of Curatorial Reason," *Springerin | Hefte Für Gegenwartskunst* 1 (2017), accessed September 22, 2022, https://www.springerin.at/en/2017/1/von-para-zu-post/.

48 *documenta fifteen*, "Sebastián Díaz Morales and Simon Danang Anggoro," accessed September 22, 2022, https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung-members-artists/sebastian-diaz-morales-and-simon-danang-anggoro.

49 I recall farid rakun in front of a monument facing west arguing that the monument could eventually face east from time to time.

50 For an interesting example, see the installation by the Hannah Arendt Institute of Artivism (*INSTAR*) at documenta Halle, where the manifesto "Curadores, Go Home" by Sandra Ceballos was displayed, accusing curators of being agents of the art system and of the state. This might be true in certain constellations, like in Cuba, the location about which INSTAR speaks. But in a rather uncontextualized display formation at documenta Halle, one can only wonder what a non-invested audience picks up from this: I would argue a rather binary opposition between curator (as state) and artist (as suppressed individual).

51 Teh, "Who Cares a Lot?"

52 Sheikh, "From Para to Post."

53 The excerpts, translated from German by the author, were taken from an interview of Bazon Brock by Michael Köhler about *documenta fifteen* in Kassel, Deutschlandfunk, June 21, 2022, accessed September 29, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m20ZIRywiFY.

54 Brock, "On the power-grotesque appropriation of the arts by cultures."

55 See this quote by farid rakun in an interview by Katerina Valdivia Bruch, March 3, 2020: "I think there is a danger to romanticise collectives, especially when it

becomes a trend, which is the danger right now. But hopefully it is not like another trend**.** If you think about community building, technology offers another type of collectives that treats individuals differently, which is also something we can learn from. If you think about the young generation, for example, they have a different way of understanding reality, as there is almost no separation between what is real and what is virtual. They socialise and relate to each other differently. I think that it has a lot of consequences. Collectivity also grows through technology.**"** Katerina Valdivia Bruch, "Interview with Farid Rakun from ruangrupa," culture360.asef.org, accessed September 22, 2022, https://culture360.asef.org/magazine/interview-farid-rakun-ruangrupa-indonesia.

56 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

57 Why slightly? The current form of globalization has managed to interlock almost all areas of the world under the same conditions (capital, logistics, trade, etc.). And even earlier, on a worldwide scale, humankind can be considered a migratory species, with peaceful and violent "exchanges" throughout human history.

58 I must confess that it is becoming increasingly difficult for me to use terms like "Western," "Global South," and "Global North." The reductive and often-times misleading effects get in the way of a nuanced and precise description of situated knowledges. These loaded terms draw so much attention that a thorough analysis is in danger more often than not of falling short in its interpretation.

59 It would be interesting to even look into the origin of modern-day art (production, market, and expression) in parallel with speculative capital. Looking at art production, consumption, and distribution starting from Duchamp's famous *pissoir* turned upside down can be seen as an inspiration for speculation.

60 *documenta fifteen*, "Practitheorizing Counterinstitutions by The Question of Funding, OFF-Biennale Budapest," workshop, September 9–10, 2022, accessed September 22, 2022, https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/calendar/practitheorizing-counterinstitutions.

61 farid rakun talked about ruangrupa's decision to emphasize story over theory for *documenta fifteen* in the workshop "Practitheorizing Counterinstitutions."

62 Bruch, "Interview with Farid Rakun from ruangrupa."

63 Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, "On Cooperation," January 1923, Marxists Internet Archive, accessed September 29, 2022, https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1923/jan/06.htm.

64 Christina Schott, "documenta fifteen: Collaborators

wanted," Universes in Universe, accessed September 29, 2022, https://universes.art/es/documenta/2022/collaborators-wanted.

65 But we know from art history of the 20th century that collectively produced art works can be rather easily taken up by the art market. Even expressions by artists without an object can be integrated into a commodifiable status, e.g., all of the ephemera and pictures of (post-)avant-garde events moved into private collections or public state ownership.

66 Dirgantoro and Kent, "We need to talk!"

67 Documenta fifteen, "ruangrupa and the Artistic Team on dismantling 'People's Justice'", June 23, 2022, accessed September 29, 2022, https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/news/ruangrupa-on-dismantling-peoples-justice-by-taring-padi.

68 This practice is not unlike other artistic collective practices, often associated with the avant-garde in Western Europe. In their early phases, avant-garde practices were usually a collective effort, or at least art was produced within cycles and networks of close exchanges. From today's perspective, art history and the art market peeled off singular artists and artworks, stripping the collective context out of the creative process.

69 "Relativism is a way of being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally. The 'equality' of positioning is a denial of responsibility and critical inquiry. Relativism is the perfect mirror twin of totalization in the ideologies of objectivity"; I use my interpretation of Donna Haraway's concept of "accountability" in feminist objectivity, from Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1988): 584.

70 See Kolb, "Situated Knowledges and Interdependence in the Exhibitionary-Educational Complex": "In her scientific studies [Margulis] argued against the New-Darwinist idea that competition creates evolutionary changes. Prominently opposing the competition-oriented views of evolution—that needless to stay, still are in place in scientific discourse although a proven fact provided by Margulis and others in scientific terms, and even more than alive in economic structures of financialized capitalism and traditional capitalist industry of production alike,—pointing out the collaborative relationships between species as the driving force of evolution. Adapting this biological scientific truth freely to culture and societies, it would suit us well to concentrate on cooperation (better:) collaboration and interdependencies over competition, separation and antagonism."

71 In this context, precarity as a contested concept became an issue in the "Global North" especially, and in this perspective refers to the end of Fordism and the replacement of stable unionized labor relations by a gig economy. In other parts of the world and in (post-)migratory movements, precarity does not seem to fit as an analytical category. In (post-)migratory formations, the main concern is not with security or the loss of economic basis, but with forms of oppression; not with stable jobs, but with the kinds of work that are under constant pressure. Xiang opts to analyze precarity through the lens of social reproduction—producing, maintaining, and improving daily life in terms of childbirth, education, elder care, family structures, etc.—, undertaking systemic analyses that go beyond experiential descriptions such as precarity, to enable the formation of strategies for a social transnational movement.

This proposed concept of precarity was presented by Biao Xiang on June 8, 2021, at the online conference called "Creating Commons in an Era of Precarity: A Multi/Trans-Disciplinary Conference on Migration and Asia," accessed September 29, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1QPDUBeEPK0.

72 "Trust" is one of the foundational values of ruangrupa and is in line with the emphasis on the building of networks in "friendship." Hence the slogan: "Make friends, not art."

73 See the statement of the Scientific Advisory Panel, which was brought in by the shareholders of documenta gGmbH to analyze possible antisemitic expressions and the response by ruangrupa and lumbung artists: "Documenta 15 Releases Press Release By New Scientific Advisory Panel," *Griot*, Sept. 11, 2022, accessed September 29, 2022,
https://griotmag.com/en/documenta-15-releases-press-release-about-findings-by-new-scientific-advisory-panel.

e-flux Notes, "We are angry, we are sad, we are tired, we are united: Letter from lumbung community", September 10, 2022, accessed: September 29, 2022, https://www.e-flux.com/notes/489580/we-are-angry-we-are-sad-we-are-tired-we-are-united-letter-from-lumbung-community.

74 Geronimo Cristóbal, "Pushing Against the Roof of the World: ruangrupa's prospects for documenta fifteen," *Third Text Online*, October 26, 2020, accessed September 29, 2022, http://thirdtext.org/cristobal-ruangrupa.

75 The Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement was initially established by the civil society of Palestine, speaking against the Israeli politics of occupation

towards the Palestinian territories.

76 ruangrupa, "Anti-Semitism Accusations against documenta: A Scandal about a Rumor," *e-flux Notes*, May 7, 2022, accessed September 29, 2022, https://www.e-flux.com/notes/467337/diversity-as-a-threat-a-scandal-about-a-rumor.

77 Ibid.

78 Oliver Marchart, *Hegemony Machines: Documenta X to fifteen and the Politics of Biennialization* (Zurich: OnCurating.org, July 2022).

79 For an in-depth analysis, see Kolb, "The Curating of Self and Others."

80 Marchart, *Hegemony Machines*, 9–10.

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid., 11.

83 In the conference *Let there be lumbung*, held September 20–23, 2022, Charles Esche, member of the search committee for *documenta fifteen*, gave a talk, positioning this *documenta fifteen* as the moment of a paradigm shift. See Charles Esche, "The 1st Exhibition of the 21st Century," *documenta fifteen*, symposium "Let there be Lumbung", September 21, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BjGxqUwOk0U&list=PLIk899bYfqf6sI-WOlUYqfvsRGkiE2Drbv&index=3.

84 Some "attacks" in German news outlets, but also internationally, indeed reduced *documenta fifteen* in its entirety to being antisemitic.

85 Nikos Papastergiadis' proposal might be interesting to look at closely, though one can see the holes in his argument. At least in the talk he gave in this instance, he excluded the material level and economic structure.

86 See Nuraini Juliastuti, "Commons people, lumbung as a traveling concept," *documenta fifteen*, symposium "Let there be Lumbung", September 23, 2022, accessed September 29, 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8tRTcX1C3AE.

87 Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking The World Politically* (Brooklyn: Verso Books, 2013), xii.

88 Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 579.

89 The symposium "(un)Common Grounds: Reflecting on *documenta fifteen*" took place at Framer Framed at the Akademie van Kunsten in the Trippenhuis, Amsterdam from September 23 to 24, 2022. The panel I refer to was titled "Other Ways of documenta-ing: Democracy, Inclusion, and Decolonised Models of Art" with speakers Charles Esche, Ade Darmawan, Lara Khaldi, and Gertrude Flentge, moderated by Wayne Modest. I attended via the live stream on YouTube.

90 See the paper by Erica Weiss, "Cultural hegemony, speech genres, and reconciliation: creating 'Middle Eastern' peace talk," accessed: September 29, 2022, https://nomadit.co.uk/conference/easa2022/paper/65170.

91 For the contextualization of ruangrupa's practice from Indonesia, the last symposium "Let there be lumbung" was motivated to do so eventually by inviting Hilmar Farid, John Roosa, Melani Budianta, and Nuraini Juliastuti, all scholars with profound knowledge of Indonesian culture.

92 Taring Padi's collective practice using the means of caricature (a placative and propagandist practice), I also experienced as a very precise and (usually) careful practice, despite a rather binary world view. But integrated in the many other hegemony-producing works, an open-minded observation wasn't possible—at least for me.

93 However, it might not be the best idea to use caricaturesque collages as a learning tool.

94 See the quote: "Tokyo Reels, a collection of twenty 16 mm films made by filmmakers from the UK, Italy, Germany, Palestine, Egypt, Iraq and Japan, exposing the internationalist scope of militant filmmaking during the period of 1960—1980." "Screening "Mohanad Yaqubi - R.21 aka Restoring Solidarity," Escautville, June 15, 2022, accessed September 29, 2022, https://www.escautville.org/post/screening-mohanad-yaqubi-r-21-aka-restoring-solidarity-15-june-14-00.

95 This quote comes from Joseph Croitoru, whose aim it was to situate the film material of *Tokyo Reels*. Translation by the author. The text was published in: *Die Hessische/Niedersächsische Allgemeine* (HNA), September 15, 2022, accessed September 22, 2022, https://www.hna.de/kultur/documenta/pauschale-vorwuerfe-so-nicht-haltbar-91789526.html?itm_source=story_detail&itm_medium=interaction_bar&itm_campaign=share&fbclid=IwAR0EmtmpmBdiz7-KLSjAmZ7e6orI75dM3QiG1ykxMFNnwFWq3F-gJQWmw0xQ.

96 *documenta fifteen*, "Subversive Film", accessed September 29, 2022, https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung-members-artists/subversive-film.

97 "Screening "Mohanad Yaqubi - R.21 aka Restoring Solidarity."

98 *documenta fifteen*, "Subversive Film."

99 *documenta fifteen*, "Cao Minghao & Chen Jianjun," accessed September 29, 2022, https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung-members-artists/cao-minghao-chen-jianjun.

100 *documenta fifteen*, "KIRI Project /one hundred trees," accessed September 29, 2022, https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/kiri-project-one-hundred-trees.

101 *documenta fifteen*, "Marwa Arsanios," accessed September 29, 2022, https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung-members-artists/marwa-arsanios.

102 *documenta fifteen*, "Baan Noorg Collaborative Arts and Culture," accessed September 29, 2022, https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung-members-artists/baan-noorg-collaborative-arts-and-culture.

103 "(un)Common Grounds: Reflecting on *documenta fifteen*."

104 Oliver Marchart, *Conflictual Aesthetics: Artistic Activism and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2019).

105 See "The 'equality' of positioning is a denial of responsibility and critical inquiry. Relativism is the perfect mirror twin of totalization in the ideologies of objectivity; both deny the stakes in location, embodiment, and partial perspective; both make it impossible to see well." Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 584.

106 An example of an equalization can be found in *dOCUMENTA (13)* with its postmodern gestures towards historicity, relativizing historical and contextual references by arranging historical objects and art works side-by-side in the so-called "brain", a pivotal exhibition space at Fridericianum.

107 Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 590.

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Reflections on the Workshop "Untitled (Re-curating *documenta fifteen*)" Tanya Abraham and Maayan Sheleff

The aim of the workshop "Untitled (Re-curating *documenta fifteen*)," organized by us for OnCurating's "Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education," was to "re-curate" *documenta fifteen* as an embodied experience, situated in the personal knowledges of the workshop participants. It treated the curatorial choices and texts of ruangrupa and their associates as raw materials, in reflection of their concept of *lumbung* as a common space to share ideas and (hi)stories. By adding layers of meaning and offering possibilities of interpretation, we were hinting as to how the workshop could commonize the curatorial act further than its own intentions and questioned whether any curatorial narrative is inherently hierarchical.

The workshop participants were asked to choose in advance one of the works presented as part of *documenta fifteen*. The choices produced an impromptu route, which the workshop participants followed and walked through together. Stopping next to every chosen work, the participants told their personal narration of the work, as an alternative to the curatorial text. The spoken interpretations were recorded and posted online, accumulating into an archive of a collectively guided exhibition tour. You can join the tour here: https://soundcloud.com/maayan-sheleff

Listening, Loosening
Tanya Abraham

When Maayan Sheleff and I started working on the workshop for OnCurating's summer school, it was an approach that was aimed at providing a setting to see how my curatorial work could proceed in relation to my PhD studies. Both of us worked in tandem to develop the workshop, focusing on the idea of participation and with the aim of offering an embodied experience to participants, albeit one with approaches attuned to our specific curatorial visions. The commonality involved in terms of community participation remained the core of the workshop, each pulling out perspectives pertaining to respective curatorial practices from what would manifest at the end of the workshop. While Maayan's PhD studies concern the political agency of voices, I considered how these voices could be used to highlight my intent of community participation in my own studies.

My curatorial practice specifically concerns social change in the community. India is a country with a strong history of traditional art and culture intertwined with the social practices of its peoples; to take contemporary art practices to them as a *new* medium of art and allow it to enmesh with their way of living, I find this a challenging proposition. Not only is contemporary art new to the public, but the divisions in Indian society concerning the arts are based on upper and lower classes. Caste-based[1] demarcations limit the extent to which such artistic practices may be freely embraced, and across hierarchies. Although being based in the city of Kochi, home to the "Kochi-Muziris Biennale", the biennial does not necessarily dilute the "strangeness" associated with contemporary art practices among locals, at least not yet because of the learning

period involved concerning a new art form. In fact, it begs the questions as to what extent such work resonates with the public and becomes meaningful to them. Is it creating a close bond with the locals to enable them to think, ponder, and express themselves? Even shift ways of thinking?

The workshop conducted at Kassel was, for me, a start to this experimentation of how new perspectives can be created. Not only so that audiences could provide their own versions of what an artwork is, but to examine what more might be required to allow my curatorial practice to result in what I am aiming at.

Since gender roles and gender identities make up a significant part of my PhD study, it is imperative that as a citizen of a nation immersed in innumerable religious and cultural differences pieced together through centuries of practices and bound by identity-driven thinking, and as a single mother in an environment influenced by numerous socio-cultural parts of the societal framework that challenge this situation (women without husbands, for one), the aspect of ideology and situatedness is stretched beyond what is visible to the apparent eye. Whilst gender roles and their positioning awaken me to a reality of how the female is positioned (in my country), inextricably tied to an intricate framework created from numerous ideology-based constructs thrust deep into the belly of society's functioning, the workshop opened the possibility of a democratic approach of loosening them. The core of the workshop discovered an anecdote in the eventual setting, an embodied experience that became the fulcrum upon which new and dynamic possibilities of the curatorial could emerge. The freedom for participants to experience, absorb, and express themselves threw open the possibility of providing a view from "the other side" through their voices, creating an awareness about how the audience experiences things.

In my previous exhibitions, although the voices of the audience were recorded, it was not possible to attain a deep and embodied participation; nor was it possible to lure participants to examine the artworks intently because of, as previously mentioned, the lack of familiarity with contemporary art and the desire to associate with a new art form. The involvement of the public/audience in this co-produced workshop allowed a sense of democracy in the way artworks were looked at, through the idea of community participation, rather than simply asking the audience what they felt or thought about artworks.

My work concerning the curatorial and its capacity for social change found an experiment here, as participants re-examined the artworks: the idea of one-dimensional thinking or a boundary within which dynamic forces operate were set free to include a free flowing encounter of perceptions and expressions. These expressions also concern the start of realizing and becoming aware of one's own personal encounters (for my work, of patriarchy), and permitting the participants' own voices to be heard—not only in the outside world, but also to themselves. Although the participants in the workshop were very familiar with contemporary art, it provided a chance to see how such participation can then be molded into involving new public participants in my country. Through this, I hope to address women of all classes and denominations in India; as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak states, "Can the subaltern speak?," where she looks at the way certain classes are treated in India. I extend this to the female, the position of Indian women situated in a patriarchal setting, bound by roles defined by religion, caste, and so on,[2] and how their voices can be heard—to let them speak (up) and let their voices be heard and resonate within their own selves.

As one of the curators of the workshop "Untitled (Re-curating *documenta fifteen*)," this involved the possibilities of querying and recreating, which then provided the opportunity to bring in the larger narrative of the public. Blurring the lines between the audience and the exhibition experiments with how thinking and understanding exhibitions can provide new discourses of participation: the awareness created about how a single artwork can narrate numerous episodical results is the beginning to understanding that curatorial practices have the authenticity to adopt a wider and a more far-reaching method of interpretations and perceptions. Taking a cue from this, I look at participatory art practices where artists and the audience work together, and the other artworks in my exhibition are then to be constructed in a manner that propels such an experience.

In the context of India, where the patriarchal foothold and the position of women is set in the midst of numerous religious, cultural, and social hierarchies, I hope that a voice of the subaltern is heard and in turn creates a personal/societal awareness leading to societal change.

It's Not My Party But I'll Cry If I Want To
Maayan Sheleff

My late grandmother used to tell me that if I don't remember something, it means that it's not important enough. I used to get annoyed by this assumption, but I've learned to appreciate it with time. When she didn't remember who I was anymore, I just held her hand and played her favorite music—Vivaldi, the Four Seasons, Spring. I wanted her to enjoy the moment because the moment was all she had.

My own memory is not that sharp. I always regret not writing a detailed diary of impressions while I'm experiencing exhibitions, or meeting people, both in professional and personal contexts, which for me are always entangled. I want to remember people and artworks that I was touched by, remember every detail; what made me angry, what made me happy, what gave me a new understanding, what made me even more confused. At the same time, I've learned to understand that what stays with me at the end, what I do remember, even if I remember it wrong, is what has value for me, what I can learn from. And either way, it is all subjective; but that doesn't make it less true.

When Tanya Abraham and I planned the workshop "Untitled (Re-curating *documenta fifteen*)," we were attempting to respond to the curatorial concept in a manner that extends it and examines its boundaries. By offering different situated narratives from the point of view of the audience and the artworks that they selected as personal mementos, we stretched the democratic premise and promise of the curatorial concept further; we took the liberties of a delegated and de-centralized authorship that was extended to specific artists and artist collectives and used it for non-invited audiences; this was thus both an act of care and appreciation for the curatorial concept, by resonating it further, as well as a gently conflictual nudge to probe how inclusively participatory the concept actually was. The tour that was created and collectively guided formed a participatory embodied account of the exhibition.[3] As these voices were recorded and uploaded online, people who could not visit the exhibition could listen to them and shape their own interpretation of the works, imagining what they looked like from hearing someone describe them, which could, in turn, open additional layers of interpretations.

Tanya and I developed the workshop in relation to both our curatorial practices and research around forms of participation and collaboration. This reflection upon our experience in two voices is part of the fragmented co-authorship, which, like every collaboration, is full of holes, questions, and fractures in terms of how decisions are being made and what is the place of every voice. For me, the term "collaboration" is always problematic, as it implies that a consensus could be reached without coercing one voice to accept the point of view of another. I prefer participation, which invites deconstruction and allows conflicts to unfold without self- destruction. Thus, the workshop is part of my ongoing attempts to practice an embodied, performative, and at times personal position; looking to connect to others to create a fragmented collectivity, a disruption of normative perceptions of kinship, where the individual voice is present and differentiated amongst others.[4]

As previously mentioned, the workshop put an emphasis on people who came in as audience members, not as invited artists-activists-participants. When we planned it, I couldn't have predicted how my own experience as an audience member enacted a certain complexity, read through the lens of the participatory intentions and their aftermath. While I'm not able to give concrete examples here, I'd like to foreground my contradictory experiences of the exhibition, which shifted between a generous sense of welcoming and care to a certain inaccessibility within participatory forms and formats.

In that moment with my grandmother, which I suddenly recalled while visiting documenta, we connected through a shared memory of music that we listened to together when I was a child. Perhaps our ears have better abilities than our eyes, in provoking memories, feelings, and with them evoking embodied criticality.[5] There were many speaking subjects and voices that documenta amplified and resonated, some that in other contexts are silenced and marginalized.[6] Many works seemed to have asked about forms of listening or offered sonic solidarities. At the same time, within the exhibition's radical participatory approach, there were voices that felt excluded from the conversation.[7]

It felt like an invisible line was drawn between the mostly Western audience and the mostly non-Western participating artists, collectives, and the communities they worked with. The line defined two different levels of engagement: on the one hand, a collaboration and sharing of resources with the invited artists, exhibiting numerous multilayered approaches to activist participation of communities in situated contexts, appealing in their inventive use of political imagination and performative documenta-ries; on the other hand, the participation of the audience, which often remained on the level of spectatorship. While attempts were made to offer more direct participation, they seemed to have been countered by conflicting moments of confusion as to whom the invitation was extended and to what level—meaning how one is meant to participate and in what. This conflictuality, whether intended by the organizers or not, is at once, in my view, the Achilles heel of the exhibition, as well as where its unique power lies.[8]

Perhaps taking control from those who are used to having it and delegating it to others is an essential way of rerouting to something different. The entire concept of lumbung seemed to have been an invitation for documenta to let go of its control,[9] and confu-sion is inevitably a part of letting go. While I'm still processing these contradictions, I can sense the transformative power of this experience and hope that the conflicts will lead to new meeting points between participation and activism, rather than to a

backlash in the form of censorship and limitations of radical, experimental, participatory curatorial endeavors.

As a curator based in Israel, I had my own inner conflict between the curator working with (conflictual) participation, feeling that this exhibition was everything that she had ever dreamed of, to someone who felt like they crashed a party they weren't invited to. But maybe that was exactly the point? When the curatorial approach is based on friendship, one can't be friends with everybody.[10] Perhaps the question of how to take part when the meaning falls apart, or when identity takes over meaning, cannot be untangled.

One thing that stayed with me is how I cried at least three times during *documenta fifteen*. Once because of a song in an artwork. The second time because I felt helpless and sad about the violence conducted by my country in my name, and because of the lack of possibility of speaking about it. The third time was because of the kindness and empathy of one stranger who said that no one should cry because of their identity. But I still did.

Notes

1 Caste is any of the ranked, hereditary, endogamous social groups, often linked with occupation, that together constitute traditional societies in South Asia, particularly among Hindus in India.
T. Madan, "Caste," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, February 14, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/topic/caste-social-differentiation.
2 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak uses deconstruction in her work *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010) to examine how certain people are positioned and treated based on class. In my curatorial work, this approach is extended to understand the influence of certain ideologies which position women in India. Through the workshop, the aim was to see how participants were likely to respond to an embodied experience, what awareness is created, the possibility of vocalizing their perceptions through them, and examining their own positions in society.
3 Some of the workshop participants gave other contexts and extended information on the works from their unique knowledges. Others mentioned what they experienced when the works were activated differently on other days, enhancing documenta's ability to shapeshift and produce multiple viewing experiences; yet others described how the work made them feel, how it connected to their own personal contexts, and what memories it triggered.
While this iteration of the workshop was conducted mostly with artists, curators, and MA and PhD students, impacting the type and breadth of knowledge and input, any other group would have produced a valuable body of knowledge with its own merit. Thus, the workshop proposes itself as a model which could be reproduced by other audiences in other exhibitions.
4 My soon to be completed PhD, titled *Echoing with a Difference—Curating Voices and the Politics of Participation,* explores how participatory artistic and curatorial practices in the last decade embody and voice conflicts, in relation to the protest movements that begun after the financial crisis of 2007-8. In it, I tackle the entanglement between the personal and the professional as embodied criticality in both curating and research, by connecting with thinkers that encourage an embodied and at times feminist position with regard to research and curation. Among them are Donna Haraway in "Situated Knowledges," calling for embodied local accounts that regain agency through collectivity; Irit Rogoff's notions of "Smuggling" and "Embodied

Criticality" as a state of frustration and heightened awareness with transformative powers (More recently, Rogoff has been developing the terms "the Research Turn" and "Becoming Research" to discuss how research has turned from a contextual activity to a mode of inhabiting the world); Marina Garcés in "To Embody Critique," calling for intellectuals to get off their balconies in favor of an embodied relation to the world and to others; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Echo," which explores the empowering potential in echoing others as a form of creating difference; Ulrike Bergermann's contradictory account of participating in protests of the Occupy movement; and Sruti Bala in "The Gestures of Participation," who reflexively acknowledges the inherent difficulty in embodied research and subjective accounts of participation.

5 The contested relations between the voice and the gaze are another focus of my PhD research. I explore the political potential of the human voice as a manifestation of critical participation (Freud, Austin, Dolar, Žižek, Chion, Conor, LaBelle), as well as look at conflictual collectivities manifested with voices and bodies and how they affect the power relations between curator, artist, community, and institution (Nancy, Butler, Moten, Lepecki, Dyson, and others).

6 This platform is too limited to discuss them, but I would like to mention some of the artists and artist collectives that exhibited impressive works in this context, among them Wakaliwood, Black Quantum Futurism, Yasmine Eid-Sabbagh, Komina Film a Rojava, Sada, Cao Minghao & Chen Jianjun, Madeyoulook, FAFSWAG, Instituto de Artivismo Hannah Arendt, Trampoline House, and others.

7 I'm not only relating to what has been known unofficially as "the scandal" and the events that followed, which I won't go into here, but to a multi-layered perspective developed from conversations with artists and audiences. I attempt to develop this perspective further in the concluding chapter of my PhD and bring concrete examples. Unfortunately, this platform is too short to allow this kind of detailing, and I'm aware that it's somewhat unfair to bring in this argument without further explanation. I can only promise that it will be continued in another platform and emphasize that this is my embodied experience of the exhibition and of how it was encountered by others, based on observation, conversation, hearsay, and gossip. Also, I emphasize that I bring this perspective from the utmost respect to the caring, radical, complex, and revolutionary move conducted by the exhibition curators and all their collaborators.

8 In my PhD, I look closely at the challenges and potentialities of conflictual and antagonistic participation via Grant Kester, Claire Bishop, Oliver Marchart, and others.

9 An interesting anecdote in that regard is the story told by one of ruangrupa's members in a conversation with Richard Bell and Taring Padi, which I listened to in the frame of Bell's "Embassy" project: he mentioned how, when asked if they wanted to give a proposal for curating documenta, ruangrupa, instead of sending in a proposal, asked documenta a question in return: Do you want to do the lumbung thing with us?

10 ruangrupa spoke in various contexts about how their curatorial methodology is to make friends. One example can be found here in my conversation with farid rakun from ruangrupa for OnCurating: https://www.curating.org/farid-rakun/

Impressions of workshop "Untitled (Re-curating documenta fifteen)",
part of "Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education," CAMP notes on
education, *documenta fifteen*. https://www.curating.org/commoning-
curatorial-and-artistic-education

Maayan Sheleff is a PhD candidate at the Curatorial platform, the University of Reading (UK) and ZHdK (CH), exploring the agency of the voice in participatory, performative and political curatorial practices in relation to protest movements of the last decade. Since 2005 she has been working with museums, nonprofit spaces and in the public sphere, both as an institutional curator and as an independent practitioner. Until recently she was the Artistic Advisor of the Art Cube Artists' Studios, Jerusalem, and the founder and curator of its international residency program, LowRes Jerusalem. In the past she was the curator at the Center for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv, and the co-curator of the first Tel Aviv- Jaffa Biennial (ARTLV 2009). Sheleff curated projects at the Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht, the Netherlands, Reading International festival, UK, the Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo, Madre Museum, Naples, Shift Festival, Basel and Tranzit, Prague, among others. Her publications include (U*n)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communcal Bodies*, OnCurating academic book series (co- editor with Sarah Spies, 2021), "Fear and Love in Graz", in *Empty Stages, Crowded Flats. Performativity as Curatorial Strategy, Performing Urgency* #4, ed. Florian Malzacher and Joanna Warsza (Berlin: House on Fire, Alexander Verlag and Live Art Development Agency, 2017) and "The Infiltrators - Crossing Borders with Participatory Art", in *Refugees and Cultural Education- Formats and strategies for a new field of practice*, Transcript publishing, Germany (2016). Sheleff teaches at the Bezalel Academy for Art and Design, Jerusalem.

Tanya Abraham is a PhD student at the curatorial platform, the University of Zurich(ZHDK) and the University of Reading (UOR). Her thesis concerns contemporary art formats in a culturally traditional society (Kerala, India) and its impact on society through participatory art practices. Since 2012 she has been working as researcher and curator in the field of culture and the arts in Kerala. She has to her credit, two books in the field, and contributes as a writer to the national publications Times of India and Art India. Tanya is also the founder-director of the award winning non-profit organisation The Art Outreach Society (TAOS). Her work associated with it concerns gender roles, art education amongst the less privileged, and social impact in society. TAOS has been recognised for its strong impact on societal change via art education, recently the organisation was granted a mandate by the government of Kerala state to take art education across its 13000 schools via a digital medium. Till recently she was also the creative director and curator of Kashi Art Gallery in Kochi, and is the founder of the Kashi International Art Residency. She has curated a number of exhibitions; In 2016 she curated as collaterals of the Kochi Muziris Biennale two art education projects (exhibitions) titled "Artist the Public Intellectual" and "Landscapes and Silence" , the latter in collaboration with Canadian curator Wayne Baerwaldt In 2018 she curated the collateral exhibitions "Red Crown Green Parrot" and "Of Memories and Might".Some of her other projects include "Influences of an Ancient Nation", Kashi International Residency 2015 in association with the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, and "My Name is Gayatri Gamuz" , 2013, in association with Museuo Fundacion Antonio Perez, Cuenca, Spain in addition to others.
Her current exhibition during the Kochi Muziris Biennale 2022 is titled "A Place at the Table", a participatory public art project of an embodied experience, concerning Kerala's public's relation to contemporary art woven in relation to the position of women in Kerala society.
Tanya lives and works in Kochi, Kerala.

Art-based Commoning?
On the Spatial Entanglement of Cultural and Urban Politics Through the Example of Project Spaces in Berlin
Séverine Marguin and Dagmar Pelger

Self-managed art, culture, and project spaces in Berlin have always been, and are again increasingly, part of an—often resistant—urban development from below. Threatened by the pressure of financialization, precarization, displacement, and appropriation, these spaces are also places of an urban subsistence economy, social reproduction work, or the desire for the good life. In many of these places, art is also a means of political work for a city for all. The aim of an interdisciplinary research course was to trace these processes of an art-based communitization—or commoning—of urban resources in the context of Berlin, the results of which are partly compiled in this text.

Due to its historical and economic "parallel development" as a divided city, Berlin has experienced an initially delayed and then rapidly accelerating urban development since the fall of the Wall. The consequences of neoliberalization, financialization, and digitalization of the global economy have taken hold here at a slower pace than in other large cities, especially in the former East. Rent, land, and real estate price increases and the accompanying gentrification processes can now be experienced all the more drastically in the everyday life of the city as urban development becomes increasingly capitalized.[1] A decades-long withdrawal of state planning bodies from urban development concerns has resulted in a heterogeneous urban landscape of increasingly closed and restrictedly accessible spatial resources. The history of self-managed cultural, art, and project spaces that have emerged in Berlin as very specific participants in urban space production should be seen against this back-ground. The large reserves of space that were opened up due to the restitution regulations of the post-reunification period, especially in the east of the city, became the space of possibility for a very diverse culture of appropriation between art, politics, and cultural work.[2]

Until the mid-2010s, there were still around 150 project spaces in Berlin in the field of visual arts alone, which represented a unique situation worldwide,[3] and which also became an important resource for Berlin's city marketing. As exhibition spaces initiated by artists themselves, which are often used as production spaces at the same time, project spaces form cultural free zones through the curatorial, artistic, and political practices of their operators. The artists thus vehemently use, open up, and defend transitional spaces that are potentially constituted as commons beyond private and public. Today, thirty years after the fall of the Wall, and fifteen years after the financial crisis, the availability of spaces has decreased significantly in the wake of the exponential rent increases and the space situation has become much more acute for artists and cultural workers, not least due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The counter-designs of tolerated open-space occupations, industrial interim uses in negotiation with private owners, contracts with state-owned housing companies, rent

agreements with property managers, cooperative model projects or enforced communitization of real estate in recent years are to be read in this context. They stand for a different contemporary Berlin that has emerged parallel to the financialization of the real estate industry, as a sometimes resistant, sometimes escapist, but in the best case emancipatory and self-empowering practice that keeps open the remaining free spaces - in some cases as common-like spatial areas or spatial commons—and sometimes even manages to reopen them back permanently.

What is the role of self-organized artistic project spaces today in the context of the increasing spatial enclosure of once accessible urban spatial resources one the one hand and in the context of a rising interest for artistic spatial practices, interventions and funding projects in the frame of "urban practice" on the other hand? What has remained of art-based commoning?

Project Spaces as Common Spaces—Theoretical Framing of an Urban Practice
The term "project space" refers to a form of organization in the art field that itself looks back on a longer history: the first project spaces, as they are called in research, emerged in the 1960s in the New York art field[4] and then spread to many Western art metropolises, such as Toronto, Geneva, San Francisco, Vancouver, London, and Amsterdam, but also Berlin.[5] The predecessors of project spaces called themselves something else: gallery, exhibition space, exhibition venue, self-help gallery, gallery-apartment, artist-run-spaces, and so on. Their characters, however, are very similar. The term is therefore by no means an established designation. Some actors, including the Berlin network of free project spaces and initiatives, are pushing it as a uniform—or better: unifying—designation. In a previous research project on project spaces in Berlin and Paris, six criteria for defining a project space were worked out:

Firstly, it is a space in which experimental, discursive, and interdisciplinary art practices are carried out and—secondly—shown to an audience. Thirdly, the space is self-organized by artists and sees itself—fourthly—as an open platform for other artists. Fifthly, the project space is non-commercial, and sixthly, it is not financially supported by the public sector.[6]

By means of an interactive mapping, the development of project spaces in Berlin from the 1970s on was documented. Until the fall of the Wall, the two scenes in East and West Berlin remained overviewable. After the fall of the Wall, the number of project spaces, mainly in the Mitte district, increased rapidly. From the mid-2000s onwards, a further massive expansion continues until the beginning of the 2010s. From then on, the number of project spaces decreases continuously. Under the pressure of the deficiency of affordable spaces, Berlin's independent scenes became politically active in various networks: Berlin Network of Free Project Spaces and Initiatives; Coalition of the Free Scene; and Haben und Brauchen were the most visible. They achieved some successes, such as the Project Space Award or the City Tax funding. During this time, cultural policy became aware of the needs but also potentials of the independent scene, which translated into concrete funding streams for Berlin project spaces.[7]

In recent years, a change in discourse that points to a closer entanglement between artistic and urban practices can be observed: artists are increasingly becoming urban practitioners who, due to an increasing lack of space, discover the potential of linking art production and space production and reinvent possible futures of urban coexistence by means of planning interventions. What thread can be drawn from the historical self-help galleries of the 1970s-1980s to the temporary space production of

the 1990s to the exponential proliferation of project spaces in the 2000s and finally to the emergence of urban practitioners in the late 2010s?

This development of project spaces in Berlin from the sphere of self-organized and potentially common space to commodified and thus private or club-like space on the one hand, or to state-funded and thus institutional or even public space on the other, can be read with reference to commons theories as an enclosure of artistic-cultural free spaces.[8] From another previous research project on Berlin's neighborly embedded commercial spaces as potential spatial commons, communitized space can be distinguished from private as well as public space on the basis of two criteria: accessibility and co-determination.

In cartographic studies, four different spatial models were made distinguishable from each other by transferring commons definitions from both social and economic science perspectives to urban space: according to this, common-like spaces are characterized by a high degree of accessibility, just like public ones, in contrast to private and club-like spaces with restricted access. However, private and common-like spaces have in common a high degree of co-determination regarding the operation and use of the space. In public or club-like spheres, on the other hand, the people using the space are hardly integrated into rules-making. In the self-managed project space, which is neither publicly funded nor operated as a gallery, the rules of artistic, cultural, or social cooperation are potentially negotiated among all participants.[9]

The criteria of accessibility and co-determination make it possible to distinguish self-managed project spaces as potential commons from non-commons. The appropriation and commodification of the terms "artistic practice" and "urban commons" in the context of urban development, marketing, and design, as well as urban research, give us cause to take a closer look at the situation in Berlin on a socio-spatial level and to question it. Therefore, we argue that the practice in project spaces is to be considered as well as questioned as art-based commoning.

Actors in the art field who run self-organized project spaces attach great importance to their economically autonomous and politically free positioning.[10] In the teaching research project, we looked at these two components of self-management from a spatial perspective, searching for those spaces that are produced out of such self-managed contexts and thereby open up and keep open potentially communitized spaces. "Potentially" because the economies and politics are rarely transparent and commoning is always dependent on the actual activities and interests of those involved.

What relevance do the practices of the project space collectives have in the sense of space-related community work or as participants in a production of space for the common good? What entanglements between municipal cultural policies and civic urban politics can be traced, disentangled, and interpreted in the context of a common good-oriented urban development at the scales of the project space, the neighborhood, and the city as a whole?

Commoning, Space, and Property
On the basis of an interdisciplinary research course that resulted in a synthesized mapping, initial answers to the questions on the protection of cultural open spaces in Berlin in the context of the enclosure of spatial resources can be derived. On the one hand, different socio-spatial coping strategies can be found, on the basis of which the

project space collectives can continue their artistic, social, and emancipatory practices of open space production. The theses on the interrelation between the respective ownership or rental conditions, a forced institutionalization and the accompanying decrease of commoning practices can be confirmed and formulated more concretely. We would like to draw conclusions from the developments of the last few years for Berlin's urban spatial resources as an outlook that uses the fields of conflict between cultural and urban policy as a reason for a policy of common spaces and argues for greater self-determination for art projects as well as other self-managed cultural spaces.

The strategies and tactics with which project space owners keep their free space open[11] are part of the pressure logics of financialized urban development. An important tool in the research was the question of how the project spaces are conditioned by questions of ownership: who owns the space, who owns the lease, who owns the courtyard, who owns the street in front of it, who owns the art, who owns the city? We were able to identify a differentiated spectrum of ownership and rental relationships for the project spaces, which indicates various degrees of securing accessibility to space. This security of access can be measured along the degree of dependency of the project spaces in the tenancy, which usually implies a specific duration. From this, the three cases can once again be verified as ideal-typical: permanently secure; medium-term with an open future; short-term; and unstable-precarious.

(Relative) Security and Autonomy
Project spaces with a permanently secured tenancy have sustainable access to their premises. Security is either formalized within cooperative ownership models with foundations or cooperatives, relatively secure also by renting from a state-owned housing company with whom an affordable lease could be negotiated, or in negotiation with non-profit private owners. Examples include ExRotaPrint (leasehold with a foundation and joint financing of the project space), SOX (lease with a cooperative at a symbolic rent), Uqbar (rental in state-owned property), Scotty Enterprises (trusting relationship with a private owner). These project spaces have a potentially long-term and sustainable perspective and can thus continue their activities without the pressure to institutionalize and commodify. Securing resources means keeping cultural free spaces open and enabling the maintenance of autonomous self-management as a commoning-like spatial practice.

Open Future and Forced Institutionalization
Project spaces with a medium-term tenancy that is open to the future have little planning perspective. The owners often have an indifferent attitude towards the use of the space and can terminate the lease at any time within the bounds of legality. This is the case with many long-established project spaces, which can also be justified statistically: in the district of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, about 75% of all residential properties (with shops on the ground floor) are privately owned. Project spaces such as G.A.S. Station, Bi'Bak Wedding, or Liebig 12 are more restricted in their autonomy than those with secure access to space, but precisely because of this a solidary and communal alliance with the neighborhood can emerge when displacement and gentrification occur. The search for funding opportunities becomes an exit strategy that secures a temporary income for the collectives, which can then be invested in rent payments, and at the same time forces the institutionalization and dependence on funding programs. This can significantly restrict commoning practices and reduce autonomy.

Liminalization and Destabilization of Spatial Practice

The project spaces with short-term and unstable precarious tenancies have no secure access to space, which is often only granted to them temporarily in the context of interim use. The project spaces are sometimes instrumentalized by the owners to achieve an upgrading of the properties through the use of artists. This is the case, for example, with Spoiler (former car dealership in speculative short-term rental), Disko Babel (development site on the S-Bahnring in a waiting situation) or District (displacement from an industrial site). As a rule, the project spaces only receive very short leases that are partially extended until the property is demolished, redeveloped, or resold. In such precarious tenancies, the practice can only be carried out with difficulty and minimal resources. It is precisely in unstable constellations that a great deal of self-organization and intensified commoning-like practices can be found "against all odds." Commoning as a collectivized production of space, which makes the tiniest and most precarious spatial resource shareable, then becomes a survival strategy with artistic means—or a political service to the landlord who extracts the cultural capital out of artistic representation and upgrading.

It becomes clear that there is a connection between partially forced institutionalization of the activities of the project spaces and a possible loss of the commoning aspects in the context of artistic spatial practice, which also affects the production of space in the surroundings of the project space. For the time being, these are exploratory findings that need to be deepened. However, the investigation shows how project spaces establish their respective political economy that oscillates between self-management and institutionalization depending on the urban and cultural political framework. In this context, we question the structural conditions that municipal administrations and city governments must create in order to maintain, secure, and enable project spaces in the sense of art-based commons. A framework for action for this is provided by the concepts of a common good-oriented urban development in which municipal safeguarding of spatial resources can be thought of and made operative by interlocking with the self-organization of spatial resources.[12] The practices, types, and systems of project spaces considered here can provide different starting points for keeping urban resources open in common.

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Notes

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Dagmar Pelger is an architect and urbanist with an interdisciplinary research focus on spatial commons, critical cartography and design methods for cooperative spatial production from neighbourhood to landscape. Her dissertation on Spatial Commons was published by adocs in 2022. She is currently a guest lecturer in urban design at the UdK Berlin and since 2017 a member of coop-disco, an architecture and planning cooperative based in Berlin.

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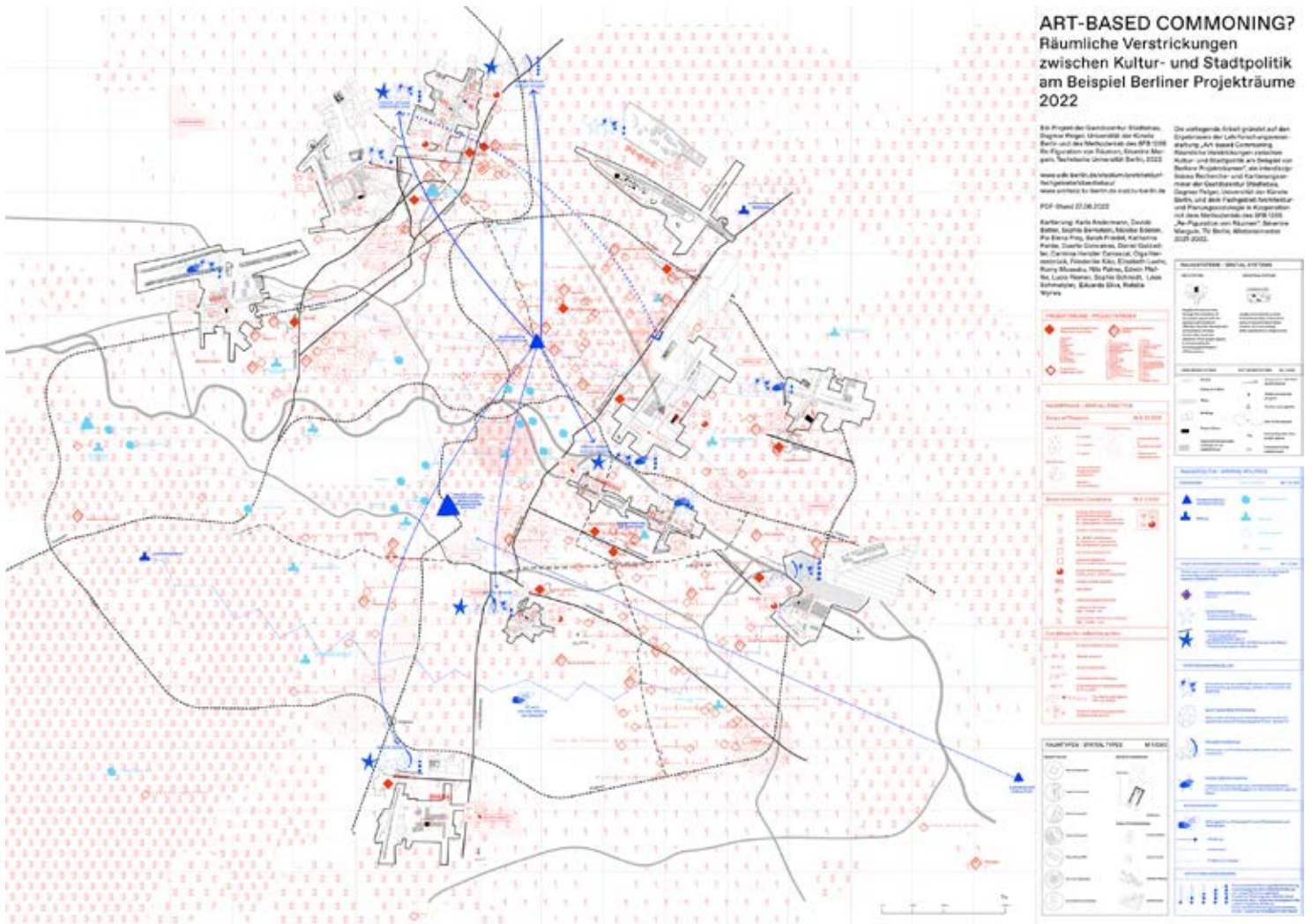
fig. 1: *Art-Based Commoning? – A Mapping of Berlin's Project Spaces 2022 (Gastdozentur StädtebauUdK Berlin, Methodenlab SFB 1265 TU Berlin) and UdK Berlin*

fig. 2 (page 13, left): *Legend Spatial Practice – Socio-economic Conditions (Gastdozentur StädtebauUdK Berlin, Methodenlab SFB 1265 TU Berlin)*

fig. 4: (page 13, right): *Legend Spatial Politics—Funding and Dependencies (Gastdozentur StädtebauUdK Berlin, Methodenlab SFB 1265 TU Berlin)*

RAUMPRAXIS - SPATIAL PRACTICE

Zones of Pressure   M 1: 10 000

Status of residential area

Development areas

1 = simple

2 = medium

3 = good

construction sites & development areas

influencing the neighbourhoods ...

Gentrification

density of the dots marks the level of gentrification

less dots = less gentrification

Socio-economic Conditions   M 1: 3 000

770 % / W — Increase of the land price (since the founding year)
W: „Wohngebiet", residential area
M: „Mischgebiet", mixed-use area

(1) — Duration of existence in years

M / EB — M: „Miete", rented space
E: „Eigentum", owned space
EB: „Erbbauzins", ground rent

dissolution planned soon

existence threatened (due to market/rent circumstances)

source of financing ratio: (red) by state - (white) independent

number of team members

association

state grant „Basisförderung"

visibility to the street: high - middle - low

participation with the non-members: high - middle - none

Conditions for collective action

Professionalization of practice

Website presence

Social media presece

Communication via Telegram

Communication & high participation to the outside

Formats for participation (film, art, dialog)

Tools for collective programmation (website, email, phone)

RAUMPOLITIK - SPATIAL POLITICS

FÖRDERGEBER   INSTITUTIONEN   M 1 : 10 000

Senatsverwaltung / Bezirksverwaltung

Städtisches Museum

Stiftung

Stiftung

Privates Museum

Initiative

STAATLICHE FÖRDERUNG VON PROJEKTRÄUMEN   M 1 : 3 000

Förderungen von staatlichen Institutionen, die häufig an einen (langwierigen) Bewerbungsprozess gekoppelt und zeitlich meistens auf 1 oder 2 Jahre begrenzt ausgestellt sind.

Projektraum mit Basisförderung 2022/23

KUNSTFÖRDERUNG
- Projektraumpreis (30.000Euro),
- Recherchestipendium (2.000 Euro)

INFRASTRUKTURFÖRDERUNG
- nur für Projekträume
- nur BASISFÖRDERUNG *2
(Topf 800.000 Euro pro Jahr; 20.000 Euro pro Jahr/Raum)
- Projektraumprogramm fällt darunter

SONSTIGE EINNAHMEQUELLEN

Finanzierung sich aus anderen Einnahmen, beispielsweise aus Raumvermietung, Ausstellungen, Verkauf, etc., temporär oder langfristig.

NICHT-MONITÄRE FÖRDERUNG

Gibt es außer die finanzielle Unterstützung noch weitere Kooperationen zwischen Förderungsgeber*in und -nehmer*in?

PRIVATE FÖRDERUNG

Förderungen von Privatpersonen, Unternehmen oder privaten Institutionen

EIGENE BEZUSCHUSSUNG

Finanzierung teilweise oder ganz aus Eigenkapital der Betreiber*innen und somit Abhängigkeit von deren finanzieller Lage bzw. Status.

BEZIEHUNGSWEISEN

Abhängigkeit von Fördergeber*in durch Förderkriterien und -bedingungen.

Förderung

Kooperation

Projektraum-Ableger

INSTITUTIONALISIERUNGSGRAD

1 keine staatliche Förderung, Selbstfinanzierung
2 geringfugige bis keine staatliche Förderung, von wenigen Personen organisiert
3 staatliche Förderung, kein offizieller Verein
4 Vereinsstruktur, fungiert als Arbeitgeberin/Vermieterin, staatliche Förderung
5 hohe staatliche Förderung, keine räumlichen Hurden, fungiert als Arbeitgeberin/Vermieterin
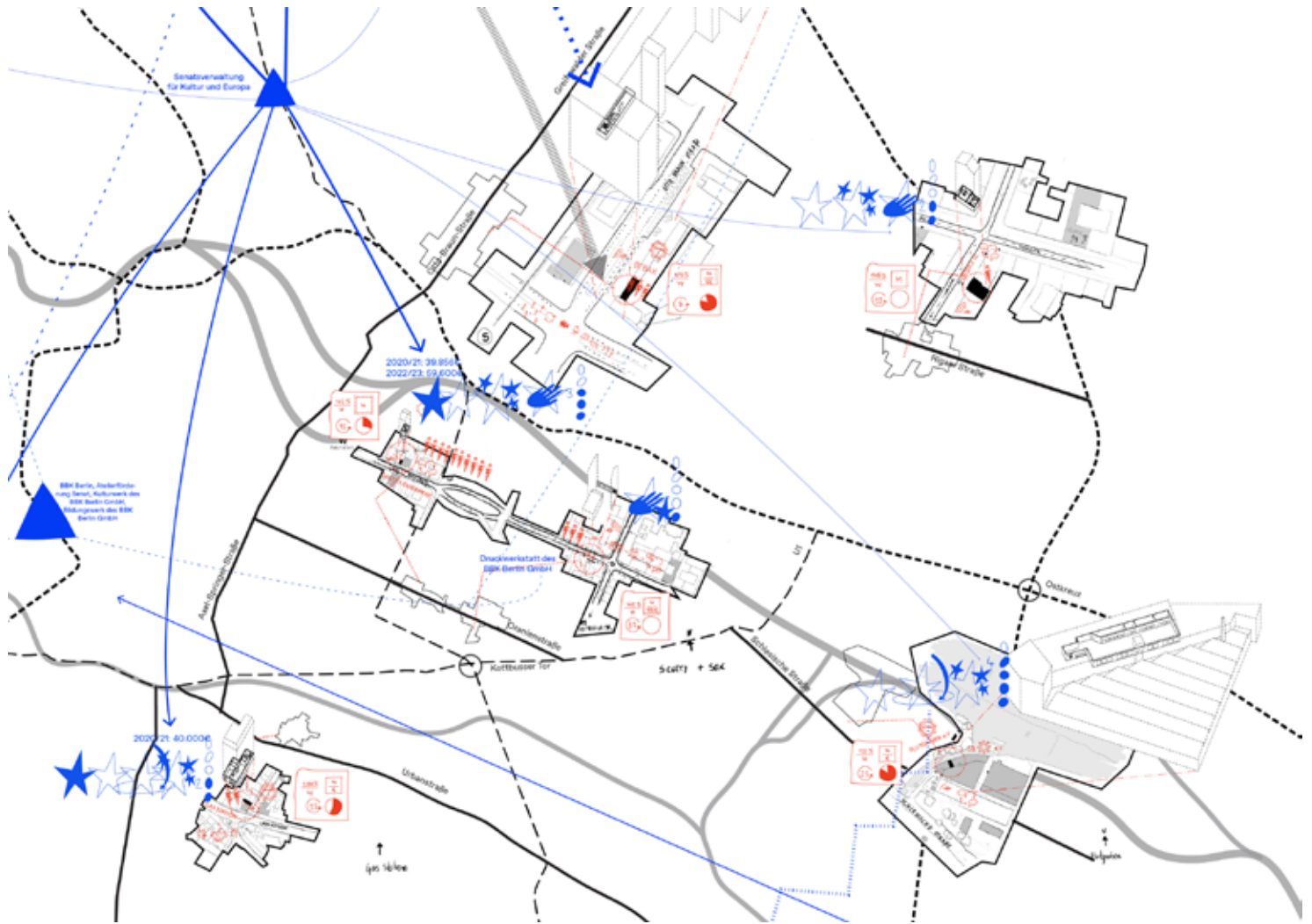
fig. 3: *Zoom-In – Project spaces oscillating between self-management (red) and institutionalization (blue) (Gastdozentur StädtebauUdK Berlin, Methodenlab SFB 1265 TU B erlin)*

On the Ideological Flexibility of the Cultural Common(s):
The Many Lives of Thailand's Art Lane
Unchalee Anantawat, Ariane Sutthavong, Lara van Meeteren, Bart Wissink

In May 2022, we received an announcement from the *Institute of Commoning* (InCommons) introducing a "taster course" for its new *Masters in Commons Administration* (MCA).[1] Bringing together an impressive group of scholars, activists, and organizers "who want to understand the world better in order to be able to change it,"[2] this initiative reflects a growing dissatisfaction with the state of our late-capitalist world, as well as with the complicity of academia in its functioning. It is increasingly clear that states and markets are unable—or unwilling—to respond successfully to the many crises that we face today, so the initiators argue.[3] Instead, governments, corporations, think tanks, and opinion-makers provide "solutions" that keep them in power and in profit. However, the initiators continue, this status quo is now challenged by people (re)discovering new ways of working together and creating and sustaining commons. The *Institute of Commoning* aims to support such initiatives by "offering a programme of study for any adult learner who wants to explore the commons as an alternative and challenge to markets, the capitalist state and colonization."[4] Rejecting the privileging of self-interest, competition, and extraction in contemporary MBA programs—which aim to meet the needs of capital and produce "good workers"—the alternative MCA program is provided outside of the formal education system. In contrast to the exorbitant fees that most universities extract from students, the program is free of charge.

The *Masters in Commons Administration* is but one of many recent initiatives that pit the common(s) against states and the market. Recurrently, these initiatives discuss the potential of the common(s) in response to the many crises of our times.[5] And time and again, these discussions reference the destructive role of neoliberal capitalism. For instance, in her analysis of contemporary crises, *The Old is Dying and the New Cannot be Born*, Nancy Fraser observes that various "forces have been grinding away at our social order for quite some time without producing a political earthquake."[6] Now, however, she finds a widespread rejection of politics as usual, as "an objective system-wide crisis has found its subjective political voice." It is this atmosphere that has ushered in the re-evaluation of existing practices in all institutional domains, on a par with the education initiative of the *Institute for Commoning*. New common practices are now debated and created as a means for realizing more hopeful futures.[7]

Of course, as is widely acknowledged, the writing on the common(s) has various strands, each with their own assumptions and critical potential.[8] Within this literature, the perspective of the *Institute for Commoning*, which presents commoning as a third way of social organizing next to the state and market, is relatively new. Highlighting its potential to produce practices and institutions that can help realize a non-capitalist future,[9] this view centers on that idea that the common—in the singular—can be a means to "reassert participatory control over the urban commonwealth" vis-à-vis

states and markets.[10] In recent years the literature that starts from this view increasingly pays attention to "cultural commoning" as well.[11] On the one hand, this attention relates to the observation that states and markets have radically appropriated the cultural domain, stimulating interest in the consequences of that development, and in possibilities for "freeing" culture of interference by states and markets.[12] On the other hand, following Antonio Gramsci's recognition that culture is a central battlefield for social struggle over domination, cultural commoning emerges as a place where structural social change can be initiated as well.[13] Inspired by these possibilities, here we will reflect on the political nature of cultural commoning from the vantage point of common cultural initiatives aligned with social movements in Thailand.

Ideological Flexibility

The starting point for our discussion is the observation by various authors that the common as a distinct domain next to the state and market is inherently political.[14] Chantal Mouffe, for instance, is outspoken in her opposition to perspectives on the common that postulate "a conception of multiplicity that is free from negativity and antagonism."[15] She argues that the public sphere will always be a "battlefield on which hegemonic projects confront one another, with no possibility of a final reconciliation."[16] By extension, this is also true for a common world, devoid of states and markets. Chantal Mouffe therefore stresses that "commoning" practices should be conceptualized from a political model that recognizes that society is divided and that every order is hegemonically structured.[17] Lauren Berlant similarly criticizes views on the common that somehow downplay antagonism, observing that "[t]he recently 'resuscitated' fantasy of the commons articulates many desires for a social world unbound by structural antagonism."[18] The alternative antagonistic view acknowledges that the cultural common is based on sharing and circulation, but it also stresses that there are boundaries to such sharing, resulting in diverse commons that reflect cultural oppositions. And while some of these commons might be anti-hierarchical and strive for openness and inclusion, others can be exclusionary and de facto function as "clubs." Similarly, while some commons might aim to counter existing hegemonies, and thus support structural transformation of social, political, and economic practices, others might actually support existing hegemonies and thereby resist change. In short, the counter-hegemonic nature of a common is an empirical question.

With others, we have argued that the role of artists and cultural organizations must be understood from this perspective of hegemonic struggle.[19] Chantal Mouffe highlights that artistic practices can be a vehicle for counter-hegemonic struggle, as they can support the emergence of alternative subjectivities.[20] Meanwhile, Jonas Staal pleads for a "propaganda art" of the left that can help to assemble a new "us."[21] However, an antagonistic perspective suggests that leaderless mass movements and the commons to which these are linked can point in many directions, and can thus support existing hegemonies as well.[22] In *Kill All Normies*, Angela Nagle has thus for instance shown that in online culture, the alt-right has appropriated transgression for non-inclusive aims.[23] And in two essays—written more than twenty years apart—that were recently published on *e-flux Notes*, Hito Steyerl and Igor Gulin criticize the idea that art is an inherently progressive or pacifist force; it can be otherwise as well.[24] In other words, cultural commoning is "ideologically flexible." For this reason, it is critically important to analyze the role of artists and artistic practices within the cultural commons vis-à-vis hegemony empirically. An analysis of several art events in Thailand under the heading *Art Lane* can help to illustrate this point.

Contemporary Art and Hegemony in Thailand

Contemporary art practices in Thailand operate within a context of a decades-long hegemonic struggle that—as is well-documented—has been resulting in recurrent coups d'état.[25] This struggle is an expression of radically opposing views of the Thai nation.[26] The dominant view centers on an imagined uniform Thai society, bound by ethnolinguistic homogeneity and by so-called "Thainess," a Buddhist religion, and a monarchy that is protected by strict laws, like the "112" royal defamation law and the Computer Crime Act.[27] According to this view, it is the task of the state—with support of the bureaucracy, monarchy, and army—to educate people in the "right" way, and to defend this imagined Thai unity against internal and external threats.[28] This conviction has gone hand in hand with the production of dramatic economic and political inequalities. From this hegemonic view, art is an instrument to create the "right" public culture by educating citizens.[29] This has translated in the development of institutions such as Silpakorn University, National Exhibitions, and National Artists that have obtained a monopoly on the interpretation and production of Thai culture.

Art education has played a crucial role in this appropriation of contemporary art in the name of Thailand's hegemony. For a long time, Silpakorn University—the offspring of a national art academy founded in 1933 by Italian Corrado Feroci, or Silpa Bhirasri—was at the core of this education. This University and its professors would go on to exercise an iron grip on all facets of Thai art practices for decades to come, regulating access to teaching jobs, annual National Exhibitions, state commissions, and competitions sponsored by banks and insurance companies. Anybody wanting to become an artist therefore needed to succeed within this system, to abide by its rules and expectations, and—crucially—to appease its teachers.

Only in the 1980s did an alternative art scene start to develop.[30] This art scene in part aligned with a radically different view of Thai society, situating sovereignty in the people rather than the palace. Embracing the nation's diversity, in this view the state should improve the well-being of all, and diminish political, social, and economic inequalities.[31] While these ideas certainly translated into counter-hegemonic cultural practices, at the same time, most contemporary artists were reluctant to speak out about issues of human rights, freedom of expression, political justice, or the monarchy in Thailand. Remarkably, such issues—including discussions surrounding the monarchy and the "112" law—have become an important part of the counter-hegemonic agenda in recent years and—as we will see—they are now finding expression in many alternative art practices.[32]

Meanwhile, an influential third view of contemporary art grounded in the Thai corporate world emerged as well. At the core of this view are economic conglomerates that have gained considerable influence on the state and are at the same time willing to leave its core ideas of unity, religion, and the monarchy intact. Following their discovery of the potential of contemporary art for stimulating consumption and enriching real estate, corporations have started to engage with contemporary art, domesticating radical views and appropriating artworks seemingly critical of the existing hegemony along the way.[33] This coincided with the emergence of a new generation of contemporary art visitors, for whom consumerist imaginations of the "good life" are aspirational.[34]

In parallel with the emergence of these new views on contemporary art, the educational system has changed dramatically as well. New art schools—at Chiang Mai University and elsewhere—and study periods abroad have brought Thai students in

conversation with alternatives to the state's view of art. Meanwhile, a growing number of art spaces have introduced platforms for a variety of new practices, thereby supporting imaginations of another Thailand. With these developments, art was increasingly wrested free from the "Silpakorn system."[35] However, the Silpakorn apparatus continues to influence views of what art should be, while structuring opportunities to work within its system. The conflicting common(s) initiatives under the banner *Art Lane*, which took place first in 2014, and later in 2020 and beyond, are clear expressions of these different views of contemporary art.

Art Lane 2014

Art Lane was first introduced to reference a collection of artist-led events that took place in early 2014, both within and in support of the "Shutdown Bangkok" street protests, organized by the self-styled People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) against Thailand's Yingluck Shinawatra government. These protests extended a period of mass-mobilizations, both in favor of and against the country's highly divisive Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra—Yingluck's elder brother—who had come to power in 2001.[36] Campaigning with populist measures that attracted rural voters, Thaksin won various democratic elections in landslide victories. The policies of this businessman cum politician "combined aggressive neo-liberalization with capitalist cronyism, and absolutist counter-reform politics with populist social policy, to radically transform the existing patterns of power relationships and elite resource allocation."[37] Support for Thaksin's administration from the rural electorate was enormous. However, the questionable, anti-democratic nature of many of his policies—which included a violent military campaign in the Deep South, extra-judicial killings during a war against alleged drug dealers, the tax-free sale of his almost $2 billion corporation to Singapore, attacks on the legal system, and increased media censorship—meant that he was detested by the old elite, inhabitants in the Deep South, and the urban population—intelligentsia included—alike. After his ouster in a military coup on September 19, 2006, enduring popular support for Thaksin meant that political parties aligned with him continued to win subsequent elections, eventually putting his sister Yingluck in power. The PDRC was set up in November 2013 by ultra-nationalist and pro-royalist Suthep Thaugsuban with the aim of unseating Yingluck and ridding Thailand once and for all of Thaksin's influence.[38] Its months-long demonstrations eventually paved the road for the May 22, 2014 military takeover of the country.[39]

In late 2013, professors at Silpakorn University with help of students—voluntarily or not—started to use art as a means of political expression to show their support for the PDRC movement. Activities took place at the university's Wang Tha Phra campus on Rattanakosin Island—the capital's old town—and its vicinity, including a rally on November 11, 2013, in which signs produced by students with anti-government slogans were carried from Silpakorn University to Democracy Monument on Ratchadamnoen Klang Road. On January 11, 2014, these professors joined other artists, again at Democracy Monument, where they produced forty-two anti-government paintings.[40] These paintings were subsequently put on view in a show called *Silpa Karawa Prachatham* (Art in Praise of the Masses) at the DOB Hualamphong Gallery on Rama IV Road, where they were sold to generate funds for the PDRC. Asked about their motivation to participate in these political activities, associate professor Thavorn Ko-Udomvit who managed the exhibition stated that, "[a]s artists who think differently from the government, we agreed to take action and call for political reform through our artistic skills."[41] Other Silpakorn professors stressed that they couldn't stay silent.[42]

In light of these initial activities, it is not surprising that Silpakorn professors again contributed to various protest events under the name *Art Lane*, organized in the context of the "Shutdown Bangkok" campaign which started on January 13, 2014. This campaign did not only aim to block major intersections in the capital, but also government offices and—in the run-up to the February 2014 general election—polling stations, effectively preventing voters from exercising their democratic right.[43] Instead, the PDRC called for the formation of an unelected government appointed by the king.[44] Despite such ominous goals, PDRC protests were viewed by many as colorful and ebullient manifestations, closer in appearance to festive fairs. Speeches were not the only attractions, as these were often accompanied by concerts, street art, and market stalls. At the protest sites, functional objects such as umbrellas, goodies, clothing items, and accessories with designs featuring the Thai flag were being sold around the clock. In hindsight, the organizers of *Art Lane* were instrumental in the creation of such a convivial façade for the PDRC.[45]

Established by a network of artists, designers, and cultural workers, *Art Lane* operated outside of formal cultural institutions, bringing creative organizing initiatives to the street[46]—specifically around the Chidlom intersection in central Bangkok. *Art Lane*'s commoning nature was captured in the documentaries *Bangkok Joyride: Chapter 1 - How We Became Superheroes* (2017) and *Bangkok Joyride: Chapter 2 - Shutdown Bangkok* (2017) by filmmaker Ing Kanjanavanit—herself a fervent PDRC supporter. Positioning her camera within the crowd, Ing's footage—edited without commentary—grants viewers unmediated access to a street-level view of the movement, thus highlighting its "popular" aspect. The film's credits read: "Starring The Ordinary People of Thailand." The heterogenous contributions of artists to the protests are depicted in the second opus, in which a performer about to appear on the political rally's stage says to her troupe: "What we can do? [...] We don't have to become soldiers or fight anyone; we don't have to be businessmen, but we can raise the people's morale [...]," highlighting the key role of artists in sustaining the protests' momentum.[47] In the 2020 pro-democracy movement, *Free Arts*—a network of artists and cultural workers opposing dictatorship in Thailand—would perform a similar role, organizing alongside the standard flash mobs and succession of speeches, events of a different nature—be they concerts, fashion shows, performances, or participative street art—aiming to maintain steadfastness among protesters.[48]

The instigators of the 2014 *Art Lane* included several well-established Thai artists—many with a Silpakorn affiliation; chief among these were Vasan Sitthiket, Sutee Kunavichayanont, and Amrit Chusuwan.[49] Vasan and Sutee were part of the generation of artists who, in the 1990s, became "standout players" according to David Teh, "putting Thai contemporary art on the international map."[50] Their works were critical of the era's consumerist craze and of the negative consequences of neoliberal globalization. Then, in the early 2000s, Vasan became known for his biting, often bawdy, depictions of Thai political life, as well as conceptual works that denounced Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's crony capitalism. Amrit, who represented Thailand at the 52nd Venice Biennale in 2007, was dean of Silpakorn University's Fine Arts Department and enlisted his students to partake in *Art Lane* activities.[51] Sutee would see his work *Thai Uprising* (2013-2014), mainly composed of agitprop, t-shirts, and placards that he designed for the "Shutdown Bangkok" campaign mired in controversy two years later, when it was included in a group show at the Gwangju Museum of Art.[52] The exhibition, marking the 36th anniversary of the Gwangju Uprising, celebrated peace, human rights, and democratic values in Asia. However, as Thai critics pointed out in an open letter to the museum and curator, the PDRC were no guardians of

democracy.[53] Aided by artists participating in *Art Lane*, this movement had effectively dispatched a representative government—problematic as it might have been itself—and prompted as much as welcomed a military coup.

Whether Silpakorn students participated in the 2014 *Art Lane* of their own volition and based on their personal political beliefs or were pressured by faculty members into assisting more senior artists with labor-intensive tasks is yet to be determined on a case-by-case basis. Tom's Yard (a pseudonym for a former Silpakorn student, then in his second year) says the "SOTUS" system—the acronym for Seniority, Order, Tradition, Unity, Spirit—that exists in many Thai universities but is particularly dominant in Silpakorn's Fine Arts department made it difficult for students to refuse their seniors' requests.[54] Faculty members were using university resources to make objects that would be sold to profit the PDRC, he added. These resources included students' free labor, but also supplies and materials provided by the university's shop that were acquired with revenues coming from students' tuition fees. Students were asked in their free time to screen-print t-shirts or make objects and goodies following their professors' or senior artists' templates—a far cry from the creative outpour of 2020-2021, when artists and makers each brought their own designs to the pro-democracy protests. According to Tom's Yard, most students who took part in *Art Lane*-related activities at the time—himself included—did not have a fully formed political opinion of the PDRC. "We did what we were asked to do, but didn't necessarily realise that we were part of something bigger, a movement that was essentially destroying Thai democracy."

The original *Art Lane* events were indisputably a cultural commoning initiative, albeit one that supported the existing Thai hegemony. Its productions were not limited to traditional art objects, but encompassed a variety of media and practices suggesting a "leveling of art to a more general sense of creativity," a tendency which Yates McKee observed in the Occupy Wall Street movement in New York as well.[55] Many *Art Lane* activities, such as graffiti, mural and pavement painting, t-shirt screen-printing, politics-themed games, as well as the sale of art objects and posters, would not have seemed out of place in the more recent 2020 pro-democracy protests in Thailand either, despite—as we will see—the two movements' conflicting ideologies and messages. However, unlike Occupy-affiliated cultural workers, or those involved in Thailand's democratic faction today, original *Art Lane* participants often placed emphasis on their artist identity—which they defined by their "skill" or institutional recognition—rather than letting it be subsumed in the general protest movement and wider protester or citizen identities. By doing so, not only were the artists making the PDRC seem more palatable and appealing, but they created cultural value, which was then transformed into financial value when their works were auctioned at the exclusive Pacific City Club.[56] The proceeds from these sales, in turn, were donated to PDRC leaders. David Graeber understood creative direct action as an autonomous, non-mediated action, but also one "in which the ruling order is challenged even as a new world is 'prefigured,'" adding that "collective resistance and collective invention are inseparable."[57] In the case of the original *Art Lane* event in 2014, the Thai society that its participants prefigured was rooted in inequality and aligned with the existing hegemony.

In an event pre-dating Art Lane, Sutee Kunavichayanont—Silpakorn University professor and well-known Thai artist—paints ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra riding a red crab that clutches Thailand in one of its claws, referencing Thaksin's sister and then Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, whose nickname Pu means crab in Thai (Image from http://www.rama9art.org/sutee/visual.html, 2013).

Vasan Sitthiket—well-known socio-politically engaged Thai artist and PDRC supporter—stands in front of Bangkok's Democracy Monument during a run-up event to *Art Lane*, holding a painting depicting himself as part of the PDRC-led anti-government protests, and the occupation of central locations in the city, known as "Shutdown Bangkok", that would start on 13 January 2014 (Image from https://www.facebook.com/Vasan-Sitthiket-240212462671471/photos/803156999710345, January 2014).

Stenciled poster at the first Art Lane event on 13 January 2014, the start date of the "Shutdown Bangkok" campaign, reading ยึดคืนประเทศไทย [Take back Thailand]. *Art Lane* was situated near the Chidlom rally site of the anti-government protests, from Soi Ton Son to the Chidlom intersection (Image anonymous, January 2014).

Sutee Kunavichayanont produces spray painted t-shirts and posters at the first Art Lane event in front of Central Chidlom on Phloen Chit Road. Some of these were later auctioned at the exclusive Pacific City Club benefiting the PDRC; another batch was displayed in 2016 as *Thai Uprising* in the Gwangju Museum of Art (Image anonymous, January 2014).

Art Lane 2020

In 2020, a new *Art Lane* saw the light of day, this time under very different circumstances and carrying contrasting goals and allegiances. The context for this project was the coup d'état of May 22, 2014 that followed the PDRC protests and its aftermath—the five-year rule of the *National Council for Peace and Order*, a junta led by general Prayut Chan-o-Cha. From the outset, the coup leaders instituted a ban on political gatherings, resulting in the forced de-politicization of all institutional settings in Thailand, including education, for more than five years. Meanwhile, they pushed through a new constitution in 2017, which according to critics instituted far-reaching limitations to the functioning of democracy in Thailand.[58] Political activities only became possible again when the ban on political gatherings was lifted just three months before the first post-coup elections in March 2019, which strongly favored the coup-leaders. Eventually, the election resulted in a civilian government under coup-leader Prayut Chan-o-Cha. Further conflict emerged a year after these long-awaited elections, when the new and successful Future Forward Party—extremely popular with young people—was dissolved on questionable grounds, while the party's founder—Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit—was prosecuted. This was one of the triggers for widespread pro-democracy and monarchy-reform protests in 2020-2021.[59]

It was in this setting that *Art Lane* returned in the summer of 2020. The initiator and organizer behind this event was Atom Pavarit, a fourth-year Fine Arts student at Silpakorn University's campus in Nakhon Pathom. Customarily, students display their work during the end-of-year presentation at the university's art gallery. However, Atom decided to put out an open call under the name *Art Lane 2020*, asking anyone—students, artists, and others—to send in works. The spark for the open call was a conversation with one of his teachers, who had been adamant that art and politics should be kept separate. In the highly charged environment of 2020, when many students were active participants in the pro-democracy protests—with all the risks involved—that position did not sit well with Atom. His unease further escalated when he found material online, documenting this teacher's active involvement in *Art Lane 2014*, which visibly and vocally supported "Shutdown Bangkok" and the PDRC, and by extension was complicit to the years of military rule that followed. Apparently, art and politics should only be separated in certain circumstances.

It can thus be said that *Art Lane 2020* started out as a parody. However, it functioned as a serious indictment of Silpakorn's teachers as well. In 2014, these teachers had entered the political arena with their professional artist and teacher identities. But subsequently, they stayed silent about the many injustices—the decline of democracy, enforced disappearances, rising inequality—under the junta leaders that they helped to put in power. According to the *Art Lane 2020* open call, "Thailand deteriorated in every aspect except the wealth of the capitalists, generals and feudal men."[60] Atom therefore explicitly questioned his Silpakorn teachers: "Before, you were part of it [the political protests] and now there are many problems that arise from these actions; what are you doing now? There is more injustice in society; why are you quiet about it now?"

Art Lane was revived to address such double standards of various Silpakorn teachers. According to a recent open call for a yet to be organized *Art Lane 2022*, the event aims "to be a space for everyone's freedom; a space to criticize and remove society's fears [about expressing yourself politically]."[61] So, whereas *Art Lane 2014* had a conservative inclination, was hierarchically structured, and supported the existing Thai hegemony, these new iterations are counter-hegemonic. They emphasize accessibility for

everyone and result in the display of many heterodox voices—a radical act in a setting where access to presentation spaces is still fundamentally restricted.[62] When asked if he applied for permission to display these pieces at the university gallery's end-of-year presentation for the first *Art Lane 2020* iteration, Atom chuckled, responding: "No, I didn't ask for any permission, because I knew that if I asked, they would not have let me do it."

Atom's own contribution to *Art Lane 2020* consisted of portraits, stenciled on newspaper pages, depicting victims of enforced disappearance by the Thai state over the years. In response to his open call, he also received some 100 other works, about half of which were text-based. These, for instance, included banners from activists and grievances written by high school students. This inclusion of high school student work reflects a broader emergence of middle and high school student activism, also exemplified by political protests under the banner "Bad Students" (นักเรียนเลว).[63] Rallying against the rigid structure and rules of the Thai education system, which for instance mandates a strict dress code and the forced cutting of hair, this group demanded an overhaul of the old-fashioned curriculum.[64] In one widely reported event in August 2020, a group of over 500 students marched to the Ministry of Education to protest restrictions on political expression in schools. There, they made the hurriedly summoned Minister of Education wait for his turn to speak, chanting that he had to "get in line": an unheard-of affront in Thailand's hierarchical society, where one is expected to defer to people in power, be they teachers or government officials.[65]

One of the contributing groups to *Art Lane 2020* was PrachathipaType, a self-described collective of "designers who use the art of typography to communicate political issues."[66] They sent in various works, some using a typeface that they had designed called "missing head" (หัวหาย). This typeface was created in response to the Senate's rejection of the "people's draft" for an amended constitution, proposed by free speech watchdog iLaw.[67] Starting out with font TH Sarabun New, which is used by the Thai state in official documents, they cut out the round headers that are part of Thai script. According to PrachathipaType, the resulting typeface symbolizes the fact that the Thai state "doesn't see the people's heads."[68] Other works that the collective sent in referenced rare comments by the Thai king in English to a foreign reporter, who asked the king's opinion about protesters who had been on the streets asking for reform. The king's answers—"We love them all the same" and "Thailand is the land of compromise"—attracted widespread attention; they were also immediately repurposed in the protests, and re-emerged under many guises.[69] Next to such text-based works, the submissions included many political illustrations as well—for instance, those by Bangkokgag and Sina Wittayawiroj®. The latter is an alumnus of Silpakorn University, critical of his alma mater's functioning. At the height of the political protests, Sina shared a new political illustration almost daily with his more than 35,000 followers via Facebook.[70]

The reactions to *Art Lane 2020*'s controversial collection of works and to the hijacking of Silpakorn University's art gallery were as expected: teachers disapproved and deemed the project inappropriate. They were especially bothered by references to the monarchy. And while fellow students did comment with customary responses—"be careful" and "take care of yourself"—by and large they remained quiet. According to Atom, "Nobody talked about it. Most of my friends were afraid of the teachers. They don't want to have any problems with them". However, like-minded peers responded as well. At the request of a fellow student who had just graduated from Silpakorn University, the *Art Lane 2020* collection was once more exhibited at *Light my Fire*, a

bar-restaurant in Nakhon Pathom, in late November 2020. *Art Lane* then made a brief third appearance in December of the same year, when others joined Atom as organizers. This time, new works were shown in the streets of Nakhon Pathom, outside of faculty buildings with the university's walls as canvases and exhibition spaces. The works mainly referenced well-known symbols of the pro-democracy protest movement, such as rubber ducks, the people's plaque and calls for an end to dictatorship. As Atom recalls, the teachers were furious, and the walls were scrubbed clean in a matter of days.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there have been no further *Art Lane* exhibitions at the time of writing. However, this hiatus is most likely to be temporary. *Art Lane* is set to return at the end of 2022, as a call for new works has been put out for a next edition— to be held at Kinjai Contemporary, a gallery that is part of a new wave of spaces enabling people to show works that express alternative, non-hegemonic political positions. For Atom, this is part of a wider transformation process: "I think most of my friends [...] have changed their opinion about Thai art. Before, they used to do contest work, and you know, if you paint a Thai flag or Buddha or the king you would get the prize. They have stopped doing this. [...] I think that more than before, they focus on social issues in their work. Maybe it is hard to sell those works, but I think it is a better way."

Works by Atom Pavarit (left) and PrachathipaType (right) at the second Art Lane 2020 exhibition at *Light my Fire*. Atom's work refers to the many victims of enforced disappearance by the Thai state. PrachathipaType repurposes words of the Thai king, "We love them all the same" and "Thailand is the land of compromise", uttered in response to an unexpected British reporter's question about the protests during a staged walkabout amongst thousands of royalists (Image *Art Lane 2020*, November/December 2020).

Illustration by Sina Wittayawiroj® referencing *Art Lane 2020*. It depicts part of a statue of Silpakorn University's founder, Silpa Bhirasri, that stands in a central square at the university's Wang Tha Phra campus. In the illustration, the statue is "defaced" by graffiti and stickers, referring to current struggles and controversies at the university, as well as a playful reversal of "Shutdown Bangkok" into "Turn on Bangkok". The university's motto "Ars Longa Vita Brevis" is also evoked, but reworked to a critique of the country's dictatorial leaders (Image Sina Wittayawiroj®, June 2021).

Installation view of the second *Art Lane 2020* at *Light my Fire* in Nakhon Pathom. The banner reads "When injustice becomes law, resistance becomes duty" and belongs to prominent political activist Jatupat "Pai" Boonpattararaksa, also known as "Pai Dao Din". Since 2016, Pai has been charged and imprisoned several times, including a 2,5-year prison sentence following a secret trial after an Article 112 charge, based on sharing a BBC profile of king Vajiralongkorn on social media. The people portrayed on the red flags are pro-democracy and monarchy-reform activists, amongst which student protest leaders Parit "Penguin" Chiwarak and Panusaya "Rung" Sithijirawattanakul, and human rights lawyer Anon Nampa, all imprisoned on royal defamation and other protest-related charges (Image Art Lane 2020, November/December 2020).

Mural by RUDE reading "Shutdown Dictatorship"—an obvious play on "Shutdown Bangkok"—on a Silpakorn University wall at its Nakhon-Pathom campus, during the third Art Lane 2020 (Image Art Lane 2020, December 2020).

Objects from พิพิธภัณฑ์สามัญชน (*Museum of Popular History)*, displayed at the "Uprisings Exhibition" at Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University. In line with the museum's aim of collecting objects from all popular movements across the political spectrum, next to artefacts from Thailand, it contains a cap from Trump's "Make America Great Again" campaign and a poster from Hong Kong's protest movement reading 香港人加油 [Hong Kong People Add Oil] (Image พิพิธภัณฑ์สามัญชน Museum of Popular History, 2020).

Beyond Ideological Flexibility?

The various *Art Lane* events illustrate that common art events can have highly contrasting allegiances. While these initiatives have used the same type of common(s)-related arguments to justify their actions, and are each indisputably cultural commoning initiatives, they support radically opposing goals, thus highlighting the ideological flexibility of the common. While this might seem a relatively obvious conclusion for those interested in political activism, against the background of a broad literature that presents the common as a solution for the appropriation of the cultural domain by states and markets, it is important nonetheless. The *Art Lane* events suggest that common initiatives cannot provide a final reconciliation for the shortcomings of states and markets, because the cultural commons itself will always be political, made up as it is by various opposing voices. Instead of presenting the common as solution, we have therefore argued for a perspective that pays precise attention to the actual alliances of a certain common; and we have argued that this should especially focus on the relation of those alliances to hegemony.

The importance of attention for the relation between a common and hegemony is underlined when seeing their different reception. While *Art Lane 2014* received a favorable response from within the existing hegemony, the organizers of *Art Lane 2020* had to struggle against institutional constraints, including the university system. Furthermore, the Silpakorn University system has clearly supported the retelling of certain views of past commons, while restricting the retelling of others. It is not surprising therefore, that one objective of the *Art Lane 2022* initiative is "to study the past so that it doesn't happen in the future."[71] This harks back to a remark of one the teachers in response to *Art Lane 2020* in the university art gallery: "The past is the past, we should forget it and start again." However, in Thailand, up until now, the past is not forgotten at all, and one hegemonic side has had a monopoly on the writing of history. However, illustrating Kodwo Eshun's attention for the importance of "counter-memories,"[72] this monopoly is recurrently challenged, most recently—as we have seen—by protesters and commons initiatives like *Art Lane 2020*. The common-based *Museum of Popular History*—a topic for discussion in its own right—is another example of a common initiative that challenges the control over memory by one hegemonic side. Collecting objects from popular movements across Thailand's political divide, the initiator behind this museum wants to accommodate the conservation and development of counter-memories.[73] Aiming to fill the gap left by Thai museums and their history-telling, the museum targets the preservation of all political expressions, so that future audiences may make up their own mind. This at least ensures that we remain aware of all political activities of old, and that we continue asking Atom's crucial question: "Why are you quiet about it now?"

Notes

1 Institute for Commoning, "MCA taster course," https://www.incommons.info/masters-in-commons-administration/taster-course.
2 Institute for Commoning, "Home," https://www.incommons.info/home.
3 Institute for Commoning, "Take back the commons," https://drive.google.com/file/d/1J5MKTD3Ddg4XGIL9IRDEeDwcWeZFwfCv/view.
4 Ibid.
5 For an intriguing analysis of the political role of such crisis-talk, see Janet Roitman, *Anti-Crisis* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014).
6 Nancy Fraser, *The Old is Dying and the New Cannot be Born: From Progressive Neoliberalism to Trump and Beyond* (London and New York: Verso, 2019), 9.

7 For earlier presentations of our views on cultural commoning on which these discussions are partly based, see Ariane Kupferman-Sutthavong, Lara van Meeteren, and Bart Wissink, "Art and Politics in the Age of Radical Appropriation: An introduction," in Ariane Kupferman-Sutthavong, Lara van Meeteren, Bart Wissink and Sina Wittayawiroj®, *Common Dissent: Texts on Art and Politics in the Age of Radical Appropriation* (Bangkok: inappropriatae BOOK CLUB, in Thai, 2021), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354680260_Art_and_Politics_in_the_Age_of_Radical_Appropriation_An_Introduction; Bart Wissink and Lara van Meeteren, "Art Organisers as Commoners: On the Counter-Hegemonic Potential of the Bangkok Biennial," *Social Inclusion* 10, no.1 (2022): 126-140, https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v10i1.4895; Lara van Meeteren and Bart Wissink, "Artists as Organisers: Cultural Commoning and Hegemony in Thailand," in Thijs Lijster, Pascal Gielen and Louis Volont, *Rise of the Common City: Cultural Commoning in Urban Conditions* (Brussels: ASP Editions, 2022), 133-149.

8 For a discussion of these different strands, see for instance, Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, *Common: On Revolution in the 21st Century* (London etc.: Bloomsbury, 2019); Louis Volont, *Shapeshifting: The Cultural Production of Common Space* (Antwerp: Antwerp University Press, 2020).

9 See, for instance, Dardot and Laval, *Common*; Massimo De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia: On the Commons and the Transformation to Postcapitalism* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2017); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009); Stavros Stavrides, *Common Space: The City as Commons* (London: Zed Books, 2016); Volont, *Shapeshifting*.

10 Louis Volont and Peer Smets, "The Politics and Aesthetics of the Urban Commons: Navigating the Gaze of the City, the State, the Market," *Social Inclusion* 10, no.1 (2022): 84-90, https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v10i1.5392.

11 See, for instance, Massimiliano Mollona, *Art/Commons: Anthropology beyond Capitalism* (London and New York: Verso, 2021); Cornelia Sollfrank, Felix Stalder, and Susha Niederberger, *Aesthetics of the Commons* (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2020); Thijs Lijster, Pascal Gielen, and Louis Volont, *Rise of the Common City: Cultural Commoning in Urban Conditions* (Brussels: ASP Editions, 2022).

12 See also Lara van Meeteren and Bart Wissink, "Biennials and Hegemony: Experiences from the Thai Laboratory," *OnCurating* 46 (2020): 431-449, https://on-curating.org/issue-46-reader/biennials-and-hegemony-experiences-from-the-thai-laboratory.html#.XxKTIPJS_OQ; Kupferman-Sutthavong, Van Meeteren, and Wissink, *Art and Politics*.

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Feral Atlas and the More-than-Human Anthropocene
Anna L. Tsing, Jennifer Deger, Alder Keleman Saxena and Feifei Zhou

Acceleration, artwork by Feifei Zhou

An atlas is more than a collection of maps. It is a compendium of vantage points, an iterative instruction manual that teaches us how to look at landscapes. Map by map by map. *Feral Atlas* curates a series of 79 field reports from the Anthropocene with just such an aim in mind. Taken together, the reports within *Feral Atlas* present a distinctive reorientation towards seeing, knowing—and, we hope, further attending to—the proliferating environmental challenges of our times. Offering a variety of intimate and expansive glimpses of the material processes through which environments are being profoundly and often irrevocably transformed, *Feral Atlas* demonstrates the impossibility, indeed the plain wrong-headedness, of presuming to impose a singular, systematizing perspective on Anthropocene environments. In doing so, *Feral Atlas* stretches the genre of atlas and, indeed, what counts as a map. What follows is a series of signposts towards key ideas that inform *Feral Atlas* and its curatorial ethos, intended to help users to recognize this diverse collection as an atlas—and, more particularly, as an Anthropocene atlas.

Feral Atlas mobilizes an intellectual commons, that is, a set of approaches to the Anthropocene in which heterogeneity and open-endedness are essential characteristics. This commons is neither bounded nor exclusive; differences—across continents and regions, across disciplines, across ontologies, and across forms of access and privilege—are key. And yet, taken together, the reports and stories in *Feral Atlas* urge a collective shift in how we make sense of the world. Through juxtaposing varied genres and perspectives, the Atlas encourages users to themselves participate in thinking together about the urgent problems of our times.

For scholars and public thinkers, *Feral Atlas* develops a distinctive approach for transdisciplinary study of the Anthropocene that sticks closely to evidence while also addressing wide-ranging social issues. The following is a list of elements of this approach. Our list also clarifies the atlas's key features, bringing together material introduced elsewhere on this site and raising additional issues. The editors hope this approach will inspire continuing research, discussion, and action regarding the more-than-human Anthropocene

Treat the Anthropocene as patchy

Feral Atlas argues that study of the Anthropocene should offer spatial as well as temporal analysis. Rather than an undifferentiated earth-wide effect, the Anthropocene is made in nonhuman responses to imperial and industrial infrastructure, which is distributed unevenly across the earth. Even carbon dioxide, distributed across the atmosphere, has a patchy distribution, created from the concentration of fossil fuel-burning factories and combustion engines, on the one hand, and carbon dioxide-reducing plant life, on the other. Such differentiation matters. If we want to ameliorate Anthropocene conditions or perhaps even put a stop to the Anthropocene, as we know it, we need to look at the specificity of the landscape structures and infrastructures that produce Anthropocene effects.[1]

To study the Anthropocene as patchy requires transdisciplinary collaboration, because the landscape histories that create patches are simultaneously human and nonhuman. Questions of colonialism, violence, class, race, and gender, for example, are not just add-ons to landscape analysis; they constitute patches that matter. The violent depopulation of the Americas after European conquest is a case in point; arguably, this was the beginning of the Anthropocene.[2] The history of slavery, and resistance against it, was key to creating the plantation form that continues to generate the Anthropocene.[3] Something as parochial-sounding as the particularities of race and gender in the postwar United States had a major impact in shaping the global Great Acceleration, led by US policy.[4] At the same time, none of these histories can show us the Anthropocene without detailed attention to nonhuman activities and their historical changes. The discussion requires biology, physical geography, environmental studies, and geology.

Watch the infrastructure
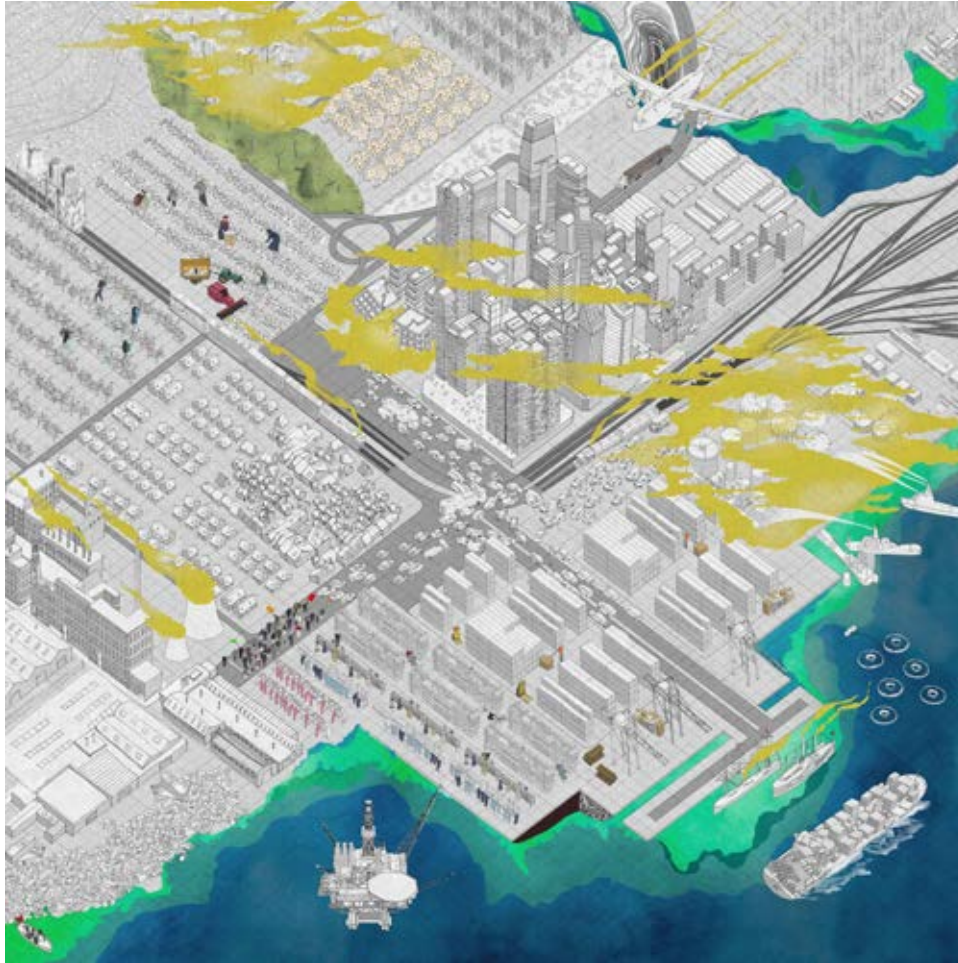
Capital, artwork by Feifei Zhou

Feral Atlas follows the material effects of land-, water-, and atmosphere-transforming projects. Two features of the argument are worth repeating. First, long-distance projects of conquest, governance, and investment for the accumulation of wealth have had an outsized role in transforming local-to-planetary ecologies. This results, in part, from the fact that project managers do not have to live with the results of their programs. Second, both brand-new and broken-down infrastructures have a role in making the Anthropocene; indeed, it is difficult to separate them because they are often created together, as, for example, when the renovation of a city is accomplished by displacing its workers to slums outside the city.[5] Infrastructures do not have to be broken to have feral effects, but sometimes broken infrastructures do have the most terrible effects. Indeed, the discriminatory nonmanagement of infrastructure contributes to the world-ripping state change created by toxic wastes, an Anthropocene phenomenon discussed in *Feral Atlas* as DUMP. (See Tippers; also DUMP.)

Consider how infrastructures emerge within those historical conjunctures that give rise to novel infrastructure-building programs.

Four sets of historical conjunctures are key in conjuring the environmental dangers called Anthropocene. *Feral Atlas* calls them Anthropocene Detonators: Invasion,

Empire, Capital, and Acceleration. In some ways they correspond to the Anthropocene start dates proposed by various scholars (see Anthropocene Detonators and What Is the Anthropocene?): Invasion moves from the 15th-century European colonization of the Americas; Empire from the 16th-century spread of European imperial schemes to Asia; Capital from new forms of accumulation in the 19th century; and Acceleration from 20th-century decolonization under the Cold War and American hegemony. Yet *Feral Atlas* detonators do not represent a chronology, but rather a set of syndromes historically initiated but stretching into the present. The historical conjunctures of each Detonator bring into the world a set of infrastructure-making projects that change the conditions of relations between humans and nonhumans. (See "Luminary Essays" in Reading Room and editors' texts on Invasion, Empire, Capital, and Acceleration.)

Infrastructures show us landscape structure
Certain kinds of infrastructures have created radical shifts in how ecologies function. The ecological simplification associated with industrial agriculture, for example, nurtures pests and diseases. (See GRID.) The speed, range, and lack of regulation of global trade moves so many living "hitchhikers" that at least some will prove to be detrimental to local ecologies. (See TAKE.) The burning of fossil fuels has changed the composition of the atmosphere, causing shifts in weather and climate. (See BURN.) In each of these cases, the forms of relationality that link organisms and their environment are forced to change. Such skeins of relations are a form of "structure," and anyone who cares about life on earth needs to pay attention to the radical shifts to which all of us are subject. (See also essays on CROWD, PIPE, SMOOTH/ SPEED, DUMP.)

GRID, video by Armin Linke

The appropriate scale depends on the feral process
The scale for understanding the Anthropocene should not be determined in the forced march of a preestablished framework; instead, scales of attention are properly shaped by the problem at hand. When learning about a disease, for example, an epidemiologist ideally follows where it goes rather than drawing an arbitrary boundary; only in following the disease can one know whether it is limited to a single town or spreading across continents. But this means that varied Anthropocene problems address each other across incompatible scales. *Feral Atlas* argues that scalar incompatibility is

important to understanding the Anthropocene; indeed, the Anthropocene is a set of incompatibly scaled effects.

The open-endedness of determinations of scale relates to the *Feral Atlas* editors' use of the term patchy. The term is drawn from landscape ecology, where a patch is a unit of relative homogeneity compared to its surroundings. A great forest, a stand of trees, a leaf, a spot of insect dung: each of these is a patch. Since landscapes are defined by their heterogeneity at every scale, determining which bit of comparative homogeneity matters depends on the problem at hand. Patches can range from microscopic to continental.

Specialized Anthropocene patches include factories, feedlots, and mines. They include traveling, mutating viral clouds, and the ranges of underwater machine noise. They include chemicals seeping from industrial tanks and uneven deposits of radiocesium after a nuclear plant accident. We need to know a lot about these patch ecologies— and their spreading effects on surrounding landscapes. Such ecologies fall firmly into the all too rarely explored zone joining natural and social sciences; they are incitements to collaborate.

Feral Atlas stretches the term patch to allow "patchy Anthropocene" to refer to links as well as spaces. Some links are ecological corridors, that is, bridges for the movement of plants and animals. Others involve relations of power and inequality, as when supply chains designed to funnel resources to rich countries create "shadow ecologies" of devastation in their wake.[6] Others still are out-of-control spin-offs, as when pathogens that have evolved among the amassed bodies in industrial chicken farms jump to new hosts, including humans.[7]
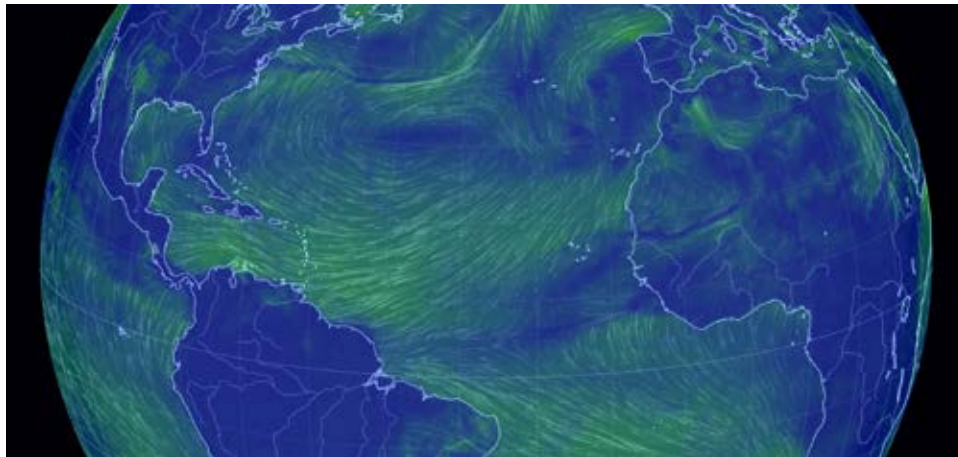
Wind streamlines over the Atlantic Ocean. Scientists speculate that coffee spores were carried to the Americas by the wind. Image from Earth visualization software at 2018-06-23 at 3.36.45 PM.

Many authors in *Feral Atlas* offer reflections on the need to be alert to shifting scales as patches and links reform themselves. Feral dynamics jump over walls: Ivette Perfecto describes how coffee rust fungus, encouraged by the full-sun conditions of monocrop coffee plantations, spreads from those plantations into shady smallholder farms that had once been able to avoid the rust. Once there, it is almost impossible to stuff the rabbit back into the hat; the rust will not be contained within the zone that led to its success. Indeed, industrial infrastructures have done a good job of spreading feral processes that might have stayed in one place. Kate Brown's report on blueberry

picking in the radioactive forests of northern Ukraine tells of the systematic transfer of radioactivity via the global trade in "organic wild blueberries." Corridors follow trade routes and shipping patterns. Yet sometimes traveling feral entities sediment, becoming dangerous precisely because of their accumulation in a place. Nathalia Brichet writes of the effects of the anti-fouling paints used to keep marine life off of ships' hulls as it collects in Caribbean harbors. In harbor concentrations, hormone-disrupting toxins in the paint stop marine snails from reproducing, decimating the population and changing the ecology of the harbor…. Start with the feral process, these authors suggest. It will show you the scale.

Co-temporalities matter

This merely means that many processes are happening at the same time, at different tempos. The only reason this is not obvious is that the ideology of progress has trained people to think that only one trajectory could be headed toward the future. Everything else was either irrelevant or a patch of not-yet-dissolved backwardness. This narrowing of attention shaped understandings of both humans and nonhumans. "Primitive people" were imagined as if they lived in a timeless past removed from the time of ethnographic fieldwork encounters.[8] Other living beings were also imagined as static machines of reproduction: once they attained their evolutionary status as a species, perhaps millions of years ago, they never changed again but only remade themselves over and over.

In recent years, more historically dynamic approaches have entered both biology and anthropology, and these allow scholars to appreciate the sometimes rapid historical shifts that have shaped our times. Anthropologists have turned to the interactions of people around the globe—those very people imagined outside history—to explain the world-making shifts of the last 500 years, such as the making of capitalism, empires, and commodity chains.[9] Biologists have shown the importance of rapid and relentless evolution, as organisms respond to other species and to their nonliving environment.[10] Far from being static since their millions-year-old origins, many organisms change at the same tempo as human histories. This is because human projects have become a major source of change for other organisms.[11] Human and nonhuman histories twine together in creating the Anthropocene, and scholars need to learn to notice more of the threads in these knots.[12,13]

New possibilities for rapid and inexpensive DNA sequencing have made the histories of nonhuman populations more accessible to researchers, sparking a revitalization of the field of phylogeography, the study of biological distributions. This is an important new resource for social scientists and natural scientists working together. Paulla Ebron's *Feral Atlas* report, for example, shows how the diseases that so many commentators have thought were merely carried from Africa to the New World in some cases came into being in the Middle Passage, that is, the forcible transport of enslaved people. The Aedes aegypti mosquito, which carries the yellow fever virus, formed a new population on the slave ships that adopted habits of "domestication," the desire to hang around people, in contrast to these mosquitoes' African cousins, which preferred forests. Whereas earlier scholars imagined that Africans did not suffer from "African diseases," this new research—based on phylogeography combined with social history—explains why so many enslaved workers died from the same diseases that were killing Europeans and Native Americans. These were new disease conditions. Scholarly appreciation of the suffering of slavery needs this kind of more-than-human research.

Other contributors to *Feral Atlas* also weave social histories and phylogeographies. Matteo Garbelotto's research on Sudden Oak Death in California used this approach to track the disease from commercial nursery shipments. Thomas Bassett and Carol Spindel show how Phragmites, the common reed, changed from a native plant into an aggressive exotic. Through such histories, the many timelines that create the Anthropocene come into view.

Radical difference forms both sharp edges and historically productive friction. To build a field to study the Anthropocene, scholars must create bridges across lines of mutual unintelligibility. *Feral Atlas* works back and forth across some of these lines, aiming to create a novel audience of scholars, students, and general readers who might find in *Feral Atlas* a taste for kinds of research they had not found before. Yet building such bridges is full of hazards, and remembering those hazards is useful to appreciate the task. For example, the atlas asked natural science contributors to be true to their scientific standards, even as the digital architecture allows users to read these reports in a social science frame. It seems likely that natural scientists will find the frame inadequately scientific; yet humanists and social scientists will criticize it for taking science too seriously. These are some of the differences that Feral Atlas must navigate. If there is to be a serious Anthropocene scholarship, it must involve dialogue and translation across these lines.

In this spirit, too, *Feral Atlas* includes Indigenous spokespeople writing across epistemological and ontological gaps. Aboriginal artist Russell Ngadiyali Ashley tells of invasive cane toads in northern Australia based on his perspective through Yolngu kinship and law. Ashley's entry centers on a "map": a painting of his people's relationship with goanna lizards, on the one hand, and cane toads, on the other. Ashley's map illuminates one of the major goals of *Feral Atlas*. Each entry presents firsthand evidence of how nonhuman feral action constitutes the Anthropocene. But the entries are not alike, in many ways, including authors' relationships to their materials. The entries reach out to each other across relations of difference, and they sometimes refuse each other's logics. To bring them together without any expectation that they would form a single common map is *Feral Atlas's* goal.

Yätj Garkman [Evil Frog], Russell Ngadiyali Ashley, 2017

Yet the atlas does not leave the problem as worlds that never meet; it does not proceed as if East is East and West is West.[14] Indeed, through his depiction of a fatal meeting of worlds, Ashley is already contributing to the emergence of a transcultural Anthropocene history. He shares images and stories for an audience beyond his people, and he mixes several different languages in the telling. In *Feral Atlas*, we adopt and extend Ashley's stance, drawing too from the "ontological anarchy" advocated by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro.[15] Through the digital architecture, we constantly try out overlaps, comparisons, lines of connection, and points of refusal. Together these entries show us processes of structuring landscape—neither one single process, nor disconnected separate worlds, but rather active world-making with many players. This is the Anthropocene: both patchy and planetary. If the ways contributors imagine and make worlds differ, so much the better. *Feral Atlas* places entries side by side and comes up with a playful, performative apparatus for comparison and reflection. We do not ask contributors to synchronize their apparatuses for knowing the material. We hope users will find this difference, at the heart of *Feral Atlas*, and use it to think about how a planetary phenomenon can be a system of partial coordinations. At the same time, we hope that the atlas will foster a cumulative appreciation of the larger, underlying arguments above. Map by map by map.
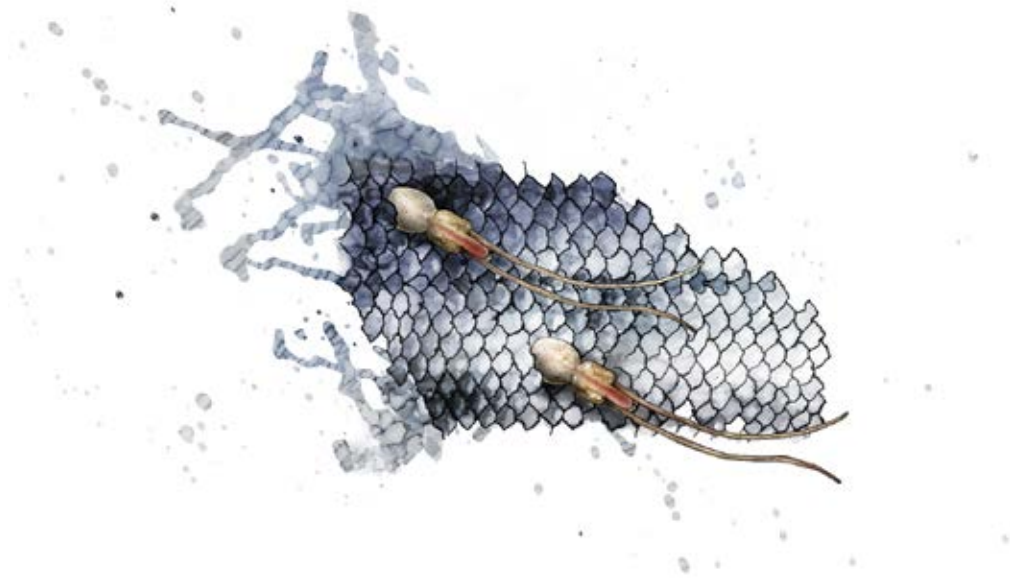
Salmon lice map by Victoria Baskin Coffey

Feral flows and blockages require mapping at different scales and angles

Feral Atlas is an atlas, but a strange one. From the first, we refused the common mapping genre that appears on digital sites: a GIS map that locates cases in global space. Such maps appear to hold answers when they do not. National boundaries often take on a strange truth, disguising complete lack of knowledge about most places. Big issues and small ones look exactly the same. The global map covers up too much that a viewer of *Feral Atlas* needs to know. A more faithful and generous mapping practice requires different spatial scales, angles, and modes of representation. The side of a salmon is a terrain for a salmon louse; it does not scale up into a global map. A map of stratosphere winds is a useful way to consider the travels of a coffee rust spore; but it's quite irrelevant to the travels of a cane toad.

Feral Atlas varies scales and modes of representation to show how ferality develops in each of the entries we include. We begin each entry with a flow map, that is, a spatial representation of the kinds of flows or blockages that might inform the feral activities described in the entry. For insects living in wooden shipping pallets, the movements of global shipping are key to their spread to new continents. For Mnemiopsis comb jellies, introduced into the Black Sea in 1989, it is the containment of the sea that allows their success. In each case, we ask what might matter in a map? How might this digital form enhance our capacity to identify feral dynamics at multiple and overlapping registers? Such questions have led us beyond the conventional boundaries of cartography. For instance, the illustration of the invasive American bullfrog uses a frog's leap to depict the failure of industrial breeding pens to contain these entities. Introducing fire, a photograph shows cars fleeing the flames at Fort McMurray, Canada, in an image that underlines the role of carbon economies in fueling wildfires. Each map, in its own way, extends the sensorial and imaginative reach of the atlas, while remaining faithful to the research underpinning the field report. In underwater noise, the sound of a seismic airgun, detectable thousands of miles from its source, allows human ears to recognize yet another industrial impact on the livablity of the oceans. Scaling down to the molecular, the map for Styrofoam depicts the repeating polymer chains of polystyrene, the structural underpinning of the toxic longevity of this synthetic foam.
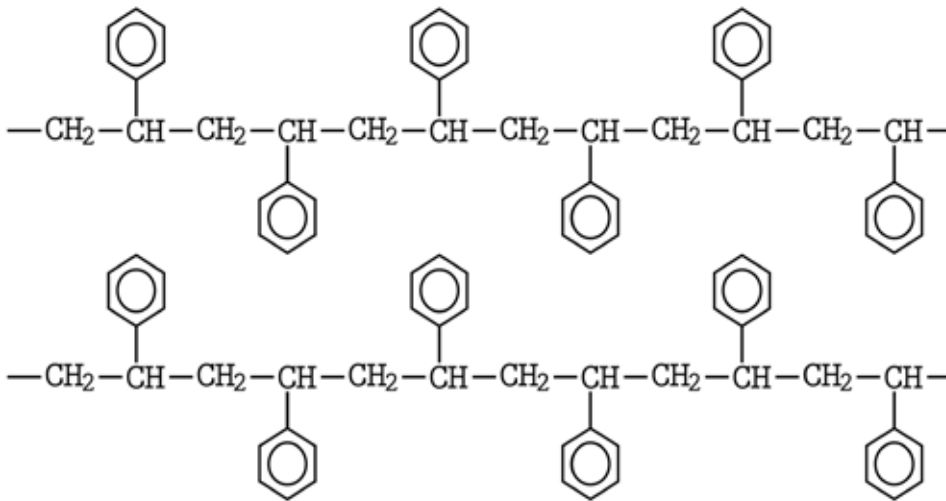
Polymer chains of polystyrene, diagram by *Feral Atlas*

Viewed from the perspective of this multiplicity, the global map users would normally expect looks strange, faulty, and shockingly incomplete.

Curation can itself be a generative, world-making project

As *Feral Atlas* embraces this wide variety of representational styles and disciplinary perspectives, it explicitly refuses the presumptions of mastery and certainty so often embedded in dominant, taken-for-granted points of view expressed in modernist cartographies[16] (see essays by Lili Carr, Victoria Baskin Coffey, and Jennifer Deger on the expanded art of mapmaking within *Feral Atlas*). Through the work of collage, juxtaposition, and poetry of many kinds, the site situates its reports and thematic essays within an aesthetic field of relational potentiality.[17] Form and content announce in unison, "There are links to be found here!" as *Feral Atlas* drags the connective

capacities of the digital towards artful exploration rather than big data analysis. Indeed, the atlas argues that digital architectures are worth exploring in the humanities to the extent that comparative frameworks resemble a performance or a game, rather than an authoritative structure for keeping categories in their place. Our categories are self-consciously playful, tentative, and incomplete. "How does this comparison work out?" the curators urge users to consider. Some comparisons within the atlas are more obvious, and more closely curated, than others. For example, the paired field reports on Dutch elm disease explicitly bring two different empiricisms into dialogue—forest pathology (Clive Brasier) and memoir (Sue Wright). The contrasts in genres, perspectives, and scale work together, expanding understanding without flattening difference. Other, seemingly less likely conjunctions between field reports will appear and accrue for users as they self-navigate through the site—what connects radioactive blueberries with antifouling paint?—allowing curiosity and the digital pleasure of the sideways link to determine their own path through the atlas. Indeed, one of the key reasons for *Feral Atlas* "going digital" is precisely so users can participate for themselves in this work of conjunction, comparison, and new recognitions, as the underlying themes and arguments of the site come into view. Map by map by map. In this way, *Feral Atlas* adds up to something that is at once thematically cohesive and open-ended.

Care has been taken to not overwhelm the site—and so our users—with digital bells and whistles. Similarly, we have attempted not to overwhelm those navigating the site with the sheer weight of evidence that the atlas presents. Indeed, from the outset the curators and designer knew we faced a battle for our users' attention. How to repurpose a medium so often blamed for corroding our collective attention spans for new forms of academic work and public outreach? How to establish a research framework that should inspire scholarship for the next 20 years on an ephemeral platform? A related set of questions arose with respect to the challenges of delivering these potentially horrifying stories to audiences already inundated by environmental bad news. What kind of storytelling is most appropriate for the Anthropocene? In a time of extinction and oncoming ecological collapses on so many fronts, some thinkers have raised concerns about telling apocalyptic stories. Too many such stories may paralyze readers, they argue.[18] Yet it makes no sense to offer happy endings just to buoy up readers' spirits. *Feral Atlas* has picked out a distinctive path through this maze. First, we want readers to pay attention to the details. We have tried to forge an aesthetic that asks readers to linger over the gathered materials. We have avoided fright for fright's sake. At the same time, we don't step back from telling terrifying stories. Our second aim, indeed, has been to see if we could tell those stories so evocatively that the colleagues who warned us against paralysis and despair might instead stop to pay attention to what is going on. The key, we thought, was to present materials with such absorbing detail, passion, and care that readers might become curious to know more, rather than turning away.

Alabama Fields, Helene Schmitz, Kudzu Project, 2013

The curatorial team designed the site with attention to the pace and quality of each user's progression through the site; we wanted users to find their way to the field reports and essays in a mood to read and reflect, ready to pause and think for a spell. In creating watercolor images of the feral entities, Anthropocene Detonator landscapes, Tipper audio and video poems, field report flow maps, and the poetry and commentary of Feral Qualities, we worked hard to hold open worlds of intertwined beauty and terror. Through combining fantasy and realism, we aimed to show feral worlds in motion: worlds that reward careful, situated, and sustained attention; and worlds capable of inspiring, in turn, deeply engaged arts of noticing and response. (See Jennifer Deger's essay, You Are Here, Victoria Baskin Coffey's essay Mapping the Anthropocene, and Feifei Zhou's essay Historical and Fantastical Landscapes.)

As users take up the Atlas to accrue their own orientations and understandings, the curatorial concern shifts from our steady focus on material processes to embrace a sense of how ways of seeing—in the broadest, multisensory, and imagistic sense of the phrase—determine the possibilities for future action. Through this iterative process of learning to look at landscapes (and seascapes and airscapes), the atlas encourages users towards the profound shifts of perspective that the very notion of Anthropocene demands. For if *Feral Atlas* is to succeed in its task of reorientating its users, the best result would be for the site to deliver its users a kind of light bulb moment, a sudden jolt of perspective whereby all the various scales and perspectives and stakes expressed in the field reports and essay coalesce, and the more-than-human Anthropocene comes resolutely and irrevocably into view—both within and beyond the atlas itself.

Hold onto the differences, follow the connections

This ethos, informed by the anthropological training of three members of the curatorial team, provides the cornerstone of the performative, world-making potential of this atlas. In that sense, *Feral Atlas*'s curators would put our digital project in the company of improvisational music and dance. In such genres, there are well-known gestures and themes, and these are tried out in different combinations. Sometimes dancers or musicians exchange motifs, asking for comparison from another team.[19] Alex Chávez describes the all-night musical duels that characterize Huapango Arribeño music of the US-Mexican border. One team plays a theme; the other elaborates in reply.[20] This performative practice takes legacy melodies and brings them to new life through innovative juxtapositions. As in a score for such music, *Feral Atlas* curates a series of reports and concepts, but with instructions to read them as improvisational performance rather than a timeless and authoritative sorting. The editors hope that *Feral Atlas* might, like the music, conjure wonder and attention—and, in the process, incite a new sense of the possibilities for collective care and response for these times we call Anthropocene.

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Commoning: Environmental Reconciliation in the Work of Common Views
David Behar Perahia and Dan Farberoff

Introduction

The *Common Views* collective, founded by artists David Behar Perahia and Dan Farberoff, applies a commoning, social-ecological perspective to arts engagement. We do so in the quest for what we've come to term *Environmental Reconciliation*. What *Environmental Reconciliation* is, how this idea has evolved and is still evolving over the course of our projects, and how it finds expression in the work and methodology of *Common Views*, form the main thread of this essay and are at the center of our presentation at the Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education summer school at *documenta fifteen*. We present our methodology, which engenders co-learning and calls for an alternative approach to curation, one that is centered on engagement, mediation, and process.

Common Views came about in 2019 following an art residency period in the Israeli town of Arad, which culminated in an invitation to create an exhibition for the *Arad Contemporary Art Centre* (ACAC).[1] Our proposal, to create a participatory art project as the basis for our exhibition, led to us working with local communities in the region of Arad, an area where conflict is present on many levels—social, political, and environmental. During this time, over a period of eight months in 2019-20, working together with curator Irit Carmon-Popper, we began examining the environmental aspects inherent in local, social, and political challenges, framing these within the commoning perspective of a social-ecological whole.[2]

During our work, initially in Arad and later in other regions, we have evolved the basic tenets and modus operandi which now form the backbone of *Common Views*' projects. These center on the adoption of a commoning perspective and attitude, applying participatory strategies, and aiming for horizontality at all levels of a project. This approach goes beyond project process and structure, forming a basic understanding that questions entrenched hierarchical attitudes of human vs. human and human over nature.[3] As we begin work and our on-site research deepens, we enter into conversation with locals, which is aimed at identifying points of contention and nodes of tension within the set of relationships between local communities, framing these in the context of their relationship to the environment. From this, we evolve social-ecological themes that guide the devised processes and the objects of mediation employed during a project. This methodology, associated processes, and hoped-for outcomes form the basis of what we term *Environmental Reconciliation*.

One of our first steps, when working in a specific local context, is to reach out to local "agents" as part of a period of site-specific research. Such agents—a term which implies agency and active involvement—may be officials, creatives, activists, community leaders, educators, researchers, and other persons who are already engaged in a context and can offer insights into the relevant local issues. With them, we initiate a conversation, which is focused on listening, establishing trust, and forging solidarity,

and is aimed at unearthing relevant questions that invite exploration.[4] As a project evolves, our network of agents expands into an intricate web, sometimes encompassing dozens of individuals and organizations.[5]

This embedded research gives rise to mediating themes and elements, which can be sites or objects,[6] and to associated, commoning actions that induce interaction and participation. These actions serve as catalysts for potential transformation,[7] and are aimed at engendering a sense of mutual responsibility and of empathy with the other and with the environment. A mediating element will often evolve over the course of our projects and cross over into other local contexts, a process we can observe when reflecting on previous *Common Views* projects, beginning with our initial project in the region of Arad.

Participants	المشاركين	משתתפים.ות
Antea Peeters, TerraVision Lab		
Orit Ovadia-Aflalo, Israel Antiquities Authority		
Oren Amit, ACAC		
Itzik Gamliel		
Alon Cohen-Lifshitz, Bimkom		
Esther Malamud, Knitting		
Batia Roded, Good Neighbourliness Group		
Gili Soffer		
Doron Orgil, Photography		
Dianna Bussel, Knitting		
Dana Roded, Environmental unit		
Dani Roded, Kfar Hanokdim		
Daniel Orenstein, Technion		
Dafan Saporta, Bimkom		
Wolfgang Motzafi-Haller		
Yardit Tsurnamal, Desert Promenade		
Zahara, Donkey		
Hadra El-Nabari, Embroidery		
Haim Abukasis		
Judith Bulka, Knitting		
Yehoram Roded, Kfar Hanokdim		
Yoav Berger, Blacksmith		
Yocheved Maihon, Knitting		
Ya'akov (Laxi) Lax		
Kefaya El Nabari, Embroidery		
Lihi Golan, Technion		
Lina Isverdlov		
Maya Yalov, Knitting		
Musa Hawamahe		
Musa Hamaise		
Miriam Cohen, Knitting		
Marco Fedele di Catrano, Photography		
Moshe Nagar, Welding		
Nir Lect-Ben Ami, Israel Antiquities Authority		
Noa Cohen-Kisinger, Environmental Unit		
Svetlana Gutman, Knitting		
Sliman El-Duda		
Salman Ibrahim Gaboa		
Said Hamaise		
Sa'ar Carmieli		
Seffi Hanegbi, Zman Midbar		
Afalia El-Nabari Azaf, Embroidery		
Ofer Ratler, Desert Promenade		
Einav Haiman		
Ali Hamaise RIP		
Fatma, Embroidery		
Faez Abu Jamaeed, Baqi'a valley Residents Comunity		
Flavia Sontag, Israel Antiquities Authority		
Prof. Uriel Safriel, Israel National Man and Biosphere Committee		
Ruthie Ben Gera, Knitting		
Rina Cohen, Knitting		
Shura Beresniak, Knitting		
Shir Perlmoter		
Sara Levy, Knitting		
Sharon Ambar, Desert Promenade		
Sarit Moyal, Environmental Unit		
Taufiq (Isma'in) Suliman Sindawi		
Tomer Kahana		

Trilingual list of agents and primary project participants. From *Common Views: Sourcing Water* exhibition at ACAC, Arad, 2020

Arad and Al Baqi'a: The Initial Inspiration for *Common Views*

Arad is a small town of some 30,000 inhabitants, situated in Israel's eastern Negev Desert just west of the Dead Sea. Founded in great fanfare as Israel's first "planned desert city," it has since alternated through periods of boom and bust, often languishing between its potential as a promising desert outpost and a depressed socio-economic reality. The town, whose residents are almost exclusively Jewish, is situated in an extremely arid desert, amid a large population of Bedouins, estimated at some 15,000, who live in partially authorized villages or in scattered, officially "unrecognized" encampments. These exist in a decades-long limbo between permanence and impermanence, with Bedouins forbidden by authorities from practicing their traditional nomadic migrations, while also receiving no official permission to establish permanent dwellings. Composed of a collection of shacks, such hamlets have no paved roads, are not connected to the electricity grid, and crucially, have no official water supply.

In contrast, Arad's residents, living in the relatively water-rich town, with its orderly, paved streets, leafy gardens, and sanitation facilities, appear almost entirely disconnected from the actual realities of the neighboring Bedouins and their surrounding desert environment. For most, with some notable exceptions, the surrounding desert forms a scenic backdrop to the townscape, a place one might venture into for leisure activities, but certainly not as an environment in which one lives. This initial impression served as our inspiration for the title *Common Views*, reflecting the common desert landscape shared by town dwellers and Bedouins alike, while also highlighting the disparate ways in which this landscape is perceived when viewed by either community. The term also brings to mind the prevalence of common misconceptions and the need for advancing a shared, common perspective.

fig. 2. A Bedouin "Unrecognized Village" at Al Baqi'a Valley, on the outskirts of Arad. These makeshift settlements are composed of a collection of shacks, have no paved roads, are not connected to the electricity grid, and have no official water supply. *Common Views: Sourcing Water*, Al Baqi'a, Israel, 2020

fig. 3. Participants of a project action on a visit to a Bedouin "Unrecognized Village". The makeshift structures in the background and lack of paved roads and other facilities are typical for such settlements. *Common Views: Sourcing Water*, Al Baqi'a, Israel, 2020

fig. 4. Street view of Arad, artist with donkey. From *Sortie*, video performance. The video diptych follows a day-long journey with donkey—a common Bedouin mode of transport—going from a Bedouin "Unrecognized Village" near Arad into town and back, exemplifying the Bedouin urban experience and the way in which town residents are disconnected from their neighbors. *Common Views: Sourcing Water*, Arad, Israel, 2020

fig. 5. Line drawing *The Gap*, showing Arad's skyline and the desert backdrop. From the *Common Views: Sourcing Water* exhibition at ACAC, Arad, Israel, 2020

As part of our initial on-site research in the area of Arad, we entered into a conversation with Bedouin community leaders at Al Baqi'a, a broad desert valley that lies only a few kilometers to the east of the town. Al Baqi'a is home to a number of extended Bedouin families living in makeshift settlements under an ever-present threat of forced displacement.[8] Asked what potential actions could help improve the community's uncertain situation, the community leaders proposed that we engage with the local, age-old tradition of rainwater harvesting. They introduced us to the many water cisterns that until only a few decades ago served as the principal water source for local inhabitants. Most of these cisterns have since fallen into disrepair, following the introduction of an official water pipeline that now passes through the valley. The Bedouins replaced these cisterns with plastic water tanks and an unauthorized network of self-laid, agricultural PVC pipes that bring the water the last few kilometers of open desert, from taps at the pipeline to their homes.[9] The abandoned cisterns were subjected to actions of enclosure by the state, which designated them as archeological sites, effectively precluding their maintenance. The Bedouins view the many cisterns dotting the area as representations of their connection to the land and an important part of their cultural landscape. We in turn could see how this introduction of an official water supply, controlled by government, and the associated fallout, exemplified a dramatic shift in the Bedouins' existence, from self-reliance to dependence on the state.

fig. 6. The artists inspecting a water cistern during preliminary on-site research. *Common Views: Sourcing Water*, Al Baqi'a, Israel, 2020

fig. 7. Water pipes, self-laid by Bedouins, stretching through the desert. This improvised network of exposed pipes and water tanks has replaced the traditional methods of rainwater harvesting which had previously sustained local inhabitants. From the photographic series *Liquid Gold*. *Common Views: Sourcing Water*, Al Baqi'a, Israel, 2020

Water: Equity and Sustainability

These initial interactions led to us honing-in on the issue of "Water as a Scarce Resource" as our mediating theme for this project. This theme encompasses pressing social-political issues, such as the inequitable access to resources and the civic inequality inherent in the vast disparities existing between local communities. At the same time, the theme also allowed us to expand the conversation to address the underlying issues of control and exploitation of natural resources, the unfolding global water crisis, climate crisis and desertification, and the relationships between communities in the context of the relationship of humans to the environment as a whole. In short, through a simple re-framing, via a social-ecological perspective, we could begin addressing a myriad of interrelated, contested, and otherwise potentially volatile issues. By referring to the tradition of rainwater harvesting, as well as to other environmentally sustainable Bedouin practices, we employed native knowledges to advance an overall vision for sustainable desert habitation—linking past and future, tradition and transformation—and offering an additional entry point for local engagement.

In discussion with the local Bedouins, we selected a large cistern known as Bir Umm Al Atin[10] as the site for a series of interventions. This required that we enter into a

conversation with the heads of the Bedouin family in whose unofficial territory the cistern is located. Such issues of territory and ownership formed an additional layer of exploration, with Bir Umm Al Atin, for example, located within the projected territory of the Bedouin family, but also within the projected territories of six different government agencies, a nearby military firing zone and others. This complex vying for ownership is reflected at all levels, with competing authorities seeking to impose their control over the land and its resources. Our intervention at the site required that we navigate these complex power dynamics, ownership relationships, and acts of enclosure relating to the site, entering into negotiations with Israel's Antiquity Authority, the Arad municipality, the regional environmental agency and others.
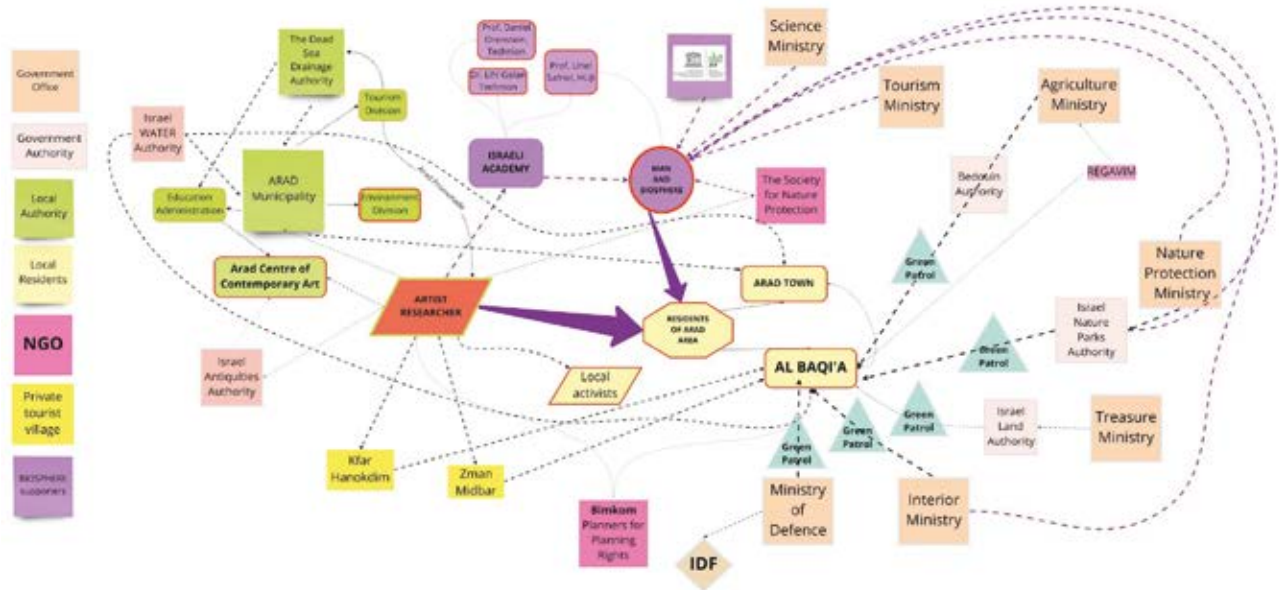
fig. 8. Map of agent interactions. *Common Views: Sourcing Water*, ACAC, Arad, 2020

The Bir Umm Al Atin cistern served as the site for a series of mediating actions, which included an introductory tour, an action to renew the rainwater harvesting channels leading to the cistern, an action to renew the cistern's sedimentation pool, and finally a performance event at the site. These actions served as points of mediation for the wider Bedouin community and for the Jewish community from the nearby town and further afield. This resulted in a continuous conversation among them, which engendered solidarity, forming a for-purpose community.[11] This successful bringing together of Bedouin and Jewish children, of religious nationalists and liberals, of the disenfranchised and the privileged, independent women and conservative patriarchs to work with each other and collaborate meaningfully, should not be underestimated in light of the region's deeply entrenched divisions. The cistern served as a common ground, bringing together the different interests of those with a love of nature, a love of "The Land," of history, of archeology, of ecology, of culture, and of tradition, while aligning their various needs with those of the natural environment.

Documentation from our project actions at Al Baqi'a was embedded into artworks presented at the eventual exhibition at the ACAC, serving as further mediating elements and allowing for engagement with an even wider audience. This is one example of a central aspect of our work, which involves the way in which we resolve the issue of translating actions and processes into mediating objects and presenta-

fig. 9. Participants with an archeologist during a project action at Bir Umm Al Atin cistern. *Common Views: Sourcing Water*, Al Baqiʾa, Israel, 2020

fig. 10. Participants reviving rainwater harvesting channels during a project action at Bir Umm Al Atin cistern. *Common Views: Sourcing Water*, Al Baqiʾa, Israel, 2020

fig. 11. Audience and performers during *Perforated Earth*, a site-specific performance at Bir Umm Al Atin cistern, devised by project collaborator, artist Iris Nais. *Common Views: Sourcing Water*, Al Baqiʾa, Israel, 2020

fig. 12. Audience during *Perforated Earth*, a site-specific performance at Bir Umm Al Atin cistern, devised by project collaborator, artist Iris Nais. *Common Views: Sourcing Water*, Al Baqiʾa, Israel, 2020
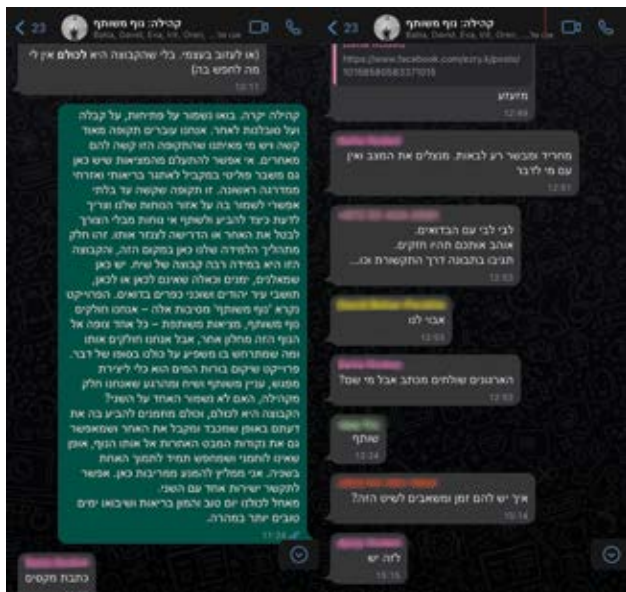
fig. 13. Charged interactions of *Common Views* community members on the project's WhatsApp group, during a period of heightened political tensions in March 2020. *Common Views: Sourcing Water*, 2020

fig. 14. A section of the installation *Allotment*, composed of water tanks and pipes scavenged in the desert, mediating the Bedouins' challenges of water sourcing. *Common Views: Sourcing Water* exhibition at ACAC, Arad, Israel, 2020
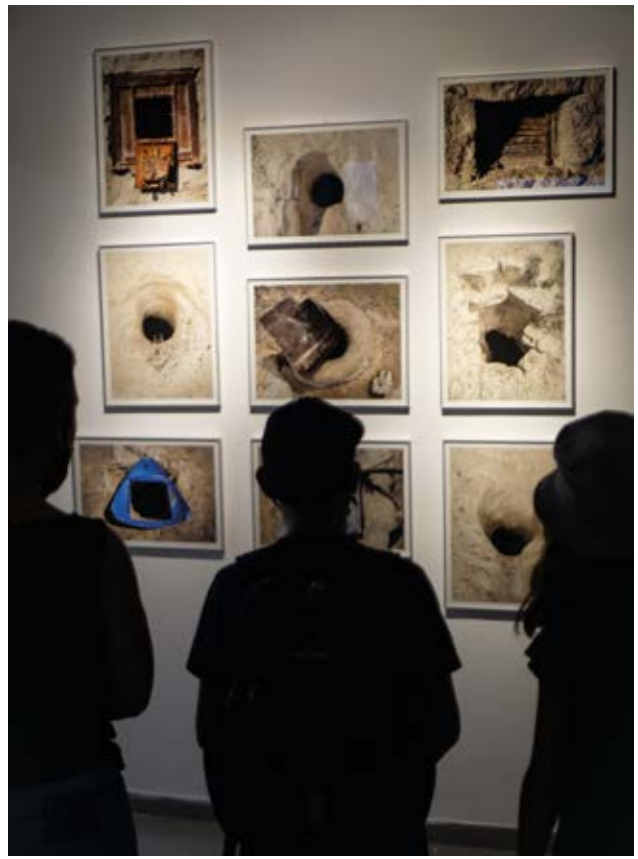
fig. 16. Schoolchildren on an educational tour, viewing photographic prints from the series *Becken Boden*, depicting a collection of cistern openings and the enclosure of water sources. The prefix *Umm*, which means "mother," is commonly attached to local cistern names, reflecting a perception of the cisterns as feminine and uterine. *Common Views: Sourcing Water* exhibition at ACAC, Arad, Israel, 2020

fig. 15. Stills from *Sourcing Water*, a video performance exploring the large gaps in water availability and consumption that exist between Arad and Al Baqi'a. The artist is depicted carrying water from a cistern in the valley up into town, in a futile attempt to fill a large swimming pool in Arad's country club. *Common Views: Sourcing Water* exhibition, ACAC, Arad, Israel, 2020

fig. 17. Schoolchildren on an educational tour, viewing interviews and documentation of participatory actions at Al Baqi'a. *Common Views: Sourcing Water* exhibition at ACAC, Arad, Israel, 2020

tions, with the aim of widening public engagement. In this way, the exploration of the theme of "Water as a Scarce Resource" gave birth to a series of new, reflective artworks that served as mediating elements for the issues of ownership, inequity, and exploitation mentioned earlier.[12] To mediate the Bedouins' current challenges of water sourcing to a wider, largely unaware public, a network of water tanks and black PVC pipes, scavenged in the desert, was set up in the gallery, spilling out into the street below. The engagement also included educational tours for schoolchildren of the exhibition, public visits to cisterns and nearby Bedouin settlements, academic seminars and more.

Our occupation with the theme of "Water as a Scarce Resource" and how it reflects on the equitability and sustainability of resource use, evolved in discussion with several environmental researchers[13] into a vision for a potential commoning proposal for the area. Our ambitious plan revived a dormant proposal by local activists for a biosphere reserve that would balance the needs of the Bedouins and the desert environment at Al Baqi'a. We vastly expanded this proposal to encompass the entire region surrounding the town of Arad, including its urban centers, villages, and nature reserves.[14] This conceptual, regional plan for a social-ecological commons that brings the needs of all inhabitants and lifeforms into consideration, was presented at the exhibition, generating a much-needed conversation about the inherent value of such an inclusive perspective.

fig. 18. Artist and local Bedouins discussing a map of the *Common Views* proposal for a biosphere reserve in the Arad region. *Common Views: Sourcing Water* exhibition at ACAC, Arad, Israel, 2020

Our focus on the Bedouins' precarious situation received criticism from some visitors to the exhibition, with the overall perception of the Bedouin community among the Jewish population being largely negative and focused on issues of criminality, violence, and a perceived disloyalty to the state. However, our reframing of the Bedouins' social, economic, and political exclusion within a social-ecological perspective and our proposed vision for equally addressing the needs of all local inhabitants allowed for a shifting of the conversation away from these habitual ruts. This perspective also enabled Arad's mayor, who initially shunned the exhibition, to begin to acknowledge the compelling link between the fates of the Jewish town, its neighboring Bedouin communities, and that of the environment, which they all share.

In another example of us successfully employing a social-ecological perspective to address contested issues, we again utilized the mediating theme of "Water as a Scarce Resource" in a similar fashion during a subsequent *Common Views* project in 2021 in

the Jerusalem neighborhood of Abu Tor. We were invited to create work there as part of a city-wide event and chose to focus on access to water as a reflection of the civic inequality between Jewish and Palestinian residents of this neighborhood, which straddles East and West Jerusalem. These broader, socio-political divisions were reflected in the tension between the differing viewpoints and interests of residents, the site's curator, the site's owner, nationalistically bent funders, and the municipality. This tension eventually resulted in our installation being censored by the anxious organizers on the grounds that it was "political." It was finally allowed, following a long discussion in which we successfully argued that the rationale behind the work was social-ecological rather than political.[15] The adoption of this perspective therefore allowed us to present in this authorized exhibition, endorsed by the authorities, the contested reality existing only a short distance away, which would have otherwise been excluded from this space and left unseen by visiting audiences.

fig. 19. Visitors viewing a video diptych, part of the installation *A Cup of Water for the Messiah*, which explores a sustainable, social-ecological vision for Jewish and Palestinian residents of Jerusalem's neighborhood of Abu Tor. The artists rolled a large water tank through the neighborhood's streets, which they used as a prop for initiating conversations with residents on the theme of water and for collecting their written responses on its surface, presented as part of the installation at the exhibition. *Common Views: A Cup of Water for the Messiah*, Abu Tor, Jerusalem, Israel, 2020

fig. 20. Visitors viewing a drawing, exploring a water-sharing commons as part of a sustainable, social-ecological vision for Jewish and Palestinian residents of the Jerusalem neighborhood of Abu Tor. *Common Views: A Cup of Water for the Messiah*, Abu Tor, Jerusalem, Israel, 2020

The Way: Crossing Divisions

Another mediating theme arising from our explorations in Al Baqi'a and Arad is that of the Path or Way, as a link between divided communities and their environment. This theme initially took shape as a concept for a proposed walking trail that would link the Jewish town with its neighboring Bedouin settlements via a number of water cisterns. This led to us creating waymarkers for the proposed trail—mediating objects, inspired by the water-sourcing reality of the Bedouin community. These objects combined materials and forms in a fusion of traditional elements, such as the "Rujm"—the conical stone heaps that are used by Bedouins to mark desert paths—with contemporary elements, such as the cube-shaped water tanks that have replaced the abandoned cisterns. This process of creation also served as an opportunity to engage with the local Bedouin women's community, which up to this point remained entirely inaccessible to us, through an invitation to local Bedouin and Jewish women to knit and weave tapestries that were then incorporated into these "Rujm" sculptures.[16] The sculptures, presented at the ACAC exhibition, as symbolic markers of the proposed path, present yet another example of us abstracting and stripping down complex issues and inviting participation in "re-dressing" them.

fig. 21. *Rujm* sculptures, combining knitting and weaving by Bedouin and Jewish women, at the *Common Views: Sourcing Water* exhibition, ACAC, Arad, Israel, 2020

fig. 22. Knitters from Arad posing next to creations by their Bedouin counterparts, at the *Common Views: Sourcing Water* exhibition. The Bedouin women did not wish to be photographed. ACAC, Arad, Israel, 2020

The concept of the waymarker served as a stepping stone and a mediating element for our next project in the region in 2021, taking place in nearby Kuseife—a large Bedouin settlement of nearly 20,000 inhabitants. Here, the mediating theme of "The Water Way," linking local communities through their shared landscape, formed the central thread of this project, as we came to understand the important role that desert ways play in Bedouin tradition and culture. With an aim to increase the horizontality and accessibility of our community engagement, we collaborated with local Bedouin artist, poet Saad Abu Ghanam, and enlisted several female Bedouin environmental and creative educators at an early stage of the project. Together, our work involved groups of local Bedouin schoolchildren and women, as potential agents for transformation, and community elders as a link to past tradition. In this project, we relied again on existing native knowledges to advance a vision for sustainable desert habitation, linking past and future. We decided, however, to exclude the overall vision for a biosphere reserve in the area, judging that it would unnecessarily complicate our communication with the groups with whom we were working.

fig. 23. Bedouin schoolchildren with environmental educator Manar Elubra. *Common Views: The Water Way*, Kuseife, Israel, 2021

In our interactions with local agents in Kuseife, we were confronted early on with issues of enclosure vis-à-vis the landscape, of ownership of land, and the perception and lack of availability of public space, with local communities having been displaced to the area forty years ago by the creation of an adjacent Israeli air-force base. This led to competition for space and at times violent conflict between extended family clans, resulting in an overall lack of solidarity and cooperation among them. The situation required ongoing negotiations with the different, competing power-brokers—be they regional planners, Kuseife's municipality, rival politicians or clan-affiliated schools—to unravel the intricacies of these competitive and delicate relationships. In this, the theme of "The Way," as a traditionally neutral territory, which allows for the crossing of these divisions, became pivotal.[17] The "Rujm" served us again as a waymarker on this symbolic path, an extension of the trail from Al Baqi'a and Arad. This concept evolved during the project in response to the local realities of the more sedentary, agriculture-based communities of Kuseife. This led to the collective creation of a sustainable desert garden around the "Rujm"—now doubling as a dew-harvester—which served as our site for a series of mediating actions with schoolchildren and the wider community on the topic of sustainability. The creation of the desert garden was guided by us in collaboration with the Bedouin environmental educators and combined traditional native practices of desert agriculture with contemporary approaches to sustainability.

fig. 24. Schoolchildren taking part in the creation of a sustainable desert garden, with dew-harvesting *Rujm*. *Common Views: The Water Way*, Kuseife, Israel, 2021

A pivotal element in this project was a focus on language, informed by our collaboration with poet Saad Abu Ghanam. While we found that locals have a limited familiarity with notions of formalist, visual, or performative arts, writing, spoken word, and language as a whole play a central role in Bedouin society and culture. This led to us focusing on poetry, creative writing, and storytelling as primary avenues for participatory, creative engagement. One example of this was the exploration of storytelling with Bedouin elders who then shared their stories with the children. Creative writing workshops for these schoolchildren produced original poetry on the topic of water and the way in the desert, which they then performed at the project's final event. Calligraphic interpretations by a local Bedouin artist of these poems were also presented at this event.

fig. 25. Schoolchildren reading poetry they had written during the course of the project. *Common Views: The Water Way*, Kuseife, Israel, 2021

fig. 26. Performance of Bedouin music by Ensemble Shargi and Yair Dalal at the project's final event, with calligraphic interpretations of poetry by children in the background, created by local artist Lubna Masoudin. *Common Views: The Water Way*, Kuseife, Israel, 2021

Kuseife's concept of a dew-harvesting waymarker served as a seed for a proposal for our next project in the region, in the area of the nearby Bedouin settlement of Al Fur'a, the site of an ongoing civic struggle against a planned phosphate strip mine. Here, we are again confronted with the combined social-ecological challenges of resource-sharing and exploitation, the realities of a disadvantaged community's relationship to the authorities, the relationship between citizens, the government, and business interests, and the relationship of humans to their environment. Our proposal encompasses the collective creation of a number of installations, serving as waymarkers on the symbolic path linking communities in the region, through their environment. These combine elements from previous projects, such as the sustainable desert garden, the lattice inspired by water tanks used by the Bedouins, the use of weaving handiwork and the integration of local stories and calligraphic representations.

fig. 27. Sketch from a project proposal for the area of the Bedouin settlement of Al Fur'a, showing the creation of a dew-harvesting waymarker with desert garden, and a combination of elements from previous projects. *Common Views*, 2022.

The Gathering Space: Meeting, Displacement, and Resilience

An additional example of our use of a mediating element is that of the gathering space. Our conversations with Bedouins, and many of the interactions between project participants, took place in traditional Bedouin communal gathering spaces, known as "Shig." These are spaces where Bedouin men traditionally gather around the fire to drink coffee and tea, converse and share stories, and where they receive guests. Formerly camel-hair tents, "Shigs" nowadays are usually constructed from corrugated iron sheets and other cheap, lightweight, and easily reusable building materials, reflecting both Bedouin traditions of light, impermanent construction but also, importantly, the ever-present threat of demolition and the need to recover rapidly following such a calamity.

fig. 28. Artists at a gathering in a typical Shig with the head of a Bedouin family, while on a visit to an "unrecognized" settlement during a project action. *Common Views: Sourcing Water*, Al Baqi'a, Israel, 2020

In another example of us stripping down and redressing complex issues, the concept of a gathering space and its aesthetics formed the basis for the evolution of a series of new mediating elements. One such element, shown at the exhibition at the ACAC, is a sculptural installation that used the positioning of a couple of tattered corrugated iron sheets, often found strewn in the desert near Bedouin settlements, to create a very pared-down, precarious, and confined semblance of a gathering space. A recorded conversation with two Bedouin community leaders, telling of their insecure existence under the constant threat of eviction, was replayed using the sheets themselves as resonators. This was accompanied by video projections, in which tattered corrugated iron sheets are seen and heard as they blow and rattle in the desert wind. The result is somewhat ominous, aimed at conveying the unsettledness of the Bedouins' situation.

fig. 29. *First Impressions*, sculptural installation with sound, exploring the Bedouins' insecure existence. *Common Views: Sourcing Water* exhibition at ACAC, Arad, Israel, 2020

In our subsequent project in Kuseife, we made use of this concept of "Shig," which is very familiar to locals, to create large communal gathering spaces for our final presentations and celebration of the project.[18] These spaces offered a neutral location where all members of the community could gather together, regardless of clan affiliation, and a hosting venue where they felt comfortable to welcome outsiders, namely members of the Jewish community from outside of Kuseife.

We also made use of the element of the gathering space in other geographical and cultural contexts. Following our initial exploration of the principles of the biosphere reserve in Al Baqi'a and Arad, we proceeded to develop a project in 2021, within the area of two established biosphere reserves in Germany.[19] These are composed of large regions, encompassing towns, villages, agriculture, industry, and vast swaths of nature protection areas. In this complex setting, our conversation with local agents involved biosphere reserve administrators, local cultural institutions and organizations, municipalities, local creatives, environmental researchers,[20] and others, resulting in the development of a number of mediating elements. An invitation to create artwork in public space in the biosphere reserve of Spreewald, a large inland delta composed of a labyrinth of waterways and wetlands, brought us to explore the mediating element of the gathering space within the context of climate change-induced displacement and its associated global and regional socio-political fallout. The resulting sculptural installation investigated the form that a shelter erected by locals from Spreewald would take, following an impending natural calamity and flood. The piece, created in collaboration with a local craftsperson, combined local materials, aesthetics, vernacular design, and recorded writings by locals, telling of their relationship to the watery landscape, aimed at creating a space for congregation with the surrounding nature.
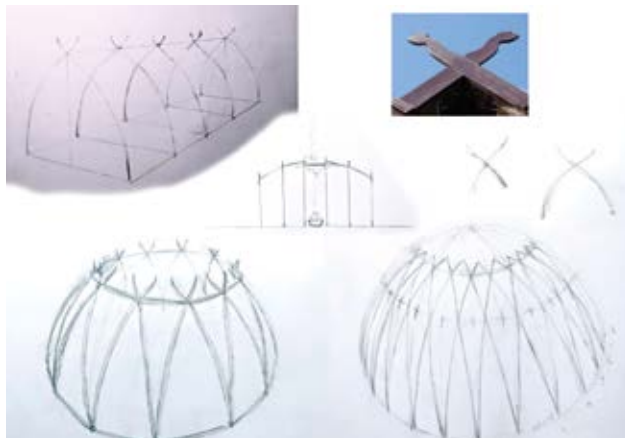
fig. 30. Development of concept for a shelter/gathering space for Spreewald, using local forms such as the typical roof gables and boat ribs. *Common Views: Archa*, 2021

fig. 31. Artist inside the installation. The materials are scavenged wood, sourced from nearby forests, and linen and hemp, which were traditionally produced in the area. The blue fabric is colored using a local, traditional wax dyeing technique as inspiration. *Common Views: Archa*, Spreewald, Germany, 2021

fig. 32: Local, elderly amateur poet Edith Baatz during an audio recording of her reading poems and singing songs about life in Spreewald, which we incorporated into the installation. *Common Views: Archa*, Spreewald, Germany, 2021

Also in 2021, we responded to a bid to create artwork for public space in the southern Polish city of Kraków. Taking place within the setting of the old Jewish quarter of Kazimierz, once a thriving center of Jewish culture, the event's overall theme of "Kumzits," referring to the Jewish-Zionist custom of gathering around a campfire, brought up echoes of the Bedouin "Shig" and its rituals.[21] This led to us further exploring the role that such gatherings and their associated rituals play in the social-ecological resilience of societies on the move, and honing in again on the issue of displacement, both historical and contemporary. Investigating the area's local history, culture, and contemporary concerns, in conversation with our initial agents in Kraków, local performance artist Adam Zdunczyk, anthropologist Oskar Kreson, and members of the Curatorial Collective for Public Art, we developed a provisional, modular gathering space as our mediating element. Called the "Tent of Assembly," this was accompanied by a "Procession of the Displaced," which was performed by volunteers and set out each morning from the center of Kazimierz to erect the shelter each day at a new location. The structure was then dismantled and carried back in the

evening. The dismantled structure fit into a wooden box, carried by the procession, which served as a symbolic "ark" of social-ecological resilience, containing the elements required by a society to sustain itself, as it is uprooted and displaced. Serving as a hub for this gathering space, the box was placed in the center of the tent and covered with a printed cloth portraying the journey of displacement. From it emanated a string of recorded recollections of displaced persons currently residing in Kraków, telling of their displacement, journey, and search for home. At the basis of the design for the shelter lay versatility of construction, the inspiration from nomadic, vernacular forms, and the reliance on local, gathered materials, which called for broad local participation.

fig. 33. Procession of the Displaced, led by project collaborator, performance artist Adam Zdunczyk, seen here during a morning reading of the proclamation. *Common Views: Tent of Assembly*, Kraków, Poland, 2021

fig. 34. *Common Views: Tent of Assembly*, on the banks of the Vistula, at one of its series of daily locations in Kazimierz. Kraków, Poland, 2021

fig. 35. *Common Views: Tent of Assembly*, inside view with wooden box, covered with printed cloth, and scroll of proclamation text. Kraków, Poland, 2021
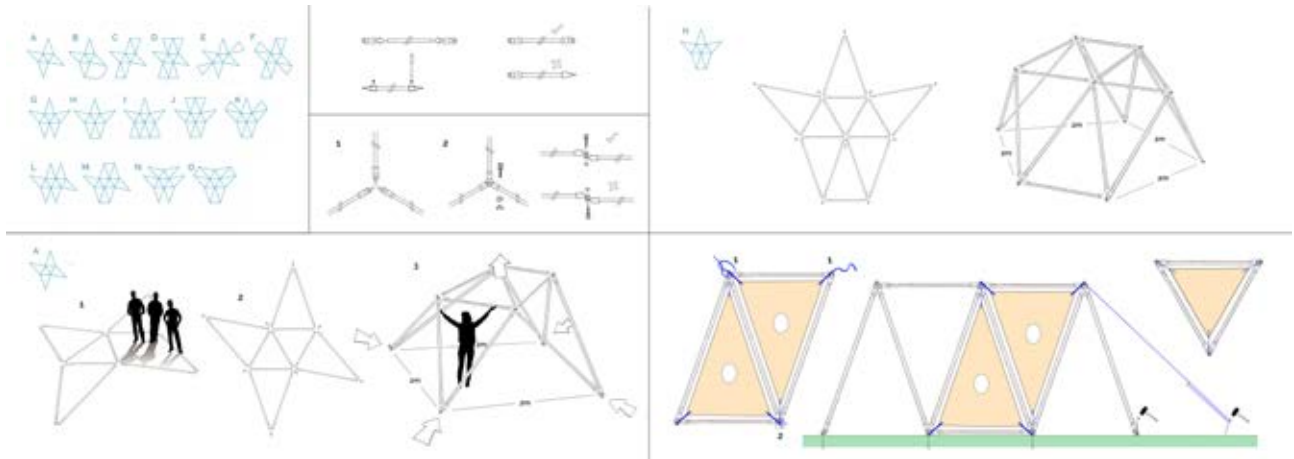
fig. 36. *Common Views: Tent of Assembly*, Assembly Instructions. The procession and installation in Kraków were designed to take place in the absence of the artists. Detailed instructions guided the volunteer performers in the construction of the tent, offering a choice of fifteen different permutations for the modular structure's size and shape (Listed A-O, upper left). Kraków, Poland, 2021

Following an invitation to present the work of *Common Views* at *documenta fifteen* in Kassel, we erected the "Tent of Assembly" in front of the Fridericianum building in the center of the city, in dialogue with *documenta fifteen*'s concept of *Majelis*.[22] The installation attracted a spontaneous gathering of passers-by, who sat down inside the tent to engage in an easeful exchange, touching on issues of nomadism, architecture and vernacular forms, home, displacement and exclusion, politics and war, and the claimed expressions of antisemitism within documenta. This gathering together in a circle, facing each other while sitting at ground level, resulted in a quality of conversation, of sharing, listening, and witnessing that seemed much deeper and gentler than the exchange taking place outside concerning these issues.

fig. 37. *Common Views: Tent of Assembly*, at *documenta fifteen*, Kassel, Germany, 2022

Outsiders in Local Context

The process of reframing and mediation that we have discussed is accompanied by a number of questions that we pose continuously over the course of our work. These relate to our position as artists from outside of a particular local context, who initiate and direct collaborative and participatory processes that are pertinent to it. One such question is the conditions for a successful immersion within a given location, while we

work across geographical, cultural, and community contexts. We've come to realize that our position as outsiders, rather than allowing us to work superficially, demands that we delve deeply into each given context, and that we do so rapidly. While our work with local agents facilitates our landing and positioning, and aids in us acquiring insights into relevant local issues, we are often confronted with miscommunication, language boundaries, difficulties in translation, and residual mistrust. And while we may achieve a certain level of access to a broader cultural context, there are always subcontexts that remain inaccessible to us or that require additional mediation, as in the case of the Bedouin women's community. By weaving these challenges into our process, we demonstrate solidarity, which generates good will. We also prefer to let the members of these communities speak for themselves, and we don't pretend that we can speak for them.

One advantage to this position of outsider is the energy, enthusiasm, and a general openness for the possibility of transformation that can be generated for a limited timeframe, aided by a sense of a stepping out of the day-to-day. This was a major factor in the success of our project in Kuseife, for example. Another advantage is what one might term "cyclical learning": by performing a reflection, and repeatedly revisiting the same questions as we move from project to project, from location to location, we deepen our learning through a comparative approach. We use the inspiration from one project, and bring the lessons we've learnt to the following, with each cultural context having an impact on the next. This leads to a question about sustainability and continuity after a project ends and what happens once we leave. We certainly do not consider ourselves community leaders, and we prefer not to take ownership away from the community. Instead, we establish a dialogic space and commoning actions that plant the seeds for the possibility for further, future actions by leading community agents.[23]

Another related issue is that of how we position ourselves in relation to authorities in any given situation, which is a combination of both working against and working with, and the need to strike a balance between the two. In the Arad region, this issue emerged in our interactions with the municipal and government authorities, but also with clan and patriarchal power-structures, as mentioned earlier, necessitating ongoing negotiation and repositioning. As part of this negotiation, we often make use of our prerogative as outsiders to enable interventions in situations of enclosure and lack of access that exclude the disadvantaged causes we aim to promote, as is evident in the case of our projects in Al Baqi'a and in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Abu Tor.

Summary

In conclusion we return to *Environmental Reconciliation* as the overarching concept for our work. We approach this idea as a continuous question, a philosophical crystal or gem, whose facets are examined afresh with every situation, project, and action. In a nutshell, *Environmental Reconciliation* is the adoption of a commoning perspective and a social-ecological re-framing within the context of arts engagement, as a way to better involve the public in working towards understanding, unpacking, and redressing contested issues. Doing so, we offer a vision of possible social-ecological transformation. To us, the political and the environmental are firmly intertwined, and to address the one we must necessarily address the other. We do so by expanding the context in which these issues exist so as to include the social-ecological whole. We see our role as catalysts of a commoning process. We do not provide answers but rather identify questions and transform these into actions and interactions that rely on local knowledges and experience, resulting in a process of co-learning for us and for the people

working with us. Together, we co-create interventions that aim to reawaken relevant, sustainable local traditions and local heritage, and experiences that engender a positive emotional involvement through commoning actions that serve as a mutual ground for diverse communities to collaborate.

In this, we look for guidance in models of sustainability, such as UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme's biosphere reserve model, the concept of environmental citizenship, the philosophy of deep ecology, and other models that present global solutions to local challenges. At this stage of our work, we wish to grow our collective in order to enhance our cross-disciplinary explorations through developing long-term collaborations. We invite those interested in further exploring *Environmental Reconciliation* and interested in becoming involved in the work of *Common Views* to reach out to us.

Biosphere Berlin

Common Views' current project, *Biosphere Berlin*, is an art-based, trans-disciplinary action research collaboration that re-conceptualises Berlin as an urban biosphere. We are collaborating with researchers from the University for Sustainable Development Eberswalde (HNEE), the Green Art Lab Alliance (GALA) and the Biosphere Reserves Institute, in conjunction with the new Berlin-Barnim Urban Biosphere Region initiative. The current phase of this multi-year project takes place from October 2022 to February 2023, in the Berlin district of Tegel, Reinickendorf, funded by the Berliner Projektfonds Urbane Praxis. The project investigates the relationship between residents, the biosphere and the city. An important concern of the project is to broaden and rethink the understanding of the relationship between nature and culture, between city and the natural landscape, between built spaces and wild spaces: the perceived opposites of "nature" and "culture", "grown" and "built", "planned" and "organic" are reconsidered as potentially coexisting, and not as mutually exclusive. We are working with local residents to develop participatory approaches that support this process. The project includes workshops, participatory art actions, installations, presentations and guest speakers events exploring the project themes.

Notes

1 The ACAC was initiated and set up in 2016 by curator Hadas Kedar.

2 Here, we mostly relate to Stavros Stavrides' notion of public space commoning (Stavros Stavrides, *Common Space: The City as Commons* (London: Zed Books, 2016); David Behar et al., *Commoning as an Instrument of Resistance*, to be published).

3 This view in relation to the work of *Common Views*, informed by the writings of Bruno Latour, Donna Haraway, Giorgio Agamben, and others, is explored in research by Irit Ben-Moshe, to be published.

4 This is a reflexive practice form of scholarly activism, the "Situated Solidarities" approach (Paul Routledge and Kate Driscoll Derickson, "Situated Solidarities and the Practice of Scholar-Activism," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 33, no. 3 (2015); Richa Nagar and Susan Geiger, "Reflexivity and Positionality in Feminist Fieldwork Revisited," in *Politics and Practice in Economic Geography*, eds. A. Tickell, E. Sheppard, J. Peck, and T. Barnes (London: Sage Press, 2007), 267–278).

5 See figs. 1 and 7.

6 We dialogue with Lygia Clark's notion of mediation object (Eleanor Harper, *Restoring Subjectivity and Brazilian Identity: Lygia Clark's Therapeutic Practice* (Athens: Ohio University, 2010).

7 This approach is in dialogue with Paulo Freire's concept of cultural action (Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2000 (30th anniversary edition).

8 Community members of Al Baqi'a began receiving official eviction notices from the authorities shortly after our first meeting there.

9 Once an official Arad-Masada water pipeline was introduced, the Bedouins abandoned the arduous work of maintaining the cisterns, gradually adjusting to new modes of sourcing water, initially carrying water from taps at the pipeline. This change brought a dramatic ten-fold increase in water consumption, from 20 liters per day to 200 or more liters per day per family group, including livestock.

10 The Hebrew name for the site, appearing in official maps, is Bor Atin.

11 This online community continued to interact beyond the specific activities of the project, at times resulting in expressions of great solidarity, at other times descending into conflict, impacted by broader political events (See fig. 13).

12 For examples of these artworks, see figs. 4, 5, 7, 14, 15, 16, 21, and 29.

13 Prof. Uriel Safriel, Prof. Daniel Orenstein, and Dr. Lihi Golan.

14 The original plan for a limited biosphere reserve in Al Baqi'a, created by Sefi Hanegbi and Tomer Kahana, was presented unsuccessfully to the local Bedouin community in 2008. Biosphere reserves, part of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme, aim to achieve a balance between the needs of humans and the environment. There are currently more than 700 such reserves worldwide.

15 We ourselves see such distinctions between the political and the social-ecological as missing the point.

16 We developed a series of color palettes for this, relating to the diverse cultural backgrounds of the participants (Bedouin, Russian, Ukrainian, Chilean, Moroccan, etc).

17 An ancient network of desert ways, which links settlements with water sources, crisscrosses the region. One of these, "Darb el Malachat," passes through Kuseife, across the territories of different family clans.

18 See figs. 24 and 25.

19 These are the biosphere reserves of Schorfheide-Chorin and Spreewald in the state of Brandenburg, in north and south Berlin, respectively.

20 We have worked with Prof. Katja Arzt, director of the "Biosphere Reserve Management" MA program at the Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development (HNEE), as well as with a number of researchers at the Biosphere Reserves Institute.

21 *Kumzits*, from Yiddish, translates literally as "Come! Sit!"

22 *Majelis* is the Indonesian term for a gathering or meeting, and a central aspect of the ruangrupa collective's "lumbung" concept for *documenta fifteen*.

23 Kuseife is a good example, where environmental education programs have been set up in four local schools as a follow-up to the *Common Views* project there.

The *Common Views* collective, formed by artists David Behar Perahia and Dan Farberoff, applies a commoning, social-ecological perspective in the context of arts engagement. Established in 2019, *Common Views* has worked on extended process-based, site-specific projects in Europe and the Middle East. The collective is currently developing new cross-national projects, within the framework of biosphere reserves in Germany, Kenya, and Colombia, as well as their next project with Bedouins, in the Israeli Negev Desert.
commonviews.art

David Behar Perahia, artist and researcher, works on the seam between sculpture and architecture. He examines the interplay between art and action, and examines the concept of "place" with reference to cultural, social, historical, and physical-geographical elements. Through his works, he intervenes in existing places while changing, shifting, and challenging the perception of reality as an absolute, creating an active viewing experience in which the viewers are an integral component of the work, from a concept that extends the relationship art/environment/audience. His work has been presented internationally with site-specific projects in the UK, Israel, France, Italy (including the 53rd Venice Biennale), Brazil, Germany, and Greece. In 2016, David founded the MUNDI_Lab (Urban Design Interventions Lab) at the Technion Institute, IL, dealing with public space in the context of surveillance, gentrification, and memory. David is a French and Israeli national based near Florence, Italy, and holds a BFA in Sculpture from Gloucester University, UK, an MSc in Material Sciences from Weizmann Institute of science, Israel, and a PhD in Architecture from Technion.
davidbehar.info

Dan Farberoff is an interdisciplinary artist and filmmaker, working primarily in mediated physical and digital presence, often in site-specific fashion, both in natural and urban environments. His works incorporate new media, video, photography, interactive technology, installation, performance, and dance. The central subjects touch on issues of consciousness and embodiment, connection to place and presence, drawing on his extensive background and experience in meditation and awareness practice, in dance and embodied practice, and in digital arts practice. He is a Colombian, Swiss, Israeli, and British national based in Berlin and holds an MA in Art & Performance from Dartington College of Arts (2007). His works in the field of digital media and dance, which include collaborations with the England National Ballet, the Richard Alston Dance Company, and world-renowned choreographers, were presented to great acclaim at festivals, including special selection at FIPA, at the London Olympics, and the Shanghai Expo, and screened on major TV networks. Over the past decade, his projects have increasingly focused on social-ecological issues, with an increasing emphasis on developing a deep connection to nature.
danfarberoff.com

Collective Autotheory: Methodologies for Kindred Knowledge Practices
Gilly Karjevsky

"The personal is theoretical."
Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life, 2017*

It was during a conversation with Jane Rendell that I heard her use the term "autotheory" for the first time, and it immediately clicked with me. That particular conversation was centred around design pedagogy - how discipline and learning are entangled with norms of domination and hierarchy, and what teachers and students can do to expose and engage with these hidden structures. Jane generously reflected on her own role as an architecture professor looking to teach beyond the boundaries of what the university might understand architecture to be, and how she actively encourages her students to tell stories that differ from the norms they might feel oppressed by. She described autotheory as a space where the relationship of self-reflection and social critique is accentuated, in a "spatially or specifically situated version of self-writing." In this conversation, Rendell links this term to works such as Michel Foucault's "self-writing" and Donna Haraway's "Situated Knowledges," as well as her own "Site-Writing." Jane Rendell is a feminist spatial scholar whose theory and terminology have helped me to define my own work in curating critical spatial practice. She has helped give scope to my own field of practice, enabling me to see clearly the places where I might choose to respect disciplinary boundaries and where I might aim to jump over professional or social hurdles.

After this conversation with Jane, I began to research autotheory, and found that it holds immense political potential for renegotiating knowledge production in cultural, academic and popular settings. Being in dialogue, or engaging with a group, one inevitably has to reckon with the needs and desires expressed by others in direct and indirect ways. Crucially, autotheory charted the way to introducing a personal perspective to my work, to explain and negotiate the essential gap between myself and others in practice. It is this tension between individual and collective desires that I will focus on in this text and what I attempt to address with collective autotheory as a methodology.

For this purpose, what follows starts with a very brief subjective reading of the emergent terminology around autotheory, after which, I aim to describe how two projects of mine—*Silent Conversation* and *Letters to Joan*—both in relation to the *New Alphabet School*,[1] constituted experiments in practicing *Collective Autotheory*. In this way, I want to propose *Collective Autotheory* as an approach to making shifts in kinship or making kinshift.

Autotheory
The term autotheory is commonly attributed to Stacy Young's work on writing and publishing practices within the North American women's movement in her 1997 book, *Changing the Wor(l)d: Discourse, Politics and the Feminist Movement*. In Chapter 2, "The Autotheoretical Texts," Young describes the life-writing of Black feminists within the women's movement as a political life-writing practice—a writing practice that departs

from academic norms to include private accounts, that meshes them together with critical theory:

> The power of the autotheoretical texts lies, in part, in their insistence on situatedness and embodiedness. The writings' autobiographical nature clarifies the origins of their insights, and thus underscores the contingency of their claims (indeed, of claims about social reality in general). It also works as an invitation to the reader to examine her own multiple positions—in relation to the author/narrator (the relationship is not always one of identification) and, by extension, to other readers and authors; and in relation to various aspects of the social structure. These texts combine autobiography with theoretical reflection and with the authors' insistence on situating themselves within histories of oppression and resistance. The effect is that the texts undermine the traditional auto-biographical impulse to depict a life as unique and individual. Instead, they present the lives they chronicle as deeply enmeshed in other lives, and in history, in power relations that operate on multiple levels simultaneously. Moreover, in their shifting back and forth between the narrators/authors as individuals and the larger social forces in which they are caught—and which they seek to transform—the texts perform the politics for which they argue.[2]

Thus, while reemerging in current art discourses now, autotheory in fact originates with observing Black feminist writing practices, which at their core were a critique of the women's movement's universalist undertones. Arguably, the autotheoretical texts go a long way to challenging the category "woman" altogether—in identity, in origin, and in theory. The autotheoretical texts insist on diversity inside of social categories such as gender, and not only in between them, in order to be able to situate individuals more precisely and thus embody resistance to the oppressive homogenising logics which arise from the strict categorisation that the modern scientific project has applied in order to assert it's power.

Among many other works since Young's writing about autotheoretical texts, two more recently published authors have used the term to describe their own critical self-writing approach: Paul B. Preciado's *Testo Junkie* and Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts*. Both books offer accounts of gender transformation: Nelson depicts the transition of her partner Harry Dodge while she herself is pregnant and grapples with oncoming motherhood, whereas Preciado is describing his own transition through a theoretical exploration of the techno-pharma-political condition, or as he describes it in the very opening sentences of the introduction, "This is a somato-political fiction, a theory of the self, or self-theory."[3]

Emerging from these examples, autotheory might be understood as a practice that aims to employ discourse in order to transform that very discourse from within. In this way, exploration, reflection and transformation of the self are central to the autotheory form, suggesting the site of personal transformation as prefiguration for social transformation. Autotheory is a critical form of free indirect speech—whereby the author's viewpoint intermingles with the seemingly objective stance of a theoretical position in order to change understanding of that objectivity from within. The autotheoretical relay between objectivity (personal account) and subjectivity (critical theory) comes to serve as a tool for transformation, resistance, and liberation.

Collective Autotheory

It is precisely because autotheory insists on acknowledging the ways in which context and situation shape the voice of the author, exactly because it provides the reader with access to embodied experiences, one to which they can relate in first person, that I will claim that autotheory is inherently also about collectivity, and about journeys traveled together.

Readers of autotheoretical texts will not only gain access to narratives, ideas, and theories that transparently inform there writers' perspective , but they will also gain insights into methodology - as these texts suggest a method of stitching private life stories, critical theory and the social structures in which those lives reside, assessing and asserting the impact they have on each other and their ever-changing relationship. Recognising the writer in her body, site, genealogy, culture, and time does three things that, when combined, could be observed as an autotheoretical-methodological protocol - contextualise, embody, resist.

Autotheoretical texts call on us to otherwise socio-political relationships by employing the tools that Young studied—reading, writing, and publishing—and that remain central to the production and dissemination of knowledge. I wish to find more tools with which we might create stories collectively—tools to embody the politics that might promote collectivity in a way which reframes the relationship between the self and the group, both agonistically and productively. For example, how can we engage in collective decision-making where the dynamics of conversation do not oppress some voices, but which rather amplify all voices so that everyone is heard and trusted for their viewpoint? How can we form collective narratives for coherently describing a complex site or a complex group without homogenising it's participants? How can plural, polyvocal narratives coexist, contaminate, and co-constitute one story?

These questions express a wish to negotiate the space between individual and collective ways of knowing and to find kinship that holds them together, accepting their validity as incommensurable. This constant reconsideration of changing needs, desires, and conditions between diverse individuals requires tools of conversation and exchange, as well as methods for collective self-determination. The relational nature of autotheory communicates through and across identity in order to tell stories that shape us all through symbiosis with others. As gleaned by Ariana Zwartjes: "In many ways, autotheory engenders collectivist, rather than individualist, worldviews; it uses theory to recognise the power of shared connection, shared experience, in fragmented and isolated time."[4]

I wish to describe how I practice collective autotheory through two projects I recently conceptualised with various partners. Two projects which attempt to write theory collectively in different settings, through conversational formats of writing, emphasising the relationship between different writers, in order to compose the whole. Through these practices, I wish to ask: can autotheory become a collective method for aligning complex group identities, politics, and actions?

Silent Conversation

My engagement with the *New Alphabet School* came via an invitation from Boris Boden and Olga Schubert. They had both attended a workshop in 2018 at the Floating University Berlin as part of the collective lexicon writing process I had been designing

for the site. I held *Silent Conversation* workshops for the lexicon process, where terms relating to the site of the Floating University Berlin were being silently co-authored in written form by participants and visitors. This was an attempt to describe collective ways of thinking and ways of making for a specific practice on a specific site. In its disrupted, hyper-contextualised form, *Silent Conversation* gives agency both to the site and to the process as producers of knowledge. This lexical technique neither produces encyclopaedic definitions nor furthers synthesis—the definitions remain as they were sketched initially on paper, frozen in time, in a process that is a game, a collage, and a meditation. In this way, the moment of thinking and writing together becomes the focus and the image of the term. I consider the *Silent Conversation* method to be collective autotheory, in that it captures a moment of cross-pollination between people, a site, and a situation.

The terms and definitions in a *Silent Conversation* document a language of practice as well as a physical process of reflection. As the terms and comments are being written or sketched onto each page, a network of thoughts is being formulated. When you look at a page, you can see the different relationships emerge between the initial writing and the comments in a way that challenges the knowledge hierarchy. In some pages, the first text written stands out clearly, in the middle or at the top, while comments, highlights, and sketches may appear around it. In other pages, it can be difficult to make out the original text from the comments that followed. On each page, the process of feedback, reflection, and conversation is made visual, capturing a raw, unfinished, imperfect process of communication. At the heart of the *Silent Conversation* is a methodology that does not so much *produce* as *frame* a process—it may coin new terms while never truly finalising their definitions. In this way, many parallel discussions take place in the silent group. All voices get heard on the page, playing with the notions of authorship, the linearity of language, hierarchy of knowledge, and conversational dynamics.

The design collective Brave New Alps used *Silent Conversation* in a community economy workshop. Here, they describe the process they use:

> We divide into groups with an equal number of people, keeping in mind that the ideal group size is 10. The groups sit in a circle, around a table or on the ground. Each person receives one A4 sheet and a pen. To start with, every person writes a sentence, slogan, hashtag or drawing on their sheet, which they use in their own context when talking about creating a different way of doing economy or a different way of operating in their context. After 90 seconds, each person passes their sheet on to the person sitting next to them in clockwise order. We then continue with 90-second time slots to respond to what we find on the sheet that has been handed to us. We continue this way until everyone has their original sheet back. The facilitator times the rounds—90 seconds each.[5]

Different workshop facilitators in different settings might change the time given to each round. Some facilitators might get rid of the time restriction all together and let the group self-regulate the handover of the papers. I normally give more time to the first round, where people propose an idea or a term to begin with, then I do to the commenting rounds. But the method is highly flexible and can be adapted according to needs and the nuances of the specific group taking part.

In 2019, during the initial week of the *New Alphabet* project, as part of the "(Un)-Learning Place" series of events, I ran a workshop on the topic of care together with Elke

Krasny, Rosario Talevi, and Hannah Wallenfels, in which we also used the *Silent Conversation* methodology to discuss the topic of care. While participants who gathered for the "(Un)-Learning Place" series of events came from a vast number of disciplines and practices, geographies and ages, for our smaller group a majority self-identified as women.

As our group sat in a circle on the carpeted area in the foyer of the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) silently working on the pages, passing them to and from each other, a collective thinking and knowing of care emerged out of the process. Not a finished, refined, textual definition, but an embodied sense of a world of care, assembled from all contributions together and held differently on each page and by each body. It is this way of knowing care that I want to highlight with collective autotheory, for in this way of knowing, no individual knowledge is favoured or less deserving. Knowledge is gained through the relation of self with others, and is co-created in this sense, but still embodied by each individual. This is what collective autotheory could be—a practice of caring for how we gain knowledge, how it is maintained, and how we share it.

Letters to Joan
The intersection of autobiography, self-writing, and critical theory is not the end goal of autotheory but more its starting place. This intersection could act as a landmark or a meeting place for collective autotheory to build around and relate to. In June 2020, Rosario Talevi, Sascia Bailer, and I co-curated the fourth edition of the *New Alphabet School* titled "#CARING." The event was meant as a general introduction into ethics of care and what it could mean for cultural practitioners. Three months into the first lockdown in Germany, we - freelance curators working from home and dealing with different personal situations, as well as HKW - a public-facing institution, were grappling with moving the content online, and questioning how to engage with different concepts of care remotely. We staged online lectures and facilitated online workshops, but we also wanted to publish online to allow participants to engage with the content on their own terms, in their own time. In thinking about a more personal introduction into ethics of care, I suggested to commission writers to articulate their own engagement with the concept of care, through correspondence with Joan Tronto - a part of the co-curated program that became *Letters to Joan*.

Joan Tronto is a North American scholar of women's studies and political science whose work on the ethics of care is central to the multidisciplinary search for an alternative paradigm to universal moral norms and their detrimental effects to diverse and marginalised communities within society. Our wish was to engage with Joan in order to recognise and map how various artistic and theoretical practices relate to ethics of care, marking Joan's work as a central node in this map.

Acting as collective autotheory of care, *Letters to Joan* also show a way to work collectively and individually at the same time, as many edited collections essentially do. As a whole, the compilation allows the concept of care to be visited from diverse perspectives, it provides an overview of the spatial relations between all the aspects of care and is able to continually expand and evolve. It also stretches over time, to map how various generations might read and understand care ethics, and how they might be practiced in different contexts. We envisaged these letters and their responses making up a landscape of care—a relational map you can read from your own personal position. With this emerging map of care, it is clear to see how far the concept stretches—and how essential care is as an alternative paradigm.

Yayra Sumah, who follows in the footsteps of bell hooks and proclaims that "care is not love" as she reflects on the confusion of motherhood with care; Elke Krasny, who highlights how the coronavirus pandemic has hit women harder at home; João Florêncio points to the contested notion of "home" in times of self-isolation; Edna Bonhomme writes a litany for surviving Black death; Johanna Hedva points to the revolutionary potential of the bed-ridden body; Teresa Dillon turns our attention to more-than-human care concepts and the internet of life; Patricia Reed describes the co-dependency of care and knowledge, especially when thinking in planetary dimensions; and Johanna Bruckner follows particles as they escape from the earth's atmosphere and form new caring constellations in space.[6]

The discussions in *Letters to Joan* and *Silent Conversation* show two different approaches to working with collective knowledge production. When taken together, the two projects provide a small-scale comparative study to see how collective autotheory might look like in practice. While the letters are individually authored by writers from various backgrounds and fields, they are still co-constituted in relation to Joan Tronto and to each other. The letter-writing format brings a more personal tone and encourages their authors to acknowledge the conversation with Joan Tronto as a departure point for their own contemplation. Unlike the *Silent Conversation* pages—where authorship is muddled, even abandoned—the authorship of the letters stays within the norm of the single voice, but one that is contextualised and relationalised within the compilation setting.

Authorship, Collectivity, and Non-Conclusion

When considering collective autotheory formats such as *Letters to Joan* or *Silent Conversation*, a discussion about authorship is essential. Having worked in partnerships and group collaborations for two decades now, I can say with a degree of certainty that there is nothing more complicated and personal than the claims for authorship within collective production. Often resulting in toxic dynamics, the claim for authorship in these situations usually occurs at the end or in the aftermath of a project.

The collective process is a Rashomon. That is, it is a situation where ideas developed in practice are seen from as many perspectives and angles as the number of individuals who are engaged in it. No one person has a perfectly subjective memory of any situation. No idea is pure, and no project is comprehensively original. Contamination, inspiration, and rewriting is inevitable and untraceable. Still, when it comes to creative work, it is hard to let go of personal feelings of ownership, authorship, or even affiliation for numerous reasons; feelings that one may not be able to capitalise on the results of the work, or that there isn't enough recognition to go around, as well as purely normal and regular human emotions such as jealousy, and competition.

As a practitioner facing the question of authorship on a regular basis, I am always looking for ways to cope with these traps. Eventually, to feel seen is a central part of our emotional well-being which makes recognition important for our contentment, while authorship translates into future income. Which is why we need to go beyond the mere representation of critique and insist on practicing collectivity in ways that do not deny recognition, and that do not create competition for income. A good place to start is by recognising that these needs are real, and to work through them together, finding methods of sustainable mutual aid.

Having laid bare here the struggles of collective work, I want to quasi-conclude by stating that there is, in my eyes, no work more urgent today or more essential, than learning how to negotiate collectivity in all of its forms. Living through the sixth mass extinction, the fourth industrial revolution, a global pandemic, and the war-ridden collapse of capitalism, we will only find shelter in collective efforts. And gladly, luckily, there are many traditions which we can still learn from to do exactly that. The idea that we know nothing about what will replace capitalism is wrong (and dangerous), as much as the notion that we don't have solutions to our pressing problems is designed to create despair. We do know. Learning from Indigenous communities and traditions is one important route we could take, to decolonise ourselves. Working towards Indigenous sovereignty might be another. Alongside those, we might revisit many of the ideas that have long circulated within collective and collaborative practices of community organisation, within social and environmental justice movements, and alternative forms of organisation learned by feminist groups. All of these past experiences offer collective road maps and recipes for a caring society. This is why I still strongly believe in collaboration, or otherwise in symbiosis. Collaboration always fitted me and still does. It fits me because I believe we are never self-contained. Because I see how present the world is within me. Much more than I am present in it.

Notes

1 See: https://hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2019/new_alphabet_school/new_alphabet_school_start.php

2 Stacy Young, Chapter 2, "The Autotheoretical Texts," in Young, *Changing the Wor(l)d: Discourse, Politics and the Feminist* Movement (Abingdon: Routledge, 1997), 69.

3 Paul B. Preciado, "Introduction," in Preciado, Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics the Pharmacopornographic Era, trans. Bruce Benderson (New York: Feminist Press, 2013), x. See also Maggie Nelson, The Argonauts (London: Melville House, 2015).

4 Ariana Zwartjes, "Under the Skin: An Exploration of Autotheory," Assay: A Journal of Nonfiction Studies 6, no. 1 (2022), accessed May 18, 2022, https://www.assayjournal.com/arianne-zwartjes8203-under-the-skin-an-exploration-of-autotheory-61.html.

5 Bianca Elzenbaumer and Fabio Franz/Brave New Alps, "Community Economies, a practice exchange: 7-8-9 June 2019, Vallagarina Italy," Snapshot Journal 1 (July 2020): 36, accessed June 9, 2022, https://www.academia.edu/69095769/Community_Economies_a_practice_exchange_7_8_9_June_2019_Vallagarina_Italy.

6 See "Letters to Joan," in New Alphabet School 4: Caring (June 12 2020), accessed June 9, 2020, https://newalphabetschool.hkw.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Letters-to-Joan-CARING-edited-by_BAILER-KARJEVSKY-TALEVI.pdf.

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Gilly Karjevsky is a curator of critical spatial practice (Rendell) based in Berlin. Her work always begins with a site and situation, making programs at the intersection of ecology and care. She is founding association member at Floating University Berlin where she curates *Climate Care - a festival for theory and practice on a natureculture learning site*. She is founding member of *Soft Agency* - a diasporic group of female spatial practitioners. Gilly is co-director of *72hoururbanaction*, with a recent monograph published with Arch+. In 2022-23, she is guest-professor for social design at HFBK in Hamburg, and Curator in Residence at the Spatial Practices program in Central Saint Martins, London.

Public Movement.
The Art of Pre-Enactment
Oliver Marchart

The popular genre of re-enactments, for which Jeremy Deller's *Battle of Orgreave* came to stand as the canonical example, has recently experienced its temporal inversion: the preenactment. In most cases, for instance in the performances of the German collectives Interrobang or Hofmann&Lindholm, the point of pre-enactments is to critically extrapolate from contemporary developments an image of our social or political future. This meaning of pre-enactment is based on the concept invented by role playing communities that do not seek to revive events of the historical past (like historical battles), but rather, to immerse themselves into science fiction scenarios. However, a second and, perhaps, more interesting use of the term pre-enactment occurred recently to describe the activities of the Israeli performance collective *Public Movement*.

Public Movement was founded in 2006 by the dancer and choreographer Dana Yahalomi and the visual artist Omer Krieger, and is led by Yahalomi alone since 2011. The name of the group refers, on the one hand, to ritualised public choreographies of the nation state, i.e. to state choreographies. On the other hand, it refers to the political or protest movements of a potential counter-public, i.e. to protest choreographies. It is of importance for the group that these choreographies will always be inscribed into the bodily knowledge of individuals. As Yahalomi puts it: "Politics exists within our bodies, as an often donnant knowledge".

This is perhaps most obvious in *Positions* (2009), one of their most emblematic performances. A rope is stretched across a public square. A member of *Public Movement* announces a series of binaries: 'left'/'right', 'lsrael'/'Palestine', etc., and the participants are supposed to 'take a side', that is, to move, according to their choice, to one or the other side of the rope. This setting may appear simplistic, but one should not be deceived by the exposure of simplicity, as from the setting a political form of 'complexity' becomes visible: the complexity of intersecting lines of antagonism. While politics is always premised on an underlying logics of simplification ('which side are you on?'), it will rarely remain a simple affair as one is rarely confronted, in political reality, with a choice between two options only. As in the case of the *Public Movement* performance, it turns out that one's own positions (in the plural) are far from consistent. One may be constantly forced to move back and forth between the two sides of the rope. Some of those who have previously moved onto the side of 'the left', for instance, might subsequently move onto the side of Israel, while others move onto the side of Palestine. They will thus have to divide, shift positions, and confront the possibility of a more intertwined, contorted and contradictory political terrain. Hence, what regularly occurs in this performance on the side of the participants is a moment of hesitance. Rarely a point is reached where it is already clear which side one is on; it depends on the particular situation, of one's readiness to expose one's political views publically, of experiencing or espousing group pressure, and of accepting a particular political interpellation in the first place rather than ignoring it.

As in the case of *Positions*, many *Public Movement* perfonnances are geared towards awakening the dormant political knowledge of bodies, and some of these performances

have been explicitly described by Dana Yahalomi as 'pre-enactments'. They are not meant to imitate an actual event in the past, but engage in the paradoxical enterprise of restaging an event that has not yet occurred, for instance, a state ritual of a future state, or a memorial ritual. In this spirit, *Public Movement* have staged rituals – for instance in the Warsaw ghetto – that are meant to be repeated year by year. These proto-rituals are, as it were, *pre*-formed by Public Movement with a view to them becoming rituals (provided that something is only a ritual if it is repeated).

In their performance *Also Thus!* of 2009, for instance, lhe group staged a fictitious state ritual in front of the fascist architecture of the Berlin Olympic Stadium. This ritual, which included mock violence and a car crash, ended with an Israeli folkdance and the audience joining in. In this *Public Movement* performance, as in some others, a quasi-Zionist occupation takes place in an antisemitic historical setting, a sort of over-writing which, nevertheless, leaves visible the background. In some cases, these *pre-formances,* as one may call them, can assume a disruptive rather than a ceremonial quality. In These cases, what is announced by the intervention is nol a future ritual, but a future protest: a future moment of antagonisation.

In their 2006 guerrilla performance *How long is now?*, the group blocked crossroads in Israeli cities by performing a circle dance to a popular Israeli song from the 1970s, *Od lo ahavti dai* (the same song that ended the *Also Thus!* ritual). After having blocked traffic for two and a half minutes, the dancers disappear and traffic can continue circulating. In order to understand this intervention, one has to know that Israeli folkdance does not in the slightest emerge from an age-old tradition. Round dances, of course, belong to the cultural heritage of the Mediterranean region and south east Europe. Yet, modern Israeli folkdance has its roots in the 1940s when the Israelis were forced to create a new, synthetic culture for heterogeneous groups of immigrants. For this purpose Israeli folkdance did not only integrate choreographic elements of highly diverse traditions, it also became very much parl of popular music production. Every new Israeli pop hit was immediately outfitted with a choreography which was then passed on in dancing classes. Among these hundreds of songs, *Od lo ahavti dai*, with the relatively simple choreography by Yankele Levy, has proven to be one of the most popular ones. It is probably because every Israeli child learns the choreography in kindergarten that *Public Movement* chose the song. In this sense, Israel's state choreography is expressed through communal dancing and registered by the bodily knowledge of its citizens. Because it is a universal (and individual) knowledge, passers-by can potentially join in and become part of the circle. By using this dance in order to block the crossroad, a dance symbolising the communitarian closure of society (but also, of course, the attempt to gain courage and solidarity within a fundamentally hostile environment) is re-appropriated and used to disturb the public order of this very society.

How long is now? is a guerrilla performance in which a strong sense of public community is carved out of the urban space. This is achieved through blocking the circulation of traffic with dancing bodies. Yet the passage to politics in the strict sense does not occur, as no real conflict appears that would force everyone to position him or herself on this or the other side of a political antagonism. In summer 2011 such an antagonism broke out in Israel when tents were planted in the centre of Tel Aviv and other cities. Starting with the call of a single student, social protests against high living and housing expenses grew to the point where Israel witnessed the largest political demonstration in its history. In the course of the protests *Public Movement* took up their intervention and offered this format to the protesters. Repeatedly dozens of activists would assemble on different crossroads in order to block traffic for two and a half nunutes to the music of *Od lo ahavti*

dai. In so doing, they actualized a conflict much wider than a simple clash with angry car drivers. Such clashes occurred, but they now referred to the wider line of political conflict drawn by the social protesters all over Israel. By offering the demonstrators a new and easily collectable protest format, the original guerrilla performance was turned by *Public Movement* from an artistic intervention into a political one. The latter actualized what was only announced as a future possibility by the former pre-enactment of 2006. Or, to put it differently, *How long is now?*, danced by the protesters, was not an artistic re-enactment of a political event, as in the case of Jeremy Deller's *Battle of Orgreave*. It was, inversely, a political re-enactment of an artistic event.

We have thus approached a definition of the pre-enactment as envisaged in the practice of *Public Movement*. The pre-enactment presents itself as something like the pre-performance of a future political event. I would thus propose to use pre-enactment as a term for the artistic anticipation of a political event to come. But this event cannot be anticipated through simple extrapolation from well-known contemporary tendencies (as in the sense of role-playing science fiction scenarios). In the realm of politics, nobody can see what the future brings: it is unclear where and when social conflicts will break out. The artistic pre-enactment could, in this sense, be subsumed under the category of the *rehearsal* – the rehearsal of a future political event. To the extent that this event is unknown, however, the pre-enactment – with its entirely open outcome – cannot be a rehearsal of a determinate event; at best, it could be the rehearsal of an entirely indeterminate event, the event of *the political*. For this reason, it is perhaps preferable to think of pre-enactments not so much as rehearsals in the strict sense (as if the definite script of the future political event were available), than as training sessions. These sessions are there to produce the skills necessary to engage in the 'actual thing', should it occur. In the latter sense, the preenactment is what in the world of classical ballet would be the exercise, the training of basic movements at the barret. It would be the warning up for something that may or may not occur. If it occurs, an artistic intervention on a cross-road may turn into a collective protest format of a social movement.

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Public Movement is working across mediums, in dance and theatre venues, museums and biennials. In 2022 Public Movement created One Day, commissioned by Galeria Arsenal, Białystok, a 12 hours series of performances, interventions, and demonstrations. In 2022, the group activated A Dialogue at 8 Kilometres Per Second, a first of its kind set of performative conversations with an astronaut at the International Space Station. Public Movement has performed in renowned art institutions worldwide including Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv; Guggenheim Museum, New York; Berlin Biennial; Performa, New York; Hebbel Am Uber Theater, Berlin; Asian Art Biennial, Taipei; Australian Centre for Contemporary Art Melbourne; and steirischer herbst Festival, Graz. The group has won several awards including the Essential Art Prize (2021) and Rosenblum Prize for Performance Art (2017) and was nominated for Future Generation Art Prize, Kiev (2014). Dana Yahalomi is the co-founder of Public Movement (together with Omer Krieger) and its director since 2011.

Educating the Commons and Commoning Education: Thinking Radical Education with Radical Technology
Grégoire Rousseau and Nora Sternfeld

Introduction

This chapter is designed as a conversation. The dialogue facilitates the encounter between our two positions within what this book calls *Post-Digital, Post-Internet Art and Education*, allowing us to articulate our standpoints and current practices. To do this we decided deliberately to leave *post-internet* as the label for a certain kind of artistic approach behind. Our aim is to come further with a more concretely engaged questioning based on the wish to work on what could come after the post- of post-internet – as it felt nothing but a form of being stuck to us. In contrast our approach intends to engage and question concretely what could be a common practice distant from thinking art as the value form of capitalism or aesthetic experience as a direct expression of corporate spectacle.

We know what being stuck in capitalism means; cynicism, art as branding, and in fine artistic practice as a form of entrepreneurship. We know that our survival depends to a certain extend in its affirmation, we know it and do it with every line, with every click, but we want to insist and persist with imagining other possible structures for education and for technology. In this sense we situate this dialogue in a state that aims to work through and overcome cynicism. We want to imagine another collective gesture, one that would form the objective conditions of production for this new space situated in, against and beyond capitalism.

Considering the post-digital as a condition of our time, we begin the dialogue by together thinking through our respective experiences. This encounter inquires into, but also questions, the potential role of current radical/critical ideas/position/theory within a technological context. The intention is to reflect on our common standpoint on particular processes currently taking place: the privatization of interest and commonalization of resources. We further ask what it specifically means for education, art, and culture. The dialogue probes these questions from the perspective of an educator and an engineer, respectively. Nora Sternfeld's practice originated in radical pedagogy, philosophy, and cultural studies, while Grégoire Rousseau, after training as an electrical engineer, has been active in alternative sound art practices since the mid-1990s.

All over the world, education – which is understood differently, as a universal right and public good – is facing processes of economization and privatization. Technology – which is also understood differently, as a common means of production, collaboratively developed – is being taken away from the public and put into corporate hands. Against this background, our conversation proposes a radical understanding of post-internet art education. It explores necessary convergences in radical practices, as well as possible future strategies for education and open technology. The exchange ranges widely across ideas of resistance, emancipation, and commoning practices. Specifically, we ask how new models of understanding technology and education as

commons can challenge the neoliberal agenda and move away from established policies, and how a collective re-appropriation of the means of production – in particular in communication and education – could emerge within a post-digital society. Working together in a discursive open laboratory, we investigate the possibility of a collective effort to learn from each other and from our respective approaches, theories, knowledges and know-how. These derive from substantially different experiences and practices. This conversation stages an encounter between our knowledges and contexts, aiming to find direct intersections in their thought. However, it also seeks to learn from two very different approaches toward the *commons*. The ultimate aim is the production of dialogue and a space to discuss education and the post-digital from a radical position.

Situating Ourselves

Nora: *As we try to bring our perspectives together, let's start by understanding them. We announced that we speak from a "radical" perspective. But what do we mean by that?*
I would regard myself as a radical educator. Let me try to say what this means for me: In theoretical terms, I make strong connections to theories of *radical democracy* and *radical pedagogy*. The most important representatives of this re-politicization and democratization of democracy are Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, whose book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985) was the first to introduce the term "radical democracy" to the political lexicon (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). In terms of my radical pedagogy, I have been very much influenced by the Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire (Freire, 1970) and by bell hooks (bell hooks, 1994), the African-American writer, teacher and Black intellectual. Both have written and worked on education as a practice of emancipation and change. The idea of such an endeavor is to collaboratively understand the conditions under which we live, in order for us to change them. In this sense radical education is also critical education: it is critical, collaborative and transformative.
In Vienna, along with my colleagues Renate Höllwart and Elke Smodics, I am part of *trafo.K*, a collective we founded in 1999. Here is how we describe our practice:
trafo.K is an office based in Vienna, which works on art education and critical knowledge production. Our projects question social phenomena which are perceived as simply given. We intervene in existing relations, more often than not using unexpected strategies. We are interested in revealing the structures of media and institutions, and in creating public awareness of alternative (hi)stories and images. In doing so, we want to find out what is produced when different forms of knowledge, artistic strategies and socially relevant themes are brought together. Our projects are based on collective, emancipatory processes, which allow a variety of perspectives to come into contact, opening up new spaces of agency (http://www.trafo-k.at/en/about/).
Does that make sense to you? And how would you describe your own position?

Grégoire: I understand this to mean your pedagogical practice is looking to do more than merely interpret the questions posed. It wants a concrete collective transformative process.

Nora: I am actually not sure if this is that much of a contradiction. Isn't interpreting a question often also a way to change it?

Grégoire: What I said just there was not an attempt to essentialize your work, I am just trying to put it into my own simple words. From my standpoint this very *concrete transformative process* happens to be crucial: we'll get back to that in relation to commoning practices. However, now I would relate my own pedagogical practice

directly to your words, 'we question things that are presented as simply given, and we intervene in existing relations.' I was educated as a computer engineer and worked for many years in industry. My early electronic art practice took inspiration from Situationist approaches, for instance the idea of the "détournement" (Debord & Wolman, 1956) of my professional working equipment into sound devices in my studio. I even brought these on stage once.

Nora: This actually sounds like a good example of deconstructing the difference between interpreting and transforming. *Détournement* could be a way to 'interpret' material differently in a very practical sense, to change its 'use' through a different understanding, to re-appropriate the material by taking it so seriously that its interpretation flips.

Grégoire: Exactly. And I would even go further, based on my own experience as an educator in technology: What seems most relevant for me in educational technology as a collective learning process, is the understanding, or awareness, that what is simply given may possess *more.* The precise idea of what is *more* cannot be defined, nor should it be expected to be as such. This is the meeting point of art, technology and collaborative practices: It may be a dead end, or an experimental art form, or even a spark triggering something else. The *more*, as a process, produces a new space for production and emancipation. This is what I mean by a collective transformative process, and this is where I would situate my practice. An actual radical technology practice must both comprehend its own position within existing conditions, and from that position, it must produce an action of return toward public hands. This may simply sound like another form of analysis, but I can assure you the work is very much hands-on. The on-purpose over-fluidity of media activated by Post Internet Art should only emphasis the hard materiality the Post Digital condition reminds us. Post Digital Commoning practices as demonstrated by Felix Stadler (2013) produce this self-reflective moment to envision together something else. Open Source Technology is one of the early examples of collectively-designed digital production. However, obviously this technological emancipation movement has thus far never happened and will never simply come about by itself.

Nora: And what if we would insist and persist that this emancipation could actually be (and even is) a post-digital or post-internet perspective? Sometimes it seems as if historical discourses and agencies are almost eradicated from actual theories and practices. But this doesn't mean they don't exist.

Converging Histories

Nora: Here is a point where it seems to make sense to examine the histories of our own approaches and practices. I have worked on the history of radical education and you have written about the history of electricity. In your book, *Electric Energy in the Arts, Knowledge Happens Together* (Rousseau, 2018) you discuss how technology and electricity could be used for emancipatory practices. Could you give some more insight into that?

Grégoire: That book's point of departure was an investigation into the relation between artistic and scientific practices: What do they share? What makes them different? How one can actually learn from the other in term of collective knowledge production? Within that context, electrical energy is the red thread running through the entire process. We take electricity for granted in our everyday life, as something we

can generate, control and distribute. However, the current situation did not come about by itself nor as the result of a very linear scientific progression. On the contrary, the history of electrical energy was a difficult process of unplanned discoveries, failed attempts, individual and collective efforts, and political struggles. It should not come as a surprise that the Italian Futurists considered naming their proto-fascist movement "Elettrissimo" (Blumenkranz-Onimus, 1983). Lenin responded with the slogan, Communism is Soviet Government + Electrification of the Whole Country (Lenin, 1920). At this point, I must make reference to a moment that deeply transformed my practice, both as an electrical engineer and an artist: Quinn Latimer's text and exhibition space "*Technology suggests the hands*" (Latimer, 2017), which featured in documenta14. Latimer's work shows how, and why, one of the best-known technology companies exploited Navajo women, taking advantage of the visual similarities between electronic circuit board and traditional Navajo weaving crafts. I realized then that electricity – both as a form of energy, and a technology in digital form – had a particular position within both art practice and education. In this sense, electric energy as form of power and technology produces a space for critical practices and emancipation. However, this must come together with constant, collective reflection on the conditions of its production.

Nora: This brings me directly to what interests me in the history of pedagogy as a critical practice: I would like to bring up two elements we both mentioned earlier: The need to take a stance and the need to take a stance *together*. Both of these things form part of political education from the very beginning. Peter Mayo (2006), who writes about Antonio Gramsci and Paulo Freire, sums this up in a simple question that probably every political pedagogy must ask: "Which side are we on when we educate and teach, and when we act (Mayo, 2006, p. 20)? The question arises in relation to power: Is education about preserving existing power relations or is it about challenging them? Paulo Freire, the Brazilian pedagogue, liberation theologian and educational theorist, positioned his own approach in this way: "Tactically within the system and strategically outside it" (Mayo, 2006, p. 21). Freire's assumption was that there is no such thing as *neutral* education. Education is always political, either serving to consolidate existing conditions, or helping to change them.

Radical education's other great question concerns relations within education itself. It questions the undisputed power of the teacher, understanding learning as an active practice of collaboration. In other words, radical education conceives of the essential link between pedagogy and society both in terms of social transformation and of removing of the clear distinction between active knowledge production and passive reception. These two goals have been the central aspects of debates on a critical, revolutionary pedagogy, from Marxist approaches in the 1920s through the Black Power Movement in the late 1960s, to decolonial approaches today. From here we come to an understanding of education, first as part of the wider struggle and, second, as a collaborative process of learning together, learning from each other.
Another history which interests me is the history of a practice called *Kritische Kunstvermittlung* in German. Something would go missing if I were simply to translate this term as "critical art mediation," or "critical art education." The German prefix "Ver-" in the original word *Vermittlung* adds an element of questioning, of crisis, additionally implying something like an 'unlearning'. Anyway, what I wanted to say is that since the late 1990s this 'Kritische Kunstvermittlung'—this art education practice—has developed ways to reflect, question, critique and reimagine art and the world in various artistic, educational and experimental contexts. To me, this seems very interesting and relevant to our topic. I would describe these practices as reflective,

playful, investigative, collaborative, open-ended. They offer solidarity with existing social struggles and are highly critical practices, even though they tend to be formulated from within the art institutions they critique. Janna Graham (2015) has described the practices used in this context as Para-Sitic. And I would actually like to ask how these particular approaches can be translated into technology. What would be a technology that is based on critique, on dialogue, and on solidarity? Translating this into strategies for a post-internet art education two words come immediately to mind, forming the possible basis for a convergence: hacking and commons.

What do we mean by Commons?

Nora: In his book *Digital Solidarity*, Felix Stalder (2013) describes the commons as follows:

The most comprehensive new formations for organizing solidarity are developed through the renewal of the idea and practice of the commons or commoning. These are organized, long term processes by which a group of people manages a physical or informational resource for joint use. (Stalder, 2013, p. 31)

My own perspective is slightly different. It seems important to me to draw a strong relation between the term *commons* and the phenomenon of property. I actually understand commons as *public property*, that which belongs to everyone. Let me try to explain this through a museological example: In museology, the history of public collections is often told in connection with the French Revolution. In the Louvre, in fact, something significant happened in relation to the ownership of objects. In the revolutionary museum, the representative objects of the nobility and the Church were made public. This was the result of expropriation, the appropriation of the collections for the general public. If the objects had, until the Revolution, served as representations of the powerful, they were now socialized. In the process, objects underwent a change of meaning, a revolutionary de- and recontextualization. Since then, we have assumed that public museums and their collections are not simply *available* to everyone, but that they in fact *belong* to everyone. In the case of the Louvre, the public cannot be understood separately from the fact of property.

Grégoire: Let's remember that revolution first happened, the people collectively re-appropriated that property. In that sense, the property of public objects followed the monopoly of ideology.

Nora: Obviously, we have since lost that tradition. The public itself has increasingly been expropriated: In our own neoliberal era, the public sphere is more and more being separated from property, and thus emptied of its core meaning. What I mean by this is that, in everyday language, we almost naturally assume that private collections, archives or research centers can be public without giving up their private ownership (think of the Getty Foundation, or of Google Museums). But if modern museum history teaches us that publicness has something to do with common property and not merely with access, then this double status is actually a contradiction in terms. This contradiction has spread particularly rapidly over the last two decades, as the public character of institutions has been increasingly eroded. Public institutions are being quietly privatized, at the same time as we have seen a boom in discourses of 'public spaces' and 'public programs.' And just as with material things, there is no reason why digital objects or digital copies should not belong to everyone.

Grégoire: We have to go further and ask: What if the property at stake is actually in the making, within a dynamic process? What would be a valid strategy when even the

precise property cannot be identified? I therefore take a different approach. On this question, I would relate more to the position of architect and educator Stavros Stavrides (Stavrides, 2016). Public property, whether a space or object or whatever else, is defined by an authority of some sort which establishes the rules under which people may use them. Private property belongs to economic entities which have the right to establish the condition of use. I would say that commons, or commoning practices, integrate something entirely different than the dichotomy between public and private property. They can be defined much more as a relation between a social group and the related collective process. They define a practice that questions and transforms the dominant form of living together.

Nora: This makes sense to me. To grasp the dynamism of the process it might be more appropriate to use the word commoning. But I can also see a problem here. In current debates on urban housing we often hear about "the three sectors: public, private and commons". This sounds like a neoliberal appropriation of the commons. A new way to integrate team work and temporary autonomous zones in the system, which can later be turned into an economic good.

Grégoire: I understand the underlying contradiction: that public property must be re-appropriated in its own full right, not in order to grant access to it as a form of privilege.

Re-appropriating the Commons
Nora: That all sounds very nice, but we seem to agree that right now we are experiencing the economization of all public goods, including the privatization of education and of technology. So, we are further than ever from our ambition. What is to be done to re-appropriate the public, to common education and to educate the commons?

Grégoire: Yes, as you mentioned, transformative processes can be turned into innovations for the market, forms of recuperation by private interest. This is true in the housing sectors, but also in technology. For our project *Station of Commons* – which I will come back to – we conducted research into one future means of production: open source software. We learned how *Open Source* became a branding method. It would take quite some time to analyze the ins and outs of the investigation. However, what we can note here is that the digital space has already its own *liberated enclaves*, ready-made traps. We should not limit the future inside of projected plans put together by someone else. The case of current digitalization practices within museums is one. The digitalization process represents a privatization opportunity. What if we would integrate the Post Digital assessments to think, reflect and act on the situation? What can we envisage or propose that would be different then?

Nora: The re-imagination of the world as common can't just be an idea that sounds good, it will either be a re-appropriation or it will not be at all. Because, in fact, the world actually does belong to everyone. Freire teaches us to name this state of affairs and to become aware of our own situation with regard to changing it. We name the world in order to change it. To make it our own again. So, it is about learning that education, culture, museums, knowledge belong to us all, just like housing and water. How do we expropriate the expropriators, the people behind the privatization and economization of culture, museums, education, technology, even the future?

Grégoire: I would suggest that the re-appropriation of the commons, the collectivization of technology, should do more than claim what already exists as our own, since

what already exists doesn't work. The term Para-Sitic that you mentioned tends in this direction: it implies a separate body situated in the margins, functioning on its own rules but still forming part of a larger body, a wider structure. Instead of imagining the re-appropriation as static, let's think it as the creation of para-infrastructures. Thinking the Post digital condition requires an understanding on the values of technological development, while acting on Post Internet art demands a grasp on forms and temporalities. Commoning practices are always in the making, gathering a great diversity of knowledge and practices.

Nora: Here we come to a moment of convergence. I would say that radical education is exactly that: The production and sharing of knowledge as a para-infrastructure. And this actually happens all the time, despite processes of neo-liberalization. If we assume that learning can serve to challenge existing hegemonies, this production and sharing happens in two ways: First, existing truths and forms of knowledge often become fragile, debatable and disputable. Second, other forms of knowledge may come to light. This learning relates to the knowledge of struggles, but also the awareness of other possibilities. In their book *The Undercommons*, Stefano Harney and Fred Moten speak about the knowledge of the *undercommons*, something which we can learn from each other (Harney & Moten, 2013). For this knowledge, Harney and Moten believe that there are always practices of coming together and learning together: in institutions, in the street, at night. This is the context for what they call 'study': Spending time together, and with the topics, but without established objectives or schedules. And above all, without credit points (Harney, 2011). This type of learning takes place in the interstices of institutions, in the interstices of economization. It is a way in which we learn about another possible world, from each other. And this cannot be done alone, only as a collective process. We could say that while we are doing this, we create frameworks and teach them to each other, frameworks which make it possible to understand the world differently, in very practical terms. We could call it a *détour-nement* of understanding, one with a material effect on how the means of production are used.

Grégoire: Let's come back to Open Source processes, both as forms of learning and of production. A piece of software A is developed by a group for a specific purpose. The work is well documented and then shared openly. The commoning dynamic happens when another group faces another requirement and so uses A to develop further its own new piece of software B, and so on. There is an open iteration of new production, of both knowledge and know-how. The whole subject requires more investigation in terms of its temporalities, its modes of organization and labor, means of communication and distribution. This is exactly what I am developing, along with Juan Gomez, in the research project Station of Commons. Station of Commons investigates the possibilities of technology and its re-appropriation as public property. Considering resources as commons integrates the ideas of shared data, open source practices, artefacts and real time broadcast. A Station of Commons operates as an easily integrable on-line platform for sharing local resources. The internet infrastructure serves only as practical protocol of communication between stations, not as a centralized server concentrating and accumulating power. This position of autonomy reflects the original concept of the internet: the equality of the client-server relation and the openness of the algorithmic process. Post Digital asks for care, share of resources, technological agencies and new peer researches. Each Station depends on its own means of digital production, way of thinking, sharing and learning.

Nora: I think we should end this conversation with your practice as a beginning: A new and ongoing process of collaboration. The point of the convergence would take

place when we work together to politicize the fields of art education and of technology. For a radical understanding of post-internet art education this would mean educating and finding new approaches and new collective practices. Let's think of them as experiments, as learning processes, as ways of learning from each other, from cyber- and techno-feminism, from radical technology, from the Situationists and the Undercommons. In this way, we can explore, step by step and by all means possible, how it is possible to continue, using what exists, to carry out a *détournement* of existing infrastructure to build Stations of Commons.

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Concatenated Commons and Operational Aesthetics
Christoph Brunner

This article deals with the specific potentials of what I call an *operational aesthetics* as part and parcel of alternative online video platforms. These platforms, I will argue, engage in operative logics of programming and interface design as well as a merger of data and metadata with the aim to resist capitalist modes of value extraction tied to the digital image. I will particularly look at the platforms 0xDB and pad.ma as projects dedicated to collaborative practices of collecting, sharing and remodeling vast databases of moving images in relation to cinema *(*0xDB*)* and to activist film making and discourse around digital film archives (pad.ma).[1] Key to both platforms is the operative logic of timelines that allow engagement with the object in an asynchronous, texturally annotated and heavily flow-based appearance. To give a concrete example of such flows and lines from 0xDB: I choose Makoto Shinkai's animated short movie *She and her Cat* [Kanojo to kanojo no neko] (1999)—a cat narrating her relationship to a single woman in urban Japan while moving across the four seasons of a year full of experiences and encounters.[2] I check the film information from one of the drop-down menus, afterwards I watch the movie once in its entirety in low resolution of 96p, then I switch to timeline view and the entire movie appears as a stream of different monochrome variations, reminding me of some of Ryoji Ikeda's audio-visual performances and installations. The full timeline view's color-variation flows open up a very different engagement with the way I am used to perceiving movies while watching them. In another encounter on pad.ma, I skim through the contributions of the seminar *Fwd:Re Archive*, held by the artist group CAMP in 2018 at the Goethe Institute in Mumbai to mark the 10th anniversary of the platform.[3] I find information, people, contexts, lines of relations and friendships, but also a community of humans gathered around digital platforms and moving images that have become digital objects imbued with activating potential for new forms of sociality. A sensation arises of shared life-lines and practices combined with the timelines available through the platform itself. It is through the relaying of different operational aesthetics as they move and amplify through digital platforms that a different perceptual account of the present comes to the fore. It is a present that is under negotiation and open for different ways of gathering through sensation, or rather, through the varying temporal encounters these platforms create. They "accrete durations" and concatenate the present into an asynchronous yet common relational field that I term concatenated commons.[4]

The main difference between pad.ma and 0xDB resides in their content, the latter being mostly cinema and different kinds of professionally-produced series, whereas the former contains more amateur footage and material gathered around specific events. Much of the material on pad.ma takes on documentary forms, often interviewing people and collecting testimonials on particular circumstances. These scenes are often annotated and sometimes geo-located in the different menus of the graphic user interface. The range of material is broad, from intense workshop-like discussions such as *Fwd:Re Archive* footage to shopping mall surveillance cameras as part of the project *CCTV Social.*[5] Both platforms turn the logic of the production, circulation and meaning of structures of moving images towards themselves in a (post-)digital era of excessive visual cultures. The proliferation of 'the poor image' provides the material and visual ground for cultural practices based on a "relational aesthetics" beyond the realm of institutionalized art. While both platforms engage with cinema and art in different

ways, their main focus resides in fostering encounters through practices of engagement and experimentation. The notion of concatenated commons asks how platforms like pad.ma and 0xDB are able to engage digital objects that open up processes of relating in and through experience.

Platforms are the zones for relaying temporalities, affects, and operations through which modes of sensing and sense-making arise. pad. ma*'s* and 0xDB*'s* engagement with an operational aesthetics takes account of the infrastructural affordances which condition processes of sense(-making) and at the same time emphasize these media materialities as processes rather than products. Such media are concatenated in the sense that they generate relations between different processes, that is, between durations that differ in kind while sharing the potential of shaping experience. The question of concatenated commons challenges not only where to situate perception beyond the human scope but also pertains to the operational underpinnings which move through technical ensembles. As practiced, commons are temporalizing activations rather than groups, or places. I will attempt to formulate a temporal conception of commons as an affective and aesthetic politics of sense/making. The movement or direction of such sense courses through the sensible and inserts into processes of sense making, while itself activating potentialities: opening up modes of becoming through the actual process of experience.

Time, Affect, and Commons

The process of concatenation is crucial for William James' concept of experience as the "stuff of which everything is composed." [6] Such a conception of experience liberates its operation from being tied to an embodied subject of perception. Concatenation is the term James deploys to hint at experience's pluralist ontology. In his book *Essays in Radical Empiricism* he states:

> The world it [Radical Empiricism] represents as a collection, some parts of which are conjunctively and others disjunctively related. Two parts, themselves disjoined, may nevertheless hang together by intermediaries with which they are severally connected, and the whole world eventually may hang together similarly, inasmuch as some path of conjunctive transition by which to pass from one of its parts to another may always be discernible. Such determinately various hanging-together may be called *concatenated* union, to distinguish it from the "through-and through" type of union, "each in all and all in each" (union of total conflux, as one might call it), which monistic systems hold to obtain when things are taken in their absolute reality. In a concatenated world a partial conflux often is experienced. [7]

In emphasizing the "partial conflux," James provides a take on reality which can never be totalizing while being part of larger relational movements. His remarks lead me to outline three different aspects of relation that pose the concept as different from mere connections.

Primarily, as James states, "the relations that connect experience must themselves be experienced relation, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as 'real' as anything else in the system." [8] This means that the composition of experience is by nature relational and what is experienced as an embodied sensation is the experience of relations relating, rather than the recognition of form or *Gestalt*. Relations are ontologically prior to the formation of subjects and objects, substances and forms and thus exceed a connectivist logic.

The relational foundation of experience brings with it the second aspect, that of movement. Rather than considering relation as static or fixed, it should be conceived as a trajectory or tendency. Shifting from entity to tendency means to also underline movement as the defining feature of relations. Unbound, movement is absolute: "Motion originally simply *is*; only later is it confined to this thing or that."[9] The general fact of movement also means that whatever becomes partially perceived in an embodied experience emanates from a "bare activity" which permeates the entirety of experience.[10] The question, I want to pose with James, concerns the specificity of relation as a movement. This means, what distinguishes one relation from another is defined by *how* relations share a time of co-emergence while expressing their singular movement (or tendency).

Concatenation means this very process of resonances of relations as movements, while differentiations occur in their unique mode of moving. In that sense, what comes to shape an embodied experience from the base-layer ground of activity through the differential relations can be addressed as tendencies, rather than substances. "The experiences of tendency are sufficient to act upon."[11] With this statement, James emphasizes that the partiality of the concatenated union which makes up the present of experience is sufficient to act upon, or as he states elsewhere: "To continue thinking unchallenged is, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, our practical substitute for knowing in the complete sense."[12]

A conception of a world in flux, and of concatenated union as what composes the present, requires a third aspect, that of rhythm. It is Deleuze's work on Spinoza and his casting of the concepts of bodies and affect which provide a fruitful liaison with the relational foundation of experience. Here, a body is not a substance or a subject but a mode. "A mode is *a complex relation of speed and slowness*, in the body but also in thought, and it is a capacity for affecting or being affected, pertaining to the body or to thought."[13] Defining things, humans or animals not by their form, organs (parts), or functions, but by "the affect of which [they are] capable" turns them into relational composites that actively contribute to the fabric of experience by means of their capacity.[14] Existence or the fabrication of the real, for Deleuze, is a polyrhythmic relaying of affects which shapes experience as a *concatenated commons*—meaning it relates "bodies" along their temporal differences without subsuming their differences under a unifying present. A commons, as I propose the term here, is a potential of relating, of resonating across different durations, a power to concatenate that can take many forms but does not predetermine the form it takes.

With the term concatenated union and the affective outline of relations and movement, I am suggesting an emphasis on *the fabrication of the real as temporal processing*. Commons as primarily polyrhythmic and temporal compositions conceive neither of a community, nor of a site or land as commons or common good, as sufficient for a conception of an aesthetics of the commons in relation to online and digital media practices and their platforms. The partial logic of experience and the relational fabrication of a present both hint at a commons as the relational co-emergence of affective capacities that become felt in experience as tendencies. Concatenation defines the relational making of a present that exceeds the momentary while pointing at the contemporaneous. It draws on relations as the very building blocks of experience, and on experience as the active movement enabling the formation of embodied sensation, memory and communication across different matters, thoughts, and activities. In James' radical empiricism, the relational outline of experience of the world

is always on the limit of its actual appearance, and the present, as "specious present," defines that margin of concrete enough formation in its potential becoming.[15]

Platforms beyond Infrastructures

The project 0xDB was first initiated by Jan Gerber and Sebastian Luetgert in 2007. An adaptation of the platform was conceived as base for the project pad.ma in collaboration with Sanjay Bhangar from the artist group CAMP in Bombay. In the aftermath of these first two initiatives, the media archive framework Pan.do/ra was developed and led to a reimplementation of both 0xDB and pad.ma based on Pan.do/ ra in 2011. Gerber and Luetgert also form the group *0x2620*—Collaborative Archiving and Networked Distribution. Overall, the primary impetus of both initiatives, 0xDB and pad.ma, resides in enabling specific encounters with (formerly private) collections. Their ethos aligns not only with open source and *libre* ideas of sharing and distribution but relates more crucially to a strong emphasis on programming and software development as an activist practice. In a statement for the tenth anniversary of 0xDB Gerber and Luetgert write: "a functioning piece of software can function as an argument: one that is impossible to make if you can only refer to an idea, or a plan, or a theory."[16] And they further underline the entanglements between aesthetic desire and the control thereof through capitalist censorship:

> Just like there are protest songs, there is protest software. 0xDB is such a case: an act of protest against the grotesque piles of junk that are the online film archives of almost all official institutions, against the obscene amounts of public funding that are being spent on digital graveyards, and against the perverse fantasy at the core of cinema—which has many names: censorship, commodity, copyright—that it has to be hard, if not impossible, to watch a film. If you think that you've heard this one before, then you know that we're coming to the chorus now: The history of cinema is the story of the wealth of technological possibilities and the poverty of their use.[17]

This statement foregrounds the relation between the archive and power, viewed through the prism of film and cinema, as being highly restricted commercial spheres whose aesthetic operational powers are captured by commercial interest. Lawrence Liang points at a similar issue when he writes about national film archives which, instead of making material available to the public, often function as gatekeepers, where the "mythic value of films arise from their non-availability."[18] The imperial undertones of the archive—sharing its etymological root with the *archaeon* (the official house of the magistrate)—emphasize the archive's heavy baggage as a place of power, control and the governance of knowledge. For these reasons, I want to follow the critique of capitalist modes of control and value production but detach them from a notion of the archive, even though its meaning and possible critiques are manifold. In the case of 0xDB and pad.ma, I consider the term platform as more adequate, in relation to both the late liberal modes of digital operationality of value generation and extraction, and in terms of their specific temporalizing potentialities.

Both 0xDB and pad.ma are open source platforms, databases and repositories with a primary focus on time-based audio-visual material, mainly film and filmed footage. As part of their infrastructures, they also allow for the inclusion of documents, still images and annotations. Their software basis is the open source platform for media archives called Pan.do/ra, which "allows you to manage large, decentralized collections of video, to collaboratively create metadata and time-based annotations, and to serve your archive as a desktop-class web application."[19] The base-structure of Pan.do/ra is the combination of a Python backend and a JavaScript front end relayed by a JSON API

(Application Programming Interface). It serves as a server and as a client, allowing the database infrastructure to be used for one's own collections and plugging this structure into highly customized front ends. The operational capacities of the API are relevant here. Adrian Mackenzie describes the API as "a gateway for centralization and decentralization" which operates between the database with its contents and the front end in the case of 0xDB and pad.ma.[20] The API is a relaying device which enables relations between data and their sentient capacities as part of a GUI (graphic user interface). The API is a "central element of programmability," as Mackenzie writes, where programmability "supports the social and economic entanglements" of commercial platforms like Facebook.[21] The social and economic entanglements Mackenzie is pointing at refer to the decentralized logic of API programming, which nonetheless contributes to the building of a platform, such as Facebook, where universal equivalents—user data— take over. This aspect is relevant due to its operational connotations, and I will further develop the concept of operation and operative logic in the last part of this chapter.

In the commercial sector, platforms "enact their programmability to decentralize data production and recentralize data collection."[22] The way Anne Helmond describes commercial platforms stands in stark contrast to Pan.do/ra's emphasis on decentralization of data collections and the open handle that defines the API coming with it. Obviously, data collection as a practice of social media platforms, and the data collections made available through 0xDB and pad.ma, relate to highly different contexts while sharing the activity of collecting. The same accounts for the question of decentralization, which, in the case of commercial platforms, provides the distribution of programming activity and the inclusion of its results into a universalizing operation, and in the case of 0xDB and pad.ma engages in a decentralized sharing of content and collaborative/collective engagements with data. Put differently, data production in relation to commercial platforms refers to the open-ended logic of API programming, where "platforms engage the flexibility and mutability of programming and programmability to modulate interfaces, devices, protocols, and increasingly, infrastructures in the interests of connectivity."[23] The empowering logic behind Pan.do/ra, on the other hand, points into a very different direction: Here we find decentralized infrastructures built on an ethos of co-production and co-emergence which defines the platform, rather than the universalizing tendencies weaving through heterogeneous elements of API programming.

Collecting and connecting, as the paradigms of APIs and platforms, bifurcate in the way that open source projects such as pad.ma and 0xDB and commercial social media platforms deploy their capacity for engaging relations. In either case, the role of data is crucial. For 0xDB and pad.ma, audio-visual data becomes an active digital object in its own right and thus is available for use and encounter as much as being generative of new relations through meta-data. The merger of data and meta-data cannot be underestimated here. It makes both simultaneously available for the processing of information and engagement with digital objects, amplifying different temporal layers in the process of information sharing and the collecting of data. For instance, in pad.ma and 0xDB each frame can receive its own URL, which becomes linkable for annotations and cross-referencing, mostly containing information such as subtitles, but also providing further aesthetic detail, such as sense of color and tone of each frame as part of a visual timeline of the entire video at hand. In the language of James, each of these hyperlinks becomes a derivative tendency which opens up new movements while referring to the rhythm of its former context. What is being shared and collaboratively worked at are not mere encoded information packages, as a more

classic conception of language as code and data as information would suggest. It is rather the open-ended processual nature of the data and meta-data in their interplay which distinguishes platforms such as 0xDB and pad.ma from commercial platforms like YouTube.

Contrary to this logic of shared amplification of data, commercial social media platforms turn data into an obscured resource for value extraction which equals data with information value, rendering its curation into an extractive activity.[24] Alternative platforms such as pad.ma and 0xDB neither understand collections as finite nor do they strive for capture or control as key operations of commercial platforms. Their collections result from highly individual compulsion and the potential of the Internet to distribute audio-visual material in a manner that invites reworking, commentary and cross-referencing. Connecting then is nothing goal-oriented, as would be the case in interlinking APIs to the building of a platform or algorithmic extraction from big data repositories. On the contrary, it means to engage a field of potential relations and *to formulate operational activations* for the different expressive qualities of the material (data) to be engaged. Commercial platforms are open-ended yet enclosed systems which cater to both a potential mode of identification and thus voluntary contribution of one's data for the sake of participating, and the need to adapt and capture new elements which contribute to a platform's attractiveness. The way to generate engagement in platforms such as 0xDB and pad.ma follows a very different route, while deploying similar advantages of an open system that is crucial to platforms. An example could be the quest for openness and adaptability in Pan.do/ ra*'s* API logic: It fosters insertion and adaptation of specific pieces of software and their functions across different realms, such as a user interface and a database. By inserting different elements of Pan.do/ ra*'s* coded (API) as well as physical (server space) into one's own projects, or contributing one's own films for further use to the platform, radically alters the logic of commercial platform operations. In these platforms, the distributive model aims at a final insertion and enclosure of programmed elements, contributing to the "whole" of a platform. pad.ma and 0xDB, on the other hand, remain open while providing tools for adaptation and the proliferation of different activations.

The key difference I want to stress between commercial platforms and alternative ones is the open circulation, the embracing of the indeterminacy of sharing code, in order to generate modes of value that exceed the capitalist surplus at the root of data extractivism. Beyond circulation, these alternative platforms allow for the transformation of digital objects into processes of relating. Such a shift happens through an active embracing of the relational nature at the heart of digital platforms. The audio-visual material enables a thinking of potential platform-based activations. Since we deal with sensuous material in the first place, these activations move through multiple processes of staging encounters with the material, both perceptually and semantically. The different functions of annotating or video-editing and watching through different temporal and visual representations, creates an immediate linkage between code as idea, its computational processing and the activation of bodies and thought, all of which concatenate in experience. Rather than creating identification-value, as commercial platforms do, alternative platforms create time-values of co-creative engagement as concatenated commons.

It is therefore crucial to distinguish platforms from infrastructures: A platform, as outlined above, comprises aspects pertaining to infrastructuralization and platformization. Infrastructuralization is "the process of rendering certain technical operations widely and immediately available."[25] Platformization, on the other hand, describes "the process of constructing a somewhat lifted-out or well-bounded domain as a relational intersection for different groups."[26] In relation to pad.ma and 0xDB the concept of

platform provides a useful approach, since it underlines the collaborative, modular and temporalizing aspects of both its mostly video content and its possibilities of engaging with the material working with and through the interface. While Mackenzie and others, such as Plantin et al., focus on modes of late liberal value extraction on commercial social media platforms, projects such as pad. ma and 0xDB comprise a different notion of value that is attached to the operational aesthetics of video-based material activating a sense of temporal concatenations.[27]

The availability that Mackenzie attributes to infrastructures requires some clarification. I would productively challenge and extend the way Laurent Berlant describes infrastructures, as "defined by the movement or patterning of social form" which she distinguishes from structure.[28] Berlant writes:

> I am redefining "structure" here as that which organizes transformation and "infrastructure" as that which binds us to the world in movement and keeps the world practically bound to itself; and I am proposing that one task for makers of critical social form is to offer not just judgment about positions and practices in the world, but terms of transition that alter the harder and softer, tighter and looser infrastructures of sociality itself.[29]

What are these infrastructures of sociality? Following a Jamesian take on experience as explored above, infrastructures need to be considered as infrastructures of existence rather than infrastructures of sociality. Or, one would have to "reassemble the social" as Bruno Latour has done, turning the social into a more-than-human and collective process.[30] A third tuning of the social would then require a movement character at the base of what might come to take shape as human sociality. If infrastructures are infrastructures of the social, then it would be a society of forces and relations as the connective tissue of experience, and human sociality a sub-form of such operations. It is for these reasons that I want to address infrastructures at a more material and operational level while accounting for their inclusion of an extended understanding of the social. Ned Rossiter writes "if infrastructure makes worlds, then software coordinates it," and he furthermsuggests that logistics infrastructures "enable the movement of labor, commodities, and data across global supply chains."[31] These operational logics move between physically bound enablement and proprietary powers while acknowledging their movement character, which becomes apparent in the entanglements with the algorithmic outline of contemporary software.[32] In resonance with 0xDB's aim to render video a digital object, I want to emphasize this material yet certainly more-than-human sociality immanent to the fabrication of the platform and its contents. The flux of the moving image moves through the materiality and the constraints of hardwired infrastructures, while its operational capacities as a being encountered on the platform shape possible activations of sense.

Infrastructures, taken as the more material enablement of social relational practices, allow me to foreground the platform-logic as an interstice of the material and the social, or, more precisely, as their operational common ground. Following Anja Kanngieser, Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter, I want to conceive of platforms "as social and technical apparatuses through which to experiment with institutional forms in both on- and offline worlds."[33] The authors stress the deployment of the term—way before its commercial adaptation in the heyday of Web 2.0 infinite connectivity talk—in Communist organizational structures of the 1920s as well as its wide adaptation in activist and artistic projects.[34] It is the latter with which I want to associate 0xDB and pad.ma. While software might underpin the operationalization of a material

infrastructure, it is the platform which renders them into a co-emergent processing. This inter-relation between the material and the operational feeds forward into specific modes of social co-production and experimentation. The open API allows for using the code to generate multiple relays between the database, its content and the different websites for potential cross-pollination. I would consider this platformatized process as a kind of process of sense/making, where the material, processual, programmable and the sensuous converge. Infrastructures need to be made available, as Mackenzie states, in terms of the server-structure and the database, as well as the source code and its open building blocks. Sense emerges in the practice and process of working with and through the materials. While this seems like a romantic "human-centered" mode of interaction with an archive or repository, I want to stress that both the infrastructural affordances and the platforms built around the digital objects on either 0xDB and pad.ma can only make sense if the processing of "stuff," or "experience" in the Jamesian sense, are considered alongside their mutually emergent and activating capacities.

Platforms, as Kanngieser et al. underline, are different from infrastructures because they are defined and nurtured by user interactivity and participation, creating "an environment of reciprocity, knowledge sharing and relationality."[35] This notion of platforms includes the social dimensions of co-producing and sharing while at the same time accounting for the infrastructural affordances and their potential constraints. Following the work of Olga Goriunova, the authors emphasize the affective dimensions of platforms: "The platform offers an ecology that makes possible the invention of cultural aesthetic phenomena by opening spaces in which creative praxis and co-conceptualisations can be stimulated and supported."[36] However, the differences and commonalities of commercial and alternative platforms not only revolve around open source code, decentralization, and an adaptable API-logic but also emphasize the different modes of labor immanent to the making, maintaining and use of platforms. While the making of platforms implies resources and the power of definition by the initiators, the maintenance of a platform results from active use and participation. This operational logic of engagement and participation shapes a platform's temporal and procedural nature, while taking account of the material infrastructural affordances and capacities. Finally, the aesthetic configurations of the interface, which can be modified to a certain extent in the case of 0xDB and pad.ma, condition but also enable the fabrication of sense as being activated through engagements with the platform. The encounter with material on these platforms differs vastly, whether I switch into "player" or "timeline" view, or if I look at the timeline depicted as key-frames or as waveform. In the case of my first example *She and her Cat*, the former leads to seeing the animated film become a manga produced by key frames and the latter moves into a more sonic representation in the waveform, similar to *Soundcloud* timelines.

I want to stress that such engagements are not a mere coming together of a set of materials and the perceiving user/subject, but rather result from the experiential ground which is commonly, yet differentially, shared between humans and more-than-human actors as concatenated. Particularly in the case of pad.ma, the embodied dimensions of content and perceptual experience of a user are moored in the thoroughgoing relaying between on- and offline spaces and practices. While the platform facilitates a processual encounter based on infrastructural capacities, the temporal activations abound across processes of sense-making. The time-sensitive aspects of pad.ma and 0xDB foreground the aesthetic political relevance immanent to the infrastructures and interfaces co-composing a platformed experience. In that sense, I

want to understand both pad.ma and 0xDB as artistic and activist platforms rather than archives. As Kanngieser et al. write:

> In art and activist realms platforms have been a key tool in opening up global networks of communication and organisation. Platforms provide a means to share knowledge, skills and research, to connect to possible collaborators and to propel a sense of immediate solidarity and commons over geographical space and time. Similarly, they provide a model for social networking and self-valorisation, which feeds into an accumulation of cultural capital both within global and local, online and offline worlds.[37]

In relation to pad.ma in particular, I would also want to stress the aesthetic dimension of this artistic and activist take on platforms.[38] The image-worlds of pad.ma are augmented by documents, transcripts, additional information; rendering the platform into a workstation for collaborative practice. Instead of being a mere repository, the platforms at stake generate an aesthetic experimental zone, with an emphasis that "vision is better from below" as Donna Haraway states in her work on situated knowledges.[39] In this subjugated and "submerged" perspective the operational power of the platforms presides over a stable account of content or finite truth.[40] In relation to the situatedness that Haraway emphasizes in its partial and tendential character, as I have outlined through James, the genealogical surges from the depths of temporal contortions across the different modalities of pad.ma and 0xDB.[41] As platforms they enable a commoning of sensuous encounters along the time-based capacities of the data and the way these data generate relations across fields of experience, on- and offline, between machines or technical ensembles and the sensuous making of the perceptual subject. Thus, the platform provides what Brian Massumi terms an "'activation contour:' a variation in intensity of feeling over time."[42] In that sense, platforms compose a contemporaneity of collective becoming while at the same time containing traces and layers of digital objects that carry an intensity of feeling across genealogical lines. From such a time-sensitive point of view, alternative activist and artistic experiments with platforms exceed the potential of making available and making present dear to the archival desires of many art projects. For what they do is to open up the temporal orders of the material, the processual and the social, making their intensities felt over time.

Beyond the Archive

While the archive maintains an important role in critical reflections on power relations in statist and institutional contexts, it usually undercuts the question of the temporal dynamics immanent to the materials that populate the archive in digital contexts.[43] It is not just the content, its ordering, classification and re-emergence through the act of making a "lost" item relevant again, but the temporalizing forces which co-compose a present beyond perceptual encounter. A platform as process of platformization relates different processes and allows them to seek a certain degree of temporal autonomy. In the "10 Theses on the Archive" the group of authors deeply involved in pad.ma propose to disentangle the notion of the archive from institutional power imaginaries and their undoing. They propose to conceive of the archive as "a possibility of creating alliances" between humans and more-than-humans, "between time and the untimely";[44] casting this altered archive into something that will "remain radically incomplete" rather than "representational."[45] Finally, and most crucially for a platform-thinking of moving images and the political work around such material, an archival impulse would allow them "to create ad-hoc networks with mobile cores and dense peripheries, to trade our master copies for a myriad of offsite backups, and to

practically abandon the technically obsolete dichotomy of providers and consumers."[46] The platform-logic of a well-bounded yet distributed mode of relating takes its very processual nature as defining core: it is the movement that brings infrastructures to specific modes of encounter and expression, which make the platform a potentially more engaged mode of thinking the archive as political procedure.

I see much potential in the temporal openings of the processual and operational of the platform-specific interlacing of temporalities. It links with radical political practices while also including some ofnthe more contemporary digital divergencies, which otherwise easily tip over into neoliberal logics of throughput. In an interview Luetgert and Gerber speak more about repositories and collections rather than archives.[47] At the same time they explain the shift in funding structures for initiatives such as 0xDB and pad.ma. At the beginning the projects received European funding, which helped to build digital infrastructures and institutions. In more recent years funding for the projects has exclusively shifted towards the art world. This shift in funding also highlights one of the problems of late liberal inclusions into speculative markets, such as the art market. The archive, despite all its militant potentialities, was one of the art theoretical buzzwords of the 2000s and 2010s. A rather broad and deliberate deploy-ment of the term archive is itself a hint at specific power relations and the economies of the global art market, much as the term platform might be. From this point of view, I will consider the notion of archive in the context of pad.ma and 0xDB as an umbrella term allowing communication across different fields, disciplines and practices in art, academia and activism.[48]

The "10 Theses" address the archive in its sensuous and affective registers. In the Theses the authors write: "To dwell in the affective potential of the archive is to think of how archives can animate intensities."[49] Animating or rather activating intensities is the relational processing of a concatenated commons, where modes of expression contract from the temporal continuum of experience. In that sense, the on- and offline potentials of platforms are extended towards the timely and untimely movements traversing servers, cables, glances, and sensuous shocks. The motion and rest imma-nent to the circulation of intensity make an affective relaying of archival matter a question of processing without beginning and end. This does not mean that we have to celebrate the instant or the momentarily. Rather, as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari suggest, it is a question of inhabiting the contemporary as a "resistance to the present."[50] Affect is not the here and now and intensity does not mark a peak of feeling. Similarly, the time-sensitive and genealogical aspects of 0xDB and pad.ma contain a concatenated sense of future-past that moves across the present but is never "of" the present as a reducible instant. The contemporary always is a concatenated commons of pushing and pulling intensities of material's temporal capacities to activate and being activated, to affect and being affected.

How does a platform become such a practical "device" to resist the present? Deleuze and Guattari refute a present that divides, orders and subjugates, a stratified present of a capitalist logic. The authors of the Theses suggest that the archive is an "apparatus which engages our experience and perception of time."[51] Rather than making percep-tion and experience "our," I suggest to dislodge them from the human, putting them in a submerged state of the concatenated union that is the partiality of experience marking a present through the feeling of tendencies. This differential and partial expression of a time of the present allows for the constitution and emergence of a platform and its political powers. The platform as "a scene of intervention" binds temporalities of the "contingent, ephemeral, and the unintended" that are "the challenge of the moving image as archive [and] recovery of lost time."[52] However, the experiences and perceptions which course through a human embodied relay are

imbued with an affective sociality beyond the human. Such experiences are socio-technical in the literal sense, a fusion of operations of sense/making that the relational processing of a platform enables and shapes. Platforms such as pad. ma and 0xDB allow for collective experimentations with temporalities, which contribute to and shape a concatenated commons across different matters and operations. To engage in the *how* of commoning means to relate with the tendencies' movement potential as processes of amplifying resonances. In that sense, the repository or collection requires tending and care, wants to be maintained and engaged, needs to be made accessible and given elbow-room for its structures to evolve. A platform is like a cephalopod, on the move, following flows on its hunt, changing color, shape-shifting textures while being held through an entire ecology of caring and supporting material and moving relations.

Resisting the present with and through platforms such as pad.ma or 0xDB happens through the unruly operational value of the "poor image" providing this sphere with its vital powers.[53] The 10 Theses, also Ravi Sundaram and Hito Steyerl attest to the proliferation of poor images and that "these mundane images attain value, not in and of themselves, but as part of a database and as information."[54] pad. ma contains manifold series of engagements with CCTV footage and draws them into small research projects, not only of interviews in control rooms but also in sticking to the redundant and residual image worlds of surveillance cameras operating in empty shops. What comes to the fore in these images is less an acknowledgment of infinite image dumps occurring across the Internet and its kinds of storage devices, but more a conception of these images as a "vast swathe of residual time."[55] The dimension of time and temporality in archives often refers to militant practices as "making present" some knowledge or historical fact that was left irrelevant by the elective engagements and setups of archives. Eric Kluitenberg opposes this linear treatment of temporality, building on the tension between Tactical Media and the "archive":

> Tactical Media, activist practices and gatherings find their vitality in moments of crisis, through the participation of the body of the protestor in them, and the affective resonance patterns they generate. The "archive" (as a system of rules governing the appearance of definite and clear statements), in its function of capturing living moments and turning them into historical events, constitutes the very opposite of this dynamic.[56]

The author further underlines that the former treatment of media in activist contexts pertains to a logic of the present as instantaneous and immediate, while the latter creates a temporality that is actually atemporal. Both, he argues, require a readjust-ment to what I would call a concatenated commons of the poor image in the case of pad.ma and 0xDB. The platforms' image resolution never exceeds 480p, both as an infrastructural affordance (slow Internet connections) but also an aesthetics that aligns with the digital affordances of mobile media images and their circulation. In a similar vein, Ravi Sundaram points out that such a doubling of circulation and infrastructures is part and parcel of an increasingly saturated mobile media landscape of the late-colonial (he uses the term postcolonial) global South (another auxiliary term).[57] Neither residual as lost time nor hyper-present, the poor image is not a remnant but appears as "liberated from the vaults of cinemas and archives and thrust into digital uncertainty, at the expense of its own substance."[58] In that sense, these poor and wretched images resist a presentist order of time, an order of the unified present while carrying manifold engagements with subjugated knowledges that come to the fore on experimental platforms such as pad.ma.

The poor image tends towards abstraction: it is a visual idea in its very becoming. Steyerl's reflections on the digital conditions of the wretched image are important for a differential temporality at stake in 0xDB and pad.ma. She points out that the poor image becomes a moveable time-capsule that can be individually stored, edited, and circulated. As digital objects, these images and files are imbued with activation potential beyond the classic archival orders and their atemporal logic. The poor image transports a former conception of "originality" into a "transience of the copy," which also means a transformation of single coherent time into a multiplication of temporalities. Finally, Steyerl suggests that "the networks in which poor images circulate thus constitute both a *platform* for a fragile new common interest and a battleground for commercial and national agendas."[59] It becomes clear that the poor image takes on a potentiality which lies in its abstraction as visual idea in its very becoming. It is a speculative device exceeding not only orders of time and place as finite but also challenging commercial refinements of processes of platformization. The poor images constitute a mode of temporal multiplicity whose circulation and openness engage a commons of potentialities rather than imagined futures. Such a differential temporality is contemporaneous, but its contemporaneity is a fragmented, heterogenous, and heterochronic assembling of sense and sensation for which platforms such as pad.ma function as activating infrastructure.

The poor image cannot be detached from its geo-political contexts and the availability of online infrastructures in less urbanized areas of the world. Sundaram draws on the artist group CAMP's film *From Gulf, to Gulf, to Gulf*, which is available on *Indiancine.ma* (a sister platform of pad.ma). The film consists of mobile phone footage of sailors travelling on cargo ships in the Indian Ocean between Somalia, Aden, Sharjah, Iran, Pakistan, and Western India. The images shift between material processes, from the building of the ships and their loading and unloading in different ports, to vernacular practices aboard such as playing games or cooking, and they frequently depict other boats caught on fire and sinking. The images are nothing specific on their own but create a consistency in the way they are assembled and brought into resonance. The circulation of the poor image becomes also a critique, as Sundaram points out, of dominant forms of logistical value extraction of the high-end and high-speed logics of contemporary media. This brings us back to the activist roots of platform logics as means of organizing along the operational capacities of technological and social potentials in becoming together. Sundaram writes:

> These expanding media infrastructures have formed a dynamic loop between fragile postcolonial sovereignties and informal economies of circulation. Indifferent to property regimes that come with upscale technological culture, subaltern populations mobilize low-cost and mobile technologies to create horizontal networks that bypass state and corporate power. Simultaneously, we witness the expansion of informal networks of commodification and spatial transformation. This loop shapes much of contemporary media circulation, where medial objects move in and out of infrastructures and attach themselves *to new platforms of political-aesthetic action*, while also being drawn to or departing from the spectacular time of media events.[60]

Against the spectacular time of media events, the poor images as shared, relayed, annotated, or reused through 0xDB and pad.ma foreground the temporal creating of concatenated commons in and through the differential rhythms which resist immediate value extraction and capture in late liberal economies colonizing the senses. The timeline logic at the heart of pad.ma and 0xDB functions as the key operation for different rhythms of sensing and making to intersect. As outlined throughout, the poor

image is actually bearing potential because of its agility and fractured nature. It affords habits of cinematic perception trained by high quality experience to contend with low-resolution worlds of color patches, fuzzy light influxes and out of focus elements populating the screen. As a temporal lure, the poor image not only accelerates because its processing cost is low, but also creates new ways of valorizing the image as tied to a time beyond spectacle or the celebration of the vernacular, which receives much appraisal both in ethnographic and documentary film as well as voyeuristic reality TV shows. The poor image is the conductor of a commoning process where the concatenations of experience meld into temporalities underneath the capitalist structuring of time, which populate both spheres: the visible and sensible distribution through media platforms and the algorithmic foreclosure of sorting date leading to predetermined effects.

Premises of Lost Time— Rhythms of an Operational Aesthetics

In an interview as part of the research project *Creating Commons*, Luetgert and Gerber describe the engagement with the platform 0xDB as creating a certain rhythm that differs decisively from the mode of consuming a movie. The timeline logic of the platform foregrounds what I call an operational aesthetics. Such an aesthetics takes account of the open API structure of Pan.do/ra as much as it includes the different ways of "perceiving" a film as digital object. Such digital objects, the way I have developed through the analysis of pad.ma and 0xDB, not only interlaces data and metadata but also opens up the audio-visual continuity of the film towards a multiplication of temporalities that occur when frames receive a unique URL and can be cross-linked or cut together with different materials, or when commentary on pad.ma provides vital information about the actual situation of a violent scene of protest. The forensic character of such tools foregrounds the procedural nature of a polyphonous truth that bears continuously shifting engagements with the real. This operationality moves through experience; it co-composes experience with the material, spatio-temporal and potential realms of a concatenated commons. In pad.ma and 0xDB timelines allow for both specific modes of representation, visualization and expression while at the same time taking account of the operational nature of the poor images these platforms harbor. These timelines are the operational core of 0xDB and pad.ma: contracting and concatenating temporalities in the actual experience of working with the platform, they define the operation logic of the platforms.

Operations and operational logic are rather counterintuitive terms when it comes to media practices of resistance or "protest software." Brian Massumi defines an operative logic tied to a politics of perception as "forces for change."[61] These forces are not merely present or confined actants—they belong less to a logic of agency, susceptible to subsumption under the extractive rhythms of late liberalism. The operative logic has transtemporal capacities of modulating a specific engagement of forces over time. Massumi's writings primarily analyze military strategies of the twenty-first century and how they bank on the active modulation of the entanglements of "time, perception, action, and decision."[62] In the context of alternative video platforms, I want to shift the term operations towards a temporal practice of commoning.

An operative logic hints at the envelopment of abstract relations into the actual fabrication of the real as concatenated in the present—as experience. This complex contraction, as I have argued throughout, refers to temporal layers and relations intersecting beyond any pre- given stasis or essence. In other word, it concerns the relational aesthetic process of feeling tendencies along their composition of experience. The real, or what comes to materialize in perception, is never only what is felt in the here and now. It includes many dimensions of prior and future experience which are not merely ordered into discrete elements or moments, but which co-compose a

present as concatenated. Foregrounding the concatenation of the present through perception can become one of the key potentials of alternative media platforms such as pad.ma and 0xDB. The operational aesthetic that is both—part of the programmed and coded structure, as much as the confluence of material, embodied, perceptual and conceptual infrastructures of sense/making—bear the power of resisting late liberal modes of extracting from experience and its assumed data.

The operative logic of platforms is their very capacity of contracting specific data and their different informational layers as relays of activation of sense. The platform nature is operational since it combines a specific logic of relating openly, in the case of 0xDB and pad. ma, through the temporal reconfiguration of data. In their different take on the space and time of cinema these platforms "lay down rhythms" as Deleuze writes: "One never commences; one never has a tabula rasa; one slips in, enters in the middle; one takes up or lays down rhythms."[63] This is a pragmatic and operational understanding beyond the infrastructural giveness of matter and its constraints, or the user adapting to these constraints or bending them. In their openness the analyzed platforms offer a temporal account of operative logics which interlace the fabrication of the present through a platformative operational logic. Such an operation is not merely emancipatory, but also part and parcel of the temporalizing politics of commercial social media and their algorithmic hunger for surplus extraction. For a creative engagement with an operational aesthetics, one has to take account of the temporal power of platformization that banks on the open structure of the poor image capable of fostering new perceptual encounters. These encounters are concatenated temporalities that can be felt collectively through the rhythms they produce.

The operational aesthetic power of the poor image and its capacity for accreting temporalities resides in seeding rhythms capable of suspending capitalist refrains. These rhythms are operative in the way that they allow for abstraction to actually inhabit the making of the real, inserting a modulation of sense, while actually not having to concretize in a finite object—a "visual idea" in Steyerl's words. The operative logic of the poor image is informative of a "becoming of continuity," as a felt potentiality.[64] Such a felt potentiality becomes affectively contagious; it moves between database, the digital object, metadata, timelines and the perceiving body/mind engaging with the video platform. The formation of a continuity through becoming is the processing of heterogeneous elements into a conjunction which makes the present a potential common ground in experience.

pad.ma and 0xDB not only provide the potential of people collaborating through the possible features and functions, but they engage operative logics as relational aesthetic activations, capable of creating time relays of a commons. It is here, where the concept of protest software becomes a relational operation, that reconfigures the means of engagement with aesthetic material, such as film and video. These shifts occur through concrete operational elements of software and the fabrication of a space, the web-interface, which allows the composition of new concatenations of the present. Concatenated commons interlace the operational capacities of a platform with the sensuous dimension of an affective engagement with the digital objects made available through the database. The archive as platform is not only dynamic or open, but it comprises operational values and potential rhythms as integral to its vault.

In a short text Stefano Harney refers to Frantz Fanon's final passage of *The Wretched of the Earth*, where Fanon raises the question of rhythm in relation to colonization and capitalism. Developing a conception of the assembly line, "a line cut loose," that exceeds the boundaries of the factory, Harney argues for an operational understanding of modes of subjectivation in late liberal capitalism.[65] In this operational account the

main target is not the human subject anymore but rather logistical processes. The principle Harney draws on refers to "operations management" as the key conduit of a logistical mode of value generated by movement and "throughput" rather than finite products. Following a *kaizen*-principle, processes take precedence over products and human embodiments are mobilized to "channel affect towards new connections" where the worker "operates like a synapse, sparking new lines of assembly in life."[66] I want to emphasize how an operative logic can take different forms, similar to the way Steyerl and Sundaram depict the poor image. The question for a politics for concatenated commons has to activate modes of encounter with the operational aesthetics as potentials for sensing and feeling transindividually. The rhythm that "breaks" and "kills" can be transformed into very different rhythmic assemblages, opening up both ways of engaging with potential and concrete modes of expressing it.[67] Sundaram depicts such an operational aesthetic shift when he writes that in digital platforms such as pad.ma the signal has replaced "the abstract labor/money, dis-embedding the 'mass' in the process of circulation." This signaletic shift links to "media that has become the infrastructural condition of *living*" in "affect-driven post-colonial media modernity," creating "new forms of unauthorized publicity."[68] Sundaram explicitly emphasizes the different platformization processes which revolve around the circulation, but also storage and archiving of poor images imbued with minor gestures, vernacular practices and different modes of political struggle. pad.ma and the example of *From Gulf to Gulf to Gulf* are both infrastructures of sense- making and commoning. Such commoning depends on the temporal activations immanent to the poor image. As Steyerl writes, "the circulation of poor images feeds into both capitalist *media assembly lines* and alternative audiovisual economies. In addition to a lot of confusion and stupefication, it also possibly creates disruptive movements of thought and affect."[69]

The assembly line reverberates throughout the logistical and operational logic of late liberal capitalism. However, the assembly line is but one model of a timeline; it preempts continuity rather than embracing the becoming of continuity. The deep engagement with polyrhythmic timelines at the heart of pad.ma and 0xDB actually exposes the temporal poverty of capitalist temporality while offering veritable alternative proliferations of time-sensitive commoning. For Harney, the assembly line is detached from the factory, cut loose, to implement abtemporal order of its own, beyond the confinements of specific spaces of production and reproduction. In other words, the assembly line has become fully operational. The social factory becomes a processual operation through and through, in which material infrastructures, bodies and series of interrelated acts are temporarily patched together, always adaptable to more throughput and operation value. These operations are the operations that the dark side of capitalist platformization banks on—as an extensive line that mobilizes activity. In that sense, experience, the actual emergent quality enabling modes of existence to compound and constitute embodied expressions, is the territory on which the new modes of operationalized platformlogics dream their appropriative nightmares. Harney points out that from the plantation to late liberal capitalism, the line of improvements of processes has been extended to and implemented in all domains of organic and inorganic life. With this polyphonic yet universalizing rhythm, however, other rhythms and lines co-evolve. These are the lines of "arrhythmia"; of a different operationality beyond the capitalist platforms of throughput and improvement and their capture of the sensuous and sense-making.

An affective account of experience as pre-personal, relational, and building on tendencies, allows the sphere where an affective politics is most needed to be

addressed. Resisting the operational managerial lust for surplus, and its subjugating and oppressive modes of appropriating life way beyond the human scope, means to engage at the level of relational formation of expression. It is here where I conceive of the arrhythmic potential of the poor image and of platforms such as 0xDB and pad.ma as potential platforms of critique. The critique that these platforms expose acts on the synaptic and sensuous, affective but also infrastructural and operational level. The general operationality which platform logics express is here turned into a counter-power along the relational aesthetic capacities of the poor image: "The poor image is no longer about the real thing—the originary original. Instead, it is about its own real conditions of existence: about swarm circulation, digital dispersion, fractured and flexible temporalities. It is about defiance and appropriation just as it is about conformism and exploitation. In short: it is about reality."[70]

How is such a reality of the poor image in an "affect-driven post- colonial media modernity" capable of seeding arrhythmia as a counterpower to capitalist capture of late liberal platformization? The aesthetic question is less how to bring something into a specific form, but rather pertains to an aesthetics of operational rhythmicality resonating across relations and their varying tendencies. Such an operational aesthetics concerns the manner of concatenating that shapes the fabrication of a commons in reality. Operational aesthetics engage bodily capacities of sensing, but extend these capacities into an ecological situatedness that is material, processual and transtemporal. pad.ma*'s* platformatized staging of *From Gulf to Gulf to Gulf* not only allows the user to engage with an image world produced on the move, but moves the way perception is usually conceived. It creates a different optics that exceeds the realm of the visible, through a layering of data sets and their proliferation from geolocation, to commentary, to crossreferencing specific frames. The images themselves present a sense of contemporary forms of logistics and circulation of goods which actually intersects with the circulation and distribution of images, minor gestures of feeling, globalized processes of labor, and how they might resist the infinite capture of throughput while nurturing other becomings of continuity. Alternative platforms as open structures for sense/ making engage the temporal fabric of the present as a polyrhythmic relaying of affects. Experimenting with these times-sensitive operations through the counterpowers of the poor image might lead to further amplificatory resonances of situated practices of resistance and struggle, a veritable "creating commons" through the concatenations of an operational aesthetics.

A slightly different version of this text first appeared in *Aesthetics of the Commons*, ed. by Cornelia Sollfrank, Felix Stadler and Shusha Niederberger, Zurich/Berlin: diaphanes, 2021, p. 241-269.

Notes

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2 https://0xdb.org/0373960/info

3 https://pad.ma/grid/title/fwd&project==Fwd:_Re:_Archive

4 Amit Rai, "Here We Accrete Durations: Toward a Practice of Intervals in the Perceptual Mode of Power," in *Beyond Biopolitics: Essays on the Governance of Life and Death*, ed. Patricia Ticineto Clough and Craig Willse (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 307–331.

5 https://pad.ma/grid/date/cctv_social&project==CCTV_Social

6 William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press,

1996), p. 4.

7 Ibid., pp. 107–108 (emphasis in the original).

8 Ibid., p. 42 (emphasis in the original).

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10 Ibid., p. 161 (emphasis in the original).

11 Ibid., p. 69.

12 Ibid (emphasis in the original).

13 Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza, Practical Philosophy* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), p. 124 (my emphasis).

14 Ibid.

15 William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1893), p. 609.

16 Pirate Cinema Berlin, "10 Years of 0xDB," https://pad.ma/documents/AJY/100

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18 Lawrence Liang, "The Dominant, the Residual and the Emergent in Archival Imagination," in *Autonomous Archiving*, ed. Artikiṣler Collective (Barcelona: dpr-barcelona, 2016), p. 106.

19 Pirate Cinema Berlin, "10 Years of 0xDB."

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25 Mackenzie, "API to AI," p. 6.

26 Ibid.

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52 Ibid.

53 Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image."

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59 Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image" (my emphasis).

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70 Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image."

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Britto Arts Trust: Tayeba Begum Lipi and Mahbubur Rahman
in Conversation with Anastasia Baka, Leilani Lynch, and Anna Wälli

Britto Arts Trust is an artist-run, non-profit collective founded in 2002. As part of the Triangle Network, an international network of artists and visual arts organizations, it has a global reach. Britto Arts Trust is based in Dhaka but works extensively in different locations across the country. Britto attempts to understand Bangladesh's socio-political upheaval by exploring missing histories, cultures, and communities and collaborating with various partners.

Britto seeds and promotes multiple interdisciplinary practitioners, groups, and networks. It provides an international and local forum for the development of professional art practitioners, a place where they can meet, discuss, experiment, and upgrade their abilities on their own terms. In response to the lack of suitable educational institutions in Bangladesh, Britto functions as an alternative learning platform for many artists who have gone on to produce highly experimental work.[1]

Britto Arts Trust is a lumbung member of *documenta fifteen*.

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Leilani Lynch: How did Britto Arts Trust begin? What were the conditions that brought about its founding?

Britto Arts Trust: Officially, we started in 2002. Unofficially, earlier. We were six founding trustees, all artists. We wanted to have this platform because Bangladesh didn't have anything like this during that time. Bangladesh had few galleries. One large government platform, which had their own agenda. So they were a public place, but not exactly, just like any big government institution. We founded Britto Arts Trust to experiment, to do things that we wanted to do because there was no platform for it.

In the early 2000s, we both visited Europe after our education, traveling to different countries, such as

England, Ireland, Germany, and Finland for residencies. There, we were seeing and experiencing new things like artist-run organizations and galleries. That was pretty interesting for us. We are young and thought we could do that. Why not? But actually in Nepal in 1994, we did an exhibition when we were still students, which was also organized by a kind of artist-run gallery with studio spaces. That was our first experience [with these types of models]. But afterwards in Europe, it was then that we understood the situation and we understood that it is possible for artists to make their own space.

So, after coming back, we were talking to our friends, and thought if we could share some money, we could rent a space to work, working on whatever and however we like. Where we can explore and experiment. Where we don't need to wait for the galleries to exhibit our works or promote us. We [could] promote ourselves and promote others, too.

That is how we thought in the beginning. And that was back in 2000. But surely there was also Triangle Network, who around that time was founding small organizations in South Asia like Khoj International Artists' Association from India, Vasl in Pakistan, and Theertha International Artist Collective from Sri Lanka. Pooja Sood from Khoj was assigned to grow more organizations in South Asia because Triangle had a big connection with Africa already, but had just started connecting with South Asia. So, it was kind of a coincidence or matching the time or something that actually moved us and moved them. We got to know their activities and saw firsthand how they were running the workshops or residencies. Coming back with all these experiences, we thought we were ready to found an organization or platform such as Britto.

Mahbubur Rahman: From the beginning, we have always worked as a group, not individually. We were practicing collectively, but we never thought we would make a registered organization, with accounts, bank-

ing things, or funding. So, from the beginning, it was a very organic process. We had been working for about six years in different groups and trying to shape an understanding between them. And then finally, the six founding trustees[2] had the same ideas to develop Britto.

Tayeba Begum Lipi: Finally, Robert Loder (co-founder of Triangle Network) and Pooja Sood actually gave us the courage and kind of convinced us, with their words of mouth, that we should start something, which we wanted. They were looking for people like us who wanted to do something different, and they were searching for the proper artists to start with this new idea. And they found us, and we found them. So, it was a good connection. A good match.

MR: Then we got confident. Because we are more like Bohemian people. We didn't think in any shape or any form. We didn't want to take on more responsibility, much less our own [laughs]. There was a lot of debate and confusion, a lot of conversation between us, even after we formed Britto. We were really confused about how to run, how to shape ourselves. Then finally we decided, no, it's like a life: if it works, it will work. And, if not, don't think that much. Just keep engaged.

The collective was not only about our work, we thought about the artist community in Bangladesh. So that was the target. But, from the beginning, we told anyone associated with us that you have to be an artist and you have to work hard. For your individual practice, you have to be supportive of the artist community who needs your support. Our (Bangladesh's) educational system is very rigid, very academic. There is less space for the experiment, but from the beginning, when we were students, we would do the experimenting in our educational life. We were becoming an alternative educational platform somehow... In the traditional system, they did not teach us about community-based work; there was sculpture, painting and printmaking. This kind of production-focused/oriented practice. So, then we started to explore our ideas related to the community, nature, and the land. It was more about the process and developing the concept and going through the process. The process was more than the product.

LL: What was the reception among the local community and local artists when you started? Was there any kind of resistance?

BAT: The reception was mixed. Some people connected with what we were doing instantly, some—even in the artist community—did not. Some people did not quite understand what we were doing, but they personally knew us and gave us moral support. Some people did think that we were establishing an NGO or something similar, which is not our background. And some were actually shocked that we started a platform because they thought that artists should do their own work only and not organize something different. In fact, we did not bother at all because we were very clear about what we wanted to do and how we wanted to proceed from the beginning. We always invited people to talk if they had any confusion; if you don't have this kind of conversation, there is always a gap that cannot be covered. Before we founded Britto twenty years ago, we were working as artists in different ways, and people got habituated with our own practice, but they were not familiar with what we are doing on a bigger platform like Britto. Since we worked very hard and after experiencing this long journey, that kind of broad recognition is there now, and people know how Britto works in Bangladesh. They would actually feel really shocked if Britto would need to close.

Anna Wälli: So how important has the physical Britto Space been for your practice? What kind of advantages did the physical space bring to the community?

BAT: Mahbubur and I have been together since 1996, and our house was always an open space for friends. So, we didn't mind starting Britto in our living room. After a while, we started to look out for small spaces where we could have a small office or residency. During approximately seven years, we had around seven spots, all located in residential areas. They were hard to keep, and we had to move constantly, because new buildings arose on those properties. Every time we moved to a new house, we knew that within two to three years we would have to move out again. But all of a sudden, the owners would say that we have to move out earlier because the house will be demolished. This was a very tiring process, and in 2004/05 we applied for a grant which we managed to receive for six years. We did not have any money at that time and were really struggling to arrange the funds for different kinds of projects, because Bangladesh does not have any local or public funding at all. So, when the first grant got approved, us Trustees decided not to take any salary. We didn't want to live on Britto—all of us

had our own work. We gave our time, our energy, and ideas to it, that is how we could save money and put it in the bank for a fixed deposit with good interest. We thought that if we maintain that scheme for the next six, seven, eight years, we could actually get a space for Britto, which could run forever, even if we are not there anymore. Half of the work would have been done with this, and we would have to organize money only for the projects and not for rent, etc., anymore. There were many sectors of work included such as design, photography, documentation; we did everything by ourselves and in-house. We saved all this money and donated our salaries and all remuneration to the house—that is how this money grew and why we were able to buy the space in 2011.

Furthermore, we applied to several institutions for funding, and Robert Loder [one of the founders of Triangle Network] also donated some funds, and we saved some money from our artworks, too.

LL: That is really interesting. Let me ask you how you identify yourselves? We are talking to a number of collectives and practitioners—but you define yourselves as "trustees." Why "trustees"?

BAT: Actually, for technical reasons. If you want to organize yourselves officially, there are mainly two possibilities: foundation and trust. We chose "trust" as an organizational form. Trustees are responsible for everything; for example, if the trustees are in debt, the trustees have to pay for that, or if there is something coming up in terms of law and order and all other things, they are in charge and have to solve the problems. There were six founding trustees in the beginning; after a while two of them left Britto, and we had to include two more, as according to the rules, we need to have six trustees. In addition to that, we can take members—they can join us temporarily and they are renewed every two years. So, the members are a changeable number, but we cannot have more than 100. At the moment, we have around seventeen or eighteen of them and the six trustees who are the decision-makers.

AW: Is it always the trustees that decide for the group?

BAT: Most of the decisions are made by the trustees, but it really depends on the project. Usually, the official activities or administrative tasks are decided and organized by the trustees. But also the members are

welcome to contribute, also in different projects. It's usually the members who are really engaged as well—in the projects, it's mostly the teams, which are put together by trustees and members, that decide. Some of the members also work as part of the administration directly and are always there. We have several working groups, and it does not matter whether you are a trustee or member, whoever has time can join them. There is a group for the residency, one for the workshops and projects, and so on.

LL: Do you meet very regularly, or a few times a year?

BAT: We have an official meeting once a year where all the trustees and members meet. But other than that, it is very organic—we love to party, so we meet for drinking, cooking, and so on. We have a social kitchen in the middle of Britto Space. It is important to mention that it's not only the trustees and members that are gathering, but there are so many young artists who might not be trustees or members, but still are associated and connected with Britto through different projects. We try to make them feel at home, and if they want to be part of the project, they need to have and feel ownership; if they have an opinion or anything to share, they can share.

A good example is documenta, because most of the artists are engaged with the whole process, but not so much the members. As the participation is process-based, we keep it open. The engagement in the process is the most important thing, rather than reaching the mountain. We tried to engage a lot of artists and members in this project. We like to work in a broader ecosystem and not exactly holding things together or making documenta to our own thing only.

Because of Covid, we need to maintain distance; that is why we have a big studio now. Britto Space is in the middle of the city, and it is rather small. So, the whole documenta project is done in our studios, and all the artists are staying over. This is the main part of the studio, but we have another one not far from here, and there is another workshop in the forest, in a village. So, there are several locations, and there are also many artists engaged for the documenta project—so it is a large ecosystem, we are working with too many people. We actually need to make a list of who is involved [laughs].

AW: Because we are so curious: could you tell us what you are planning for documenta, or is this a secret?

BAT: We are certainly not disclosing everything, but the concept is about food politics. Everything is related to food and food politics. In the beginning of 2020, when we all were shocked with the Covid situation, we did a project called *ZERO WASTE-FoodArt* which was done in sixteen different locations with sixteen different groups of artists—some of them individuals and some collectives. We could not actually meet with each other due to Covid, but we managed to get a small amount of funding for that project, and the artists got supported through that. Many of the artists had done really dynamic projects; all sixteen projects were really unique, and every project told its own story.

When we started to talk with the artistic team of documenta, that time we didn't actually know that we were talking about documenta; they got curious about what we are doing and wanted to know more and more about it. That's how it started.

That was an eight-month project. We were busy gardening and using the soil or growing and distributing the food to the people and managing the waste and creating artwork out of the whole process. Meanwhile, we were getting very engaged with food politics, and did a lot of research, watching films and documentaries, etc. This is how we started working on the project that will be for documenta.

We have five different projects for documenta on the same concept—food and food politics. One is a huge mural in Documenta Halle. We've done 90% here and 10% will be done over there (Kassel). It's influenced by hand-painted cinema banners and posters that used to be seen at theatres. This culture is already gone, but there are a couple of painters still alive and practicing. So, we thought, why don't we take that style, the cinema banner "attitude," and make something food-related.

We were interested in how film moves with culture, in terms of the costumes, features, and location. So, we thought, let's start to do research on food-related film. We watched about six or seven films and collected screenshots from the films, which we then developed with the eighteen artists into the mural. We will also show films related to food politics and colonial suppression. How coloniality has had an ecological impact—for example, that famine is a man-made phenomenon.

After doing several projects with artists, through the Britto ecosystem, we came up with a final list of artists to present at documenta. We have made around 2,000 objects, which we are installing that in the middle of Documenta Halle. Then the large wall nearby will have the mural, and then we are creating an organic garden outside the Halle. It will have an organic garden, whose structure is made of bamboo. In the middle of the garden, we will have our own bamboo kitchen run for 100 days by 100 people of different nationalities. They will be cooking, telling the stories of their food, and sharing memories.

We also have a very old project where we worked with different ethnic communities from the countryside of Bangladesh, which are mostly remote areas where there is no electricity or running water. We started this project in 2009, so we wanted to revisit all these places today to share at documenta. We have chosen seven locations and have been revisiting each during the last year, finding their culture once again. We are learning about each ethnic group's food habits, environmental issues, and how political issues are suppressing them. So, this will be shown as a three-channel film, which we are working on now, along with photography about this journey. And we are also planning to do some graffiti in the city.

Lastly, we will be publishing a book working with a young researcher who has been following us from the beginning of Britto. This will be published during documenta on the occasion of Britto's twenty-year anniversary (next year).

LL and AW: How exciting and ambitious! You've always been part of Triangle Network, but how has it been to be connected through the documenta project to other collectives across the world? Did you already know a lot of them, and did it change anything for you?

MR: Yeah, of course these networks are so important. The Triangle Network gave us a lot of tools, and we're happy to involve them in Britto's upcoming twentieth anniversary. Through Triangle Network, we had a platform to connect with collectives from all over the world, which gave us a lot of experiences and opportunities to share ideas. Many of the lumbung members we knew already, but others were new to us, so it's been a great experience working with them. Having conversation with them and making a discourse,

exploring how they cross borders of defining beauty and modes of exploration.

We are always at the boundaries, and it's very difficult to come out from them, being based in different geographical locations. This network is meant to be more than a one-day experience; it's more of a long-term journey with others.

TBL: I think this documenta is completely different from any other documenta we've seen because it is run by non-profit, artist-run organizations. We organized the first Bangladesh Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2011, but that was more like presenting an individual artist, not thinking about the ecosystem or involving a lot of other people or communities. As Bangladeshi artists, you can have space to reach out and introduce Bangladesh to the global art scenario, but at the same time, you don't make any network to organizations because that is not really related to artist collectives. It's more about individual practitioners.

MR: For documenta, we thought why don't we go for an organic process, you know.

TBL: If it's right, it's right, and if it's not, we just go another way.

LL: Just take another path.

TBL: Exactly.

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Notes
1 https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung-members-artists/britto-arts-trust/.
2 Shishir Bhattacharjee, Mahbubur Rahman, Tayeba Begum Lipi, Salahuddin Khan Srabon, Imran Hossain Piplu, and Kabir Ahmed Masum Chisty

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Leilani Lynch is Curator at the Bass, Miami Beach. She has organized recent solo exhibitions with Naama Tsabar, Mika Rottenberg, Karen Rifas, and Aaron Curry, in addition to co-organizing exhibitions with Abraham Cruzvillegas, Haegue Yang, Pascale Marthine Tayou, and Paola Pivi. Before joining the Bass curatorial team in 2015, she was Exhibitions Project Manager at Locust Projects, Miami. Lynch has participated on panels and lectures for STPI – Creative Workshop, Singapore, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, ArtTable, and ICOM, and served on juries for the Association of

Art Museum Curators, Oolite Arts, FL, the Hopper Prize, and others. She holds a BA in Art History from University of California, Berkeley, and an MAS in Curating from Zurich University of the Arts.

Anna Wälli is a curator and project manager with a background in art, history, and literature.

Gudskul: Marcellina Putri, Gesyada Siregar, and MG Pringgotono
in Conversation with Leilani Lynch and Maria Mumtaz

Gudskul is an educational platform with a pedagogical model that focuses on collective study and grassroots ecosystem-building. It is designed to provide an infrastructure for the contemporary art scene in Indonesia. We met with members Marcellina Putri, Gesyada Siregar, and MG Pringgotono over a Zoom call in three time zones (Miami, Dubai, and Jakarta) to discuss the beginnings of Gudskul, why collaborative practices are still a fascinating concept for the West, and their plans for *documenta fifteen*. Gudskul operates from a warehouse in the south of Jakarta, with its many rooms and spaces shared among different entities and the working spaces for the projects they spearhead. Gudskul is part of the lumbung network of *documenta fifteen*, curated by artist collective ruangrupa, who also came together with Grafis Huru Hara and Serrum to form Gudskul.

Maria Mumtaz: Could you give us a bit of background into Gudskul and how it came about?

MG Pringgotono: In 2006, we established Serrum after a couple of years of working on several projects with ruangrupa. In 2013, after many years of collaborations and working together on exhibitions, ruangrupa and Serrum started to think about another platform for institutions and organizations wanting to work with us on exhibitions and so on. So we said, okay, it's a good idea to make a unit where we can all work together as exhibition consultants through a serious platform. In 2016, after the Jakarta Biennial, we had some issues with the space. ruangrupa was paying a lot of money on rent, so we decided to move to a 3,000-square-meter warehouse where we could upscale our collaboration and make our own ecosystem, which is why we call that place Gudang Sarinah Ekosistem. It was an abandoned warehouse of Sarinah, which is the first department store in Indonesia. We opened it to everyone and anyone, collectives and groups, who would like to rent the space and join us with their studios under one roof. We also rent the space to institutions who would like to exhibit, present

a concept or festivals in the big warehouse. This continued for two years and became a very hipster place, inviting youngsters and creatives.

MM: After establishing the space and Gudskul, how did you then continue to create a sustainable program of community engagement?

Gesyada Siregar: It is important to start with the education program, which is the DNA and prototype of what has today become the Gudskul. Each collective focused on a division or sub-unit to create a diversity of programs ranging from guest oriented to high school and university student oriented programs, as well as inviting emerging artists and curators. We realized the potential that each division or sub-unit has in educational programs. We held workshops and classes like any other collective, but we also thought about how we can glue all our efforts together. And that is the DNA of the Gudskul—taking its name from *gudang* (warehouse) and Indonesian spelling of school (*skul*). When Sarinah realized the warehouse was popular and attracting lots of visitors, they decided to increase the rental cost. We still had that non-profit mentality, you know, when friends come from different parts of Indonesia we offered the space for concerts and musical festivals for free. This is when we found profit-based programs to cover our operational basis and balance things out. Many people would come back to see the spaces because they knew about us, the ecosystem, the environment and the dynamics. This is when we realized the potential and importance of having educational programs and how we can exchange knowledge, because when these people come for our educational program, they are not only learning from us, but we also learn something from them. There's always a mutual exchange in the arts. Apart from people coming in as participants, we also get a lot of volunteers whenever we have festivals. These volunteers then go on and invite their friends, and based on these friendship networks, we attract

more and more audiences who have a sense of belonging to the space.

Marcellina Putri: I also started as an assistant curator for Ok Video Festival. Gudskul was an informal education platform that invited more younger people to be part of the ecosystem. Many of us graduated with the choice between commercial or non-profit work. However, Gudskul is an alternative platform for such students who want to learn more about how the contemporary art ecosystem works, and how they can build their own collective in their hometown if they ever return. Serrum and Grafis Huru Hara also came from the same university. Serrum had a peculiar approach towards art pedagogy, and that's also why Gudskul chose its path towards an educational platform.

Leilani Lynch: I am sure it fluctuates from time to time, but how many people form the core group of Gudskul, and how do you make decisions on programming and operations?

GS: There are about fifty main board members working in different roles and capacities, as coordinators of different sub-units and fulfilling the "triangle," or the three units of the Gudskul. The first is the educational program (Gudskul) composed of collective studies, short courses, short residencies, and art camp; second is the art collective compound under which ruangrupa, Serrum, Grafis Huru Hara, Ok Video, etc., fall; and the third is RUX, which includes artistic consultation, studio rental, art handling, and artistic production services. The financial support we get from RUX goes towards the collective pot, or lumbung, which is at the center of this. Everything we do with the art collective compound also nourishes our educational program.

MG: We founded ruangrupa and Serrum to commemorate and remember our expressions and interests through any number of activities. This has become a very basic mentality at Gudskul. In the Gudang, we can see what is missing in our ecosystem and what we would like to do to support it and make it a reality. ruangrupa, Serrum, and Grafis Huru Hara had their own programs before we came together. We decided to keep some elements from each in order to become a magnet for everyone else to come and propose new ideas. For example, a group of designers, architects, and independent publishers set up studios in the warehouse, making it a truly interesting and dynamic

place to come to. Our next step was to see how to transform all the knowledge we had accumulated over the years, through our experiences of working on exhibitions and festivals, and make it sustainable and distribute it. We all have a concept of a Western school, how you learn there and disseminate knowledge, but we don't do that. We just borrowed the concept of school, and we are trying to run it in our own style. It was only after years of operations that we realized we are running a school. When ruangrupa started curatorial work, it was a very good moment for us because at the time there was no formal education in Indonesia.

MM: I think it's also interesting to note how collaborative practices are somehow second nature to the Global South. I feel like it's just innate in the culture, the social and religious practices—it beautifully comes together in your artistic and pedagogical practices.

MG: Collectivism as practice is a method; it's how we see and think. We would also like people to learn more about this. What we are seeing in *documenta fifteen* is quite interesting because the idea of collectivism is getting bigger, and more people are curious about it. Maybe it is going to be something. Maybe it will work for some and not for everyone. But like you said, it is second nature to us in the Global South. I agree with that.

MM: I would be curious to know how you position your practice within a global perspective, especially in the context of the upcoming documenta fifteen—how do you translate your practice in Jakarta to Kassel?

GS: We are going to translate the triangle in our work for *documenta fifteen*. We would like to see *documenta fifteen* as a knowledge resource where many artists from the lumbung network are coming together. There will be a mutual exchange in this model, which is why we are creating an adaptation of the Gudskul Ecosystem from hanging out, cooking together, playing games, and giving workshops or classes. Through this model, we move away from the trap of just presenting our work for a period of time, and then poof, it's gone when *documenta fifteen* ends after 100 days.

MG: We also have a digital platform called Sekolah Temujalar that we imagine will optimize communication and how we distribute the knowledge from each

collective in our network. Let's just say what Gudskul does is a small version of *documenta fifteen* on a daily basis, and what *documenta fifteen* is doing right now is a bigger version of Gudskul. The idea of lumbung, the idea of value, is already there in our practice, but it will be on a bigger scale with so many different cultures coming together for *documenta fifteen*. We also need critique about this model and to grow and to do more.

LL: I was thinking about knowledge exchange and how it's not just people learning from you, but you learning from other people as well. I am wondering if already in your interactions with the wider lumbung network, there has been some learning or something you have taken away?

GS: Yes, it is an ongoing process because to work together you still need to be in the same space physically. I can step on your foot, I can tap your shoulders, you know? We still need that kind of intimacy. During the past two years, we have been working with other lumbung members online to develop trust and understand each other's languages, each other's accents. The main thing is learning and adapting the new models of the pandemic. All of us are learning, taking the time to absorb and reflect, and come back with feedback. I think documenta is also learning. When you are working together in such capacities, there aren't only artistic issues to tackle. We are also having visa issues. It is very easy for an artist or collective in Europe to arrive in a heartbeat, but for us and many other collectives, we have to go through a very difficult visa process. Even with the first Indonesian directors of *documenta fifteen*, we still have visa limitations. It is also a learning process, especially for *documenta fifteen* to reflect on how they can handle this collective, budget, scale of works, a collective mechanism that can be shared by members. These are tiny things, but they push you to think about how you can find ways to connect.

MM: How are you funding your project in Kassel for *documenta fifteen*? Is there support from the local government in Jakarta?

MG: We are still looking for local funding. But we are also pushing the idea of the Lumbung Collective Pot. We are thinking about how to leave something behind for Kassel-based collectives that we are collaborating with and bring some things back for other collectives and friends in Indonesia. Right now, we have three Kassel-based collaborators and are looking for more to work with us during the 100 days of *documenta fifteen*.

We are making a sort of a dormitory in Kassel where collectives from different parts of the world can come and discuss, meditate or sleep. A hub for more collectives to come together.

MM: What are some other solid strategies that you are thinking of implementing beyond the duration of *documenta fifteen*?

GS: We have the term "harvesting," which means how we can extract knowledge in a conversation into other forms such as visual recordings, radio drama, etc. Once we harvest all this knowledge, it will form the basis to strategize and speculate ways in which we can do other kinds of programming. We need to have data, information, and knowledge to speculate. The strategy so far is to create these modules. We often joke that this is our hit single, as if we are a Pop band, invited to perform at a concert. Once we have this information, we are going to make another hit single called the speculative collective module, which is based on value, property, economy, sustainability, and members. By strategizing what we have in our groups, we create other modules. Since we cannot attend all sessions online, we have created a workbook consisting of games and illustrations based on classics such as snakes and ladder, yes and no games, fill in the blanks, etc., based on the speculative collective module. Once we finalize the PDF, we are going to send it to the institution to disseminate it with our collaborators who will then fill the workbook, and it will become the tool of harvesting. Once we have the harvest, we can then think of the sustainability of the program.

MP: We are trying to use gamification to become our methodology to translate our artistic practices. Workbook is one aspect we created last year because we cannot travel due to COVID-19. Temujalar is another such tool. Starting in 2019, Gudskul began researching Indonesian collectives, and from there we are also creating a collective of collectives. When we have the limitation where we cannot physically meet with other collective members, then we use the digital platform to share our knowledge, resources, and access to other networks. We share job and funding opportunities in one platform to help members develop their practice. This is what inspired Gudskul to create the Temujalar digital platform. We often get very bored of the typical Zoom platform, so we try to use other tools that don't limit us to only some interactions, but enable us to host classes, workshops, and virtual exhibitions. We want to create what the Gudskul Ecosystem already

did but on the digital platform. We only see gamification as an approach, to make learning and knowledge sharing more fun.

LL: How can visitors to documenta fifteen interact with your project? Are there set times for the module, classes, or some kind of physical representation of your work?

MG: We are going to move Gudskul in Jakarta to Kassel. The whole area is going to function exactly how Gudskul does over here. There are many tables and chairs and collective games, a program called knowledge market, some offsite projects, events, classes, karaoke, cooking sessions, talks at designated times mentioned in the schedule of the program.

LL: It must be such an interesting discussion with the museum staff to bring cooking into the museum. We cannot wait to see how your plans will manifest.

This interview was conducted on February 4, 2022, via Zoom.

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Gudskul: Contemporary Art Collective and Ecosystem Studies (or, for short, Gudskul, which is pronounced like "good school" in English) is a public learning space established by three Jakarta-based art collectives: Grafis Huru Hara, ruangrupa, and Serrum. Since the early 2000s, all three have actively immersed themselves into the contemporary art realm by practicing a collective and collaborative mode of working. They collectively formed Gudang Sarinah Ekosistem in 2015 to practice an expanded understanding of collective values such as equality, sharing, solidarity, friendship, and togetherness. The collective transformed into Gudskul in 2018. Founded in 2012, Grafis Huru Hara (GHH) is a group of Jakarta-based graphic artists who focus on explorative, experimental, and educational methods of graphic arts as their main medium. GHH's programs include exhibitions, graphic art workshops, and various publishing projects about graphic arts.

Leilani Lynch is Curator at the Bass, Miami Beach. She has organized recent solo exhibitions with Naama Tsabar, Mika Rottenberg, Karen Rifas, and Aaron Curry, in addition to co-organizing exhibitions with Abraham Cruzvillegas, Haegue Yang,

Pascale Marthine Tayou, and Paola Pivi. Before joining the Bass curatorial team in 2015, she was Exhibitions Project Manager at Locust Projects, Miami. Lynch has participated on panels and lectures for STPI – Creative Workshop, Singapore, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, ArtTable, and ICOM, and served on juries for the Association of Art Museum Curators, Oolite Arts, FL, the Hopper Prize, and others. She holds a BA in Art History from University of California, Berkeley, and an MAS in Curating from Zurich University of the Arts.

Maria Mumtaz is an arts strategist and curator based in the UAE with ten years of experience in contemporary art from the Global South. She currently works in the Publishing division of the Learning and Research Department at the Sharjah Art Foundation, a contemporary art and cultural foundation based in Sharjah since 2009. Prior to this, she was part of the core team of Noura Al Kaabi, UAE Minister of Culture and Youth. She has also served as Director of Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde, which represents a significant and pluralistic roster of artists from the MENASA region. Mumtaz started her career as Editorial Assistant at *Canvas* magazine, the region's premier magazine on art and culture from the Middle East and Arab world, where she wrote several in-depth articles for magazines, newspapers, and books. She holds a bachelor's degree in Media Studies from SZABIST, Karachi, and an MAS in Curating from Zurich University of the Arts.

Jatiwangi art Factory (JaF): Ismal Muntaha and Al Ghorie
in Conversation with Sophie Brunner, Marinella Sofia Gkinko, and Maria Mumtaz

Jatiwangi art Factory (JaF) is a community that embraces contemporary arts and cultural practices as part of the local life discourse in a rural area. Their manifold activities, always involving the local public, include a video festival, a music festival, a residency program, a discussion series, and a TV and radio station. We met with members Ismal Muntaha and Gory over a Zoom call, which connected three cities (Zurich, Dubai, and Jatiwangi) to discuss the beginnings, background, and practices of JaF, which included the division of roles, funding issues, the role of the local ecosystem, their project *Kota Terakota,* their plans for *documenta fifteen*, and why the period after the 100 days of documenta is more important for them. JaF is part of the lumbung network of *documenta fifteen*, curated by the artist collective ruangrupa.

Maria Mumtaz: Could you tell us a bit about the Jatiwangi Art Factory (JaF) and your collective practice?

Al Ghorie: It started in 2005 in Arif's mother's house. Arif and his wife started inviting artists and organizing workshops, exhibitions, and residency programs. After that, it got bigger and bigger. By doing so, we would learn something from the invited artists, curators, or musicians. Jatiwangi is a very industrial area with no culture and art, but only the tradition of the roof tile factories since 1905. We were thinking that luxurious things are never happening in the village. It's always in the big city, in the urban area with the infrastructure, with the schools and galleries. At this point, we challenged ourselves to do something in a place that doesn't have those things at all. Since then, we have been thinking that maybe the identity of the roof tiles itself is culture.

MM: In what physical form does the JaF exist? Do you have a space, or is it a group of individuals who come together as a collective?

AG: We added art, because we have a lot of roof tile factories, and, instead of making roof tiles we are making art. We do the events, concerts, and workshops in the actual factory itself. We don't call ourselves a collective maybe because also our neighborhood is a part of our community. We are more of a community. Our focus is to connect the various interests of our friends, family, or neighbors, even our government.

MM: How does JaF function, how are the roles divided, and how do all members come together? If you can also just expand a little bit more on the collective and the collaborative practices; it's important given that, you know, this is the central theme for *documenta fifteen* as well.

Ismal Muntaha: What we do here cannot be separated from our daily life context because we are living here. We don't need to rent some space because we're living in the mother's house, which since the beginning has been a public space. People hang out in our house, in our yard. We are not some organization that is working for the community or some art collective empowering a community. It actually sounds very awkward for us if we call ourselves an art collective. From that context, we started inviting our friends and our neighbors to connect, and we have also always been introducing ourselves as members of the family. When we are inviting our friends, we are introducing them as our friends who come to our home or who are living in it. We also have various languages in terms of artistic approach or practice because we are very diverse with various backgrounds and various interests. Also, it gives us a very dynamic approach and fluidity, but then at the same time we feel we are a community, trying to survive the transformation. That's probably one of the main things that we are facing now, connecting what we are proposing for *documenta fifteen*. Jatiwangi and its industrial area are related to the colonial history. The Dutch constructed those huge factories, and then it's also since then that

Jatiwangi has been connected to the first liberalization in Jaffa. The sugar factories changed our landscape, as the rice fields changed into sugar cane fields. This is also related as well with how the roof tile industry evolved. That also changed our social relationship. From 2008 until now, a new industry has been growing; for example, the Nike factory is located here, and it's very huge—about 10,000 workers—and also other factories like Puma. This transformation is something that we are facing now and what we are doing is related to it.

MM: The people you invite to participate, including friends and family, don't necessarily have to have an arts background. They come in as collaborators and could be involved in many different ways.

IM: Because Arif is an artist, and when he came back, he began to activate the house more as a common space. So, the circle is opening up to artists, musicians, performers, etc., but then the actual network is related to the roof tiles and the local community, so it is more diverse, including architects, policemen, and the neighborhood as well. To see this new relationship between those sectors is interesting.

MM: Could you also tell us a bit about the project Kota Terakota that you're working on for documenta fifteen and how different members of the collective are involved in this project?

IM: It's also still related to what we are, what has happened now, the literal transformation actually, the notable rural expansion, and the *Kota Terakota* is kind of crystallizing our activity. We now try to recognize our local resources, which is soil or clay. Before, that was only seen as a commodity or for making roof tiles, and consequently to make money. We are trapped in the kind of exploitation of our resources, and slowly with time we see our resources as our new identity or, our—we call it—dignity. And then with various activities, new rituals, and new traditions, like, for example, every three years we are bringing our roof tiles with thousands of people, which is very important to make a kind of common agreement to see our resources as something that can have a cultural value again. And from that point, it is crystallized into a more strategic plan or strategic artistic approach that we call *Kota Terakota*. We can now negotiate our territory as a cultural territory; before it was only an industrial area. That's why we call it *Kota Terakota*. Now in the city plan, it's written that Jatiwangi should become a terra-

cotta cultural area and not only industrial area. So, we as citizens or as a community living here, we can also become a subject in terms of development.

We see now in documenta how some states are facing what we are already have started, what we are already been experimenting here in Jatiwangi, and we see it as well as a chance to talk about the situation: what happened in Jatiwangi and also probably in another places, which is the urban expansion. And what we are proposing is a new Rural Agenda as kind of the umbrella project for documenta. The Rural Agenda is starting from a situation that has happened in Jatiwangi. Maybe you're familiar with the new urban agenda that was made by the UN after the summit in 2016 called New Urban Agenda. And it mentioned that, in 2030, people will go to the city and then they should make some kind of guideline on how to live in the city. But what happened now in Jatiwangi and also in other places in the world is that the city expanded to the rural areas, to the villages, not only people moving to the city. I think the perspective is still that they see the rural as something that is supporting the urban, not something that is a place with many values. Policing the rural can be some step to a common future, the field view, the relation, et cetera. That's why for documenta we want to make a summit to create a new rural agenda, but from the community. We are glad to connect with the lumbung members that also have some really strong relations or issues regarding land, communing, and collectivity, proposing to us something that we can articulate in the future. Of course, we cannot be separated from our ecosystem. I mean, we should also bring our ecosystem.

It is much easier for us to talk with the local government in this way, if we are not talking only from the perspective of art, like let's make some summit with a lot of practices from various backgrounds, or we can negotiate directly with the many stakeholders there, including the policymaker—for example, the UN. Now our mayor will also come, and we are examining the possibility of a meeting with our mayor and the Kassel mayor to talk about a new model of development. That is important for us, because when we come back, after documenta, we can have a different position in our local context.

MM: Does the government in Indonesia fund your projects?

IM: Our local government is already part of our ecosystem. Thanks to the international context, it's also kind of easy to seduce them to be more supportive. For

the context of the Rural Agenda, actually we have like 17,000 islands and most of our country is rural; we are also starting to talk with our cultural ministry who already has 300 networks of rural/cultural villages. So, this Rural Agenda is for us also important for building a dialogue with the international rural network, with the lumbung ecosystem. We are already talking with UNESCO in Paris regarding the summit as well. But for the summit, the most important thing is how to put the community as the main actor. It is also important to see the non-human delegation as the stakeholder and to find a non-human delegation.

MM: Since we are on the subject of funding, would you explain a bit about how the summit and activities around it are being organized and budgeted?

IM: For the 100 days, it's more crucial for us to bring people rather than works or objects. Like I mentioned before, after documenta, it's easier to build a dialogue with the local government and our community even with our neighborhoods, because sometimes we invite somebody, but then for our neighborhood, it's not cool at all; but then we can also bring them to Kassel and do something together, so it is easier to continue after that. The production budget is fairly limited if we spend more on bringing people. That's why we invited our mayor to make some agreement, and it's also a strong reason for him to spend some budget as well to bring our ecosystem, our local leader, or even the businessman or some other collective or community in our city. So, they are supporting that, and we are doing some programs there. For the summit as well, we are trying to cooperate with our cultural ministry, and they are pretty excited about the idea because they also feel that we need experimentation on how to create some policy or a solution. This is a great moment for them as well to come together. So, they will probably also support us.

MM: How are you nurturing your relationship with other lumbung members for your project in Kassel?

IM: We always say that actually the period after documenta is more important for us. We see documenta as something that will strengthen our connection and collaboration, not only during documenta, but mostly after documenta. Two months ago, I was invited by one of the lumbung members, Más Arte más Acción. I feel that it is a necessity to connect the ecosystems of other collectives and communities and I feel that it

will be very interesting to connect with our network, for example, connecting the Indonesian rural network with communities in the Amazon. There's a dialogue and relations that make us excited about documenta. Not something that we are preparing and showing in Kassel, but something that has already started, but then also after documenta.

MM: If I understand it correctly, the summit is going to be the only major aspect of your project in Kassel, or is there something else as well?

IM: It's more like the momentum. We plan to do the summit around the opening, and during the 100 days we have some space in Kassel that is also kind of articulating the process of the rural agenda—a space for dialogue and collaborations. A space for making agreements to realize the Rural Agenda. The Rural Agenda is actually something we are already experimenting with here in Jatiwangi, so people also can see our method and our approach. In the 100 days, we will do some programs or some activation, because we did some off-site projects related to documenta here in Jatiwangi as well. And then we will translate this in that space. This month, we want to start the new rural school also as part of the Rural Agenda to build a dialogue between the Indonesian ecosystem and the lumbung ecosystem.

MM: During a talk at our university, farid rakun put forth some keywords including local anchor, humor, independence, generosity, transparency, sufficiency, and regeneration, which we thought was very interesting. How does JaF refer to some of these ideas? Where do you position yourself?

IM: Probably that principle of the lumbung actually is something that we are familiar with as well regarding the local anchor and family; we cannot separate it from our local contexts and what we are doing. Also, humor plays a key role, while generosity is more like a driver.

MM: How do you archive and document activities of JaF?

IM: It is always challenging how to translate what we are doing here to other places. For documenta, it's more interesting for us to bring in the people. But, of course, regarding some production budget, we already spent that on the offsite project, so there should be something that we bring to documenta in terms of

documentation or archive. For the summit, we are thinking of experiencing it through the five senses. When we are talking about a non-human delegation and how we communicate, we need our five senses. Maybe the summit will smell. Regarding other lumbung projects, probably compost will be some delegation as well, or some cow dung, or a lot of flowers. It's the five senses that we want to maximize in the summit.

MM: How do you take your project forward after documenta fifteen? What can we expect after the 100 days of the exhibition?

IM: What we are now working or discussing often is regarding that, because there is a group working on land. So probably that will be some kind of future collaboration, how we can also have some land, reclaim some land. Land ownership or reclaiming land is one of the aspects that we are talking about, and one of the questions is also how we can also find some new investment models regarding land. Because, for example, now we know, we already have a soil (bangla in Bengali) in Jatiwangi, which is important for *Kota Terakota*. It is the material for pursuing our vision. This can also be some cultural anchor to negotiate with the territory. We are developing the discussion: how we generate land into something that can be commonly as well as collectively used.

Marinella Sofia Gkinko: You mentioned earlier that you have been introducing yourselves as members of a family, but you also use the term community. Do you, therefore, define JaF, as a community or more as a family?

IM: Family. We have the word *tanah*. *Tanah* can be one word for many things: *tanah* means soil, clay, earth, plan, ground. So, everything is one word. And for the summit as well, we are thinking of including *tanah* from other places as delegation.

This interview was conducted on January 14, 2022.

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Established in 2005, **Jatiwangi art Factory JaF** is a community-based organization focused on the ways that contemporary art and cultural practices can be contextualized with the local life in a rural area. At the beginning of the twentieth century, its clay industry made Jatiwangi the biggest roof tile-producing region in Southeast Asia. A hundred

years later, in 2005, using the same clay, JaF encouraged the people of Jatiwangi to create a collective awareness and identity for their region through arts and cultural activity. In doing so, JaF tries to cultivate clay with more dignity and to raise the collective happiness of the community. The project *Kota Terakota* thus marks the beginning of a new clay culture for Jatiwangi, remodeling the city based on its people's desires and their collective agreement. In this sense, *Kota Terakota* speaks to "terra" not only as a material, but also as land, territory, or an idea. The work of JaF has been shown at various venues in Indonesia and abroad, including Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul (2020), the Asian Art Biennial, Taichung (2017), the Gwangju Biennale (2016), Copenhagen Alternative Art Fair (2016), SONSBEEK '16, Arnhem (2016), Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2013), and the Jakarta Contemporary Ceramic Biennale (2012).

Sophie Brunner is a freelance curator based in Switzerland and Italy. She is the founder and director of Atelier Rohling, a project that demands and promotes a contemporary and equal concept of art since 2012. She is currently leading the national project access, which gives marginalized Swiss artists better access to the art world.

Marinella Sofia Gkinko holds a PhD in Literature, specializing in Periodical Press, from the University of Patras, and a MAS in Curating from the Zurich University of the Arts. She has participated in international conferences and interdisciplinary research projects with emphasis on literature, translation and periodicals. Gkinko has been an exchange PhD student at Lumière University Lyon 2 and trained in Digital Humanities at the University of Leipzig and University of Oxford. Within the curatorial realm, her interests encompass art, language and technology. She is based in Zurich and currently working at elementum.art.

Maria Mumtaz is an arts strategist and curator based in the UAE with ten years of experience in contemporary art from the Global South. She currently works in the Publishing division of the Learning and Research Department at Sharjah Art Foundation, a contemporary art and cultural foundation based in Sharjah since 2009. Prior to this, she was part of the core team of Noura Al Kaabi, UAE Minister of Culture and Youth. She has also served as

Director of Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde, which represents a significant and pluralistic roster of artists from the MENASA region. Mumtaz started her career as an editorial assistant at Canvas magazine, the region's premier magazine on art and culture from the Middle East and Arab world, where she wrote several in-depth articles for magazines, newspapers, and books. She holds a bachelor's degree in Media Studies from SZABIST, Karachi, and an MAS in Curating from Zurich University of the Arts.

Más Arte Más Acción: Jonathan Colin, Alejandra Rojas, Rossana Alarcón and Carmenza Rojas
in Conversation with Rosela del Bosque, Olena Iegorova and Veronica Mari

Más Arte **Más** *Acción* **(MaMa)** began in 2008 as a collaboration of shared interests between partners Jonathan Colin and Fernando Arias. The foundation's base, on Colombia's Pacific Coast, contextualizes artists and other professionals to explore wide-ranging social, political, and ecosystemic issues that have arisen due to industrial growth, neoliberalism, and ecocide in bioverse landscapes. By working through collaborative processes and issues rooted in the community, MaMa has contributed to a discourse that considers the challenges facing local people, broader humanity and socially engaged practices.

MaMa is committed to environmental and social processes that do not focus on the contemporary art discourse. Having been chosen to participate as a lumbung member for *documenta fifteen,* MaMa has been given an opportunity to present its processes within a contemporary art framework. They have developed activities with their neighbors and friends in nearby communities, deciding among everyone what lines of action to focus on.

For this interview, we met with nearly the whole team of MaMa and engaged in far-ranging topics such as their multidisciplinary projects in the region of Nuquí and alliances that have been constructed over the years in this territory.

MaMa will pause its program in 2023 to reflect on its future role and structure. *Más Arte* Más *Acción* is a lumbung member for *documenta fifteen.*

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Veronica Mari: As we have learnt, *Más Arte Más Acción* initiated as a collaboration focused on local and community issues and ways to address them. To begin with, we would like to have a deeper understanding of your own context. Could you please tell us more about what has motivated you to start the collective?

Jonathan Colin: Firstly, we prefer to be considered an organization rather than a collective. MaMa began in 2008 as a collaboration of shared interests between myself and my partner Fernando Arias (fig 1.). We lived together in Scotland and then in London until 2006. I was running a community-cultural center in Brixton, where I was seeking ways in which young people could come together to make exhibitions with contemporary artists. Fernando's work deals with political, social, and environmental issues, and has always been very strong and deep-rooted in Colombia, its territory, its complexities, and social concerns. My interests have always been riveted to art that doesn't take place in galleries. We were doing that at a time when it wasn't really a kind of normal practice and there weren't curatorial study courses in places like the Royal College in London where most courses were focused in arts administration instead. I was running a public art agency in Scotland when I met Fernando back in 1995. So that was my background for the years before we came to Colombia in 2006. Our initial spark actually came after we'd been for some time in the Pacific coast region of Armenia located in the coffee growing area, where in fact a lot of our programs have taken place for the last twelve years. The first time we went to Chocó, though, actually goes back to 1997 when we wrote for an ecotourism magazine. Early in 2009, when we returned from Armenia to our base in Chocó on Colombia's Pacific Coast, we were invited by the Ministry of Culture to curate *El Salón Regional*, the regional salon of art, which is really the place where contemporary art in Colombia rallies around curatorial concepts. So, for us, it was the first time we'd done anything like it, and we had to come up with a name for the two of us because we weren't just going to be Jonathan and Fernando. We came up with *Más Arte* Más *Acción* because we were interested in art that

engaged and confronted people in ways that they weren't necessarily used to. We were interested in activism as well and generating a kind of change through artistic practice on different levels. From the start, MaMa has tried to share resources and remove hierarchies, so well-known visiting international artists and young local artists were allocated equal budgets. By working through collaborative processes and issues rooted in the community, MaMa contributed to a discourse that reached beyond the art world and voices from the region were heard at events around the world.

It evolved into something very fluid when the Prince Claus Fund in the Netherlands invited us to apply to become network partners. And we were up against the Museo de Antioquia in Medellín, which is a really massive institution with hundreds of people working for it. We knew we weren't going to become a network partner of the Prince Claus Fund, but it really sparked that idea that we could do something more solid, and it laid out the kind of pathway towards this creating a foundation, because ultimately we wanted to find financial resources to channel into projects that we felt were valid and socially engaged projects around us. That's when we started our relationship with the Prince Claus Fund in more depth and then with Arts Collaboratory. This is a particular moment where we're obviously working towards *documenta fifteen* in a way that we're fully engaged in producing. However, we've been discussing for the last two to three years, stopping, stepping back, and rethinking the form of the organization itself, how it's going to be managed in the future, if it's going to have a future, or if it was a project that was fit for purpose for its time, we don't know the answers until we have time out in 2023 to deeply reflect on what we've done and what we can do in the future.

VM: You mentioned that, interestingly enough, you don't identify yourself as a collective—how do you really identify MaMa? Is it a network?

JC: From the beginning, everything has revolved around the people and the relationships that we have with each other. Even though we've had our tensions and conflicts, the nature of the organization has shifted through many chapters depending on who's been here. When things were starting to scale up and we couldn't handle all the administration, Ana Garzón came in as an administrator, working three or four days a week just taking care of the finances. She gradually took over more and more of the management of

the project until she ended up being an incredible director (fig. 2.). Therefore, the shape of the organization has changed all the time, and we are at a particular moment where it is quite intense. We've had an encounter at the end of November-beginning of December in Nuquí, as our Lumbung Chocó, which raised a lot of questions about how we relate to one another, and we don't have the answers yet (fig. 3. and fig. 4.). So, I think we'd all be crazy to say that we know what the answers are, and we know the shape that it will take in the future, but I know that all I know is that we are these people. We are these people with our own individual interests and also our collective interests around certain topics. For example, Carmenza was just talking about the relationship between humans/the non-human and the afro-feminist group that she's still very much driving, and all of those things are areas that we want to explore and will explore this year in *documenta fifteen.*

Olena Iegorova: Could you also please tell us how the cultural differences within the group or the artists helped in shaping what the project looks like right now, because as we see, you all have different backgrounds, and this might be very enriching to your practices.

Carmenza Rojas Potes: The richness of our ecosystem has been the difference. When you work from a homogeneous perspective, you lose the most important aspect in life and surely nature gives you that. Chocó is the most biodiverse region in the world, so I believe that our practices and collaborations in *Más Arte* Más *Acción* stem from this; (fig. 5.) as it happens, it's been possible to read and be completely sensitive to our environment. Speaking of globalization, I understand it in regard to color, which means reflecting on Blackness as a word and its historical meaning, not only in terms of skin color. It is essential to first position yourself within your context, for example, considering myself before anything a Colombian, a diverse and multiethnic cultural practitioner. Regarding the collective, I believe people have bestowed certain value over the word collective but haven't fully seen it as a way of producing something. You can probably say "We are a collective," but you only speak within a group of five people because it's *your collective.* If you consider the whole extension of the notion of biodiversity, only five people stay quite short on building this.

Alejandra Rojas: I wanted to build a little bit on that. I think Arts Collaboratory has been a big influence in

the process of MaMa. For example, we've been working on rethinking our financial paradigm in relation to North-South relationships of funding. I would like to remark that practices based in the Afro community both in rural and urban spaces, as Carmenza has pointed out, should not be solely related in terms of Afro and skin. Instead, it should be studied taking in account their cosmovision and complexities on understanding how to live and produce from this territory; for example, Quibdó, which has probably been excluded from the hegemonic sphere, is an important site for intellectual production and feminist practices. Ana Garzón was quite focused in reinforcing alternative and community practices thought out from a feminist perspective and this was very enriching for sustaining the relationships built from our residency programs (fig. 6.). Some of the feedback we've received from our past projects expressed gratitude for the attention we provided, and I think it derives from care and femininity. Like today, we are mostly women working in the project, and from my position this has been substantial in terms of influence concerning our country's political situations which are always speaking to us. We cannot dismiss violence or the difficulties that confront our location. Positively, support and activism in cases, like *El Paro Nacional* or *El Paro de Buenaventura*, have created important communitarian acts of agency and governance on account of the political tension and disparities.

People who are close to the organization have put a lot of influence in it. I would like to point out some of the important influences and also to emphasize the idea of not having a strategic plan for the organization, trying to go step by step and trying to analyze the input before taking the next one, instead. It's very organic planning, in a way. Of course, we have some more precise financial strategy, but even in it we adhere to the idea of lifeline—cyclical learning and adjusting the strategy according to what was learnt.

JC: I also like the idea that you don't need to say you're a collective to be necessarily working in a collective sense. And I think, although having set up this organization, which was in a way forced on us as a structure by the North funding policy, our organizational structure is still horizontal. Sometimes, things are difficult to talk about in an organization when you're in it, but I've never felt that I've been taking or forcing decisions on others as one of the co-founders. And I hope that people have always felt that we take decisions collectively, including ones about programming, etc. At the same time, there will always be that elephant in the

room, that sense of worker-owner relationship, when you've got that structure, where, as a legal entity, you are the people who have the ultimate right to make decisions. But I'm confident that with the people we're with and accompanying us, it will get to that point where we can really make decisions together.

Rosela del Bosque: I have a question following up on what Alejandra was talking about, because I come from a very familiar context being from Mexico. I believe that all community-based projects that are strongly grounded definitely take into consideration location and the political influence that you are under. How exactly do you shape your project and your activities, and do you incorporate the political and also the social and economic factors that affect Colombia, and how do you address them through the project?

AR: I would like to talk about it with examples, and I would invite Carmenza, because I think that Atrato Collaborations (fig. 7.), which has also been a project of a lot of tension, is also crossed by a reality of the river and the reality of Quibdó. Just to give an example, I would like to talk about the port of Triuga and how it was threatening the territory, and generally speaking of the Gulf of Triuga. That is the place where Fernando and Jonathan started the organization and where the residency program was established. Now, we also started to get very involved with the organizational and cultural processes of Nuquí (fig. 8.). At that moment, I was not there from the start. So, these stories were told by Ana, but at that time there was a need to respond from artistic practice or cultural practice to the start of construction of the mega-port that was going to be built in Nuquí.

We've collaborated a lot with El Colectivo de Comunicaciones en Puja that emerged as a communications initiative and collective working with the local community council, which is a government unit managing the collective land of Black communities after 1991 and then *Ley 70*, which is far from being fully implemented. Most of the territory of Nuquí is a collective land of Indigenous or Black people now, so this council is a very important political unit for distributing collective property. MaMa had also already gotten very close to a film collective in Buenaventura that is located among the oldest mega-ports of the Pacific region, and it has definitely neoliberalized itself due to the gentrification impacting the locals inhabiting in this territory. It is a place with a lot of social conflict, traces of violence, narco-traffic, and lack of public

policies that regulate extraction and use of this land, partly because most of these resources are administered and sent to Colombia's urban areas. For five years already, and for three years in a row, we have been conducting a film exchange between these two collectives and other collectives to reflect upon the ideas of port and future, meanwhile, the situation with it gets more threatening.

We have created an alliance between different groups or from other organizations and NGOs that work in that territory, in order to take legal actions and develop political strategies. We, being the only artistic project within that process, try to emphasize the questions that bother the communities residing in the area. They have different opinions about the port itself, but they demand clarity about the future of this place and on how it will affect them, as well as being concerned about violations of their rights. There's this idea that rights only come with "progress," and this is the national hegemonic political discourse in power and the common explanation from government agencies to the people who are disposed of in their municipality. With the project *Postales del Futuro* (fig. 9.) , we created six short films of exchange between Nuquí and Buenaventura, also learning how to do film in the process and involving filmmakers mostly from the Center to help. Nevertheless, there has been a lack of reference to Black filmmakers in this discussion, and this is why El Colectivo de Buenaventura has been quite active in speaking out and circulating Black filmmakers' work with the project *Lente Pacífico*. Additionally, El Colectivo de Comunicaciones en Puja is working on the idea of Chocó Futurism and collaborating closely with the filmmakers in Quibdó, rather than the mestizo/white people from the Center (Bogotá or Cali).

OI: Your mission of generating change through artistic practices seems to be very successful on a local, community level. Considering that, could you tell us what is your relation to the global, and how do you position yourself within the global art discourse?

JC: I would say that we've never intentionally tried to place ourselves in the global art discourse. However, we are part of Arts Collaboratory, which puts us in that frame, but in a very non-mainstream sense, because we are one of twenty-five organizations from mainly Global South countries that are focused on art that shares similar struggles. It's been a platform for coming together to exchange. So, we met once a year,

before the COVID crisis, outside of an urban context with the common purpose of communicating and getting to know each other's ecosystems, and sharing our projects, struggles, and building collaborations. That's something which started really from the very first Arts Collaboratory event or meeting that took place in Colombia in 2012 or 2011. This format prevailed after that in different countries, and it introduced us to the international arts and cultural scene. But in terms of the Western or Northern concepts, we've not been that present until documenta. When the discussion came up, Alejandra and I were both in Uganda with other Arts Collaboratory members and we were approached to just think about the idea of being part of lumbung inter-lokal.

It raised many questions, not only because we were really wanting to reconsider how we operated and functioned as an organization, but also it's just quite scary, I think, to be out there in the public eye and under scrutiny. The kind of press that is circulating around the antisemitism campaign is one of the many ways in which this kind of practice can be attacked, and especially considering the press around the Turner Prize (the UK contemporary art prize) last year also and how the discussion was escaping collective practice. I find it common to be skeptical of big scale contemporary art institutions like documenta. I think it also helped to set the tone of what we might expect here from not necessarily the arts press, but certainly from the more mainstream. We're going to see objects in a traditional exhibition sense. But anyway, that's just my perspective on the kind of international context.

RDB: Thinking about the "lumbung" concept and ruangrupa's set of values, which are local anchor, humor, independence, generosity, transparency, sufficiency, and regeneration. How do you refer to that? And where do you position yourself between this constellation of allies in the "lumbung" structure?

JC: We identify ourselves with all the values. However, the humor has been very difficult to find over the last two years since we joined this process. It's not easy to have to build empathy through the lumbung process, which had to go online due to COVID. Going back to that invitation, it all sounded quite utopian. It replicated so many things that had been happening in the Arts Collaboratory and were placed in this lumbung idea for documenta. However, we got struck with the COVID crisis. We couldn't start to build those relations in the way that we've set out. Two years ago, it was impossible to do that over Zoom. We have these *maje-*

lis where we come together as lumbung members; we have working groups where we share and discuss ideas around collective governance and so on. But actually doing it without being able to physically meet is really tough. In terms of the values, I think we can all identify as individuals and as collectives and organizations to those values in different ways.

CRP: The only thing that I want to say is how I understand MaMa practices for myself. It is important to understand that this is an ecosystem. Everything exists in unity. Something happens in one place and has an effect on the other. Colombia is a part of the world where extractivism never stops. For Indigenous people, gold had a spiritual meaning, but with the course of time it has become a little thing that can make a person rich. The capitalist mindset and spiritual cosmovision collided here, with the first one exhausting this land and forcing people to leave their lands. The art practices that we share allow us to raise the topics that nobody wants to speak about. Through this artistic collaboration, we look for a way to heal this pain. We try to switch the focus from blame to action. We emphasize the importance of taking individual and shared responsibility for the outcomes. Why is it our responsibility? I feel that this is the best word, my favorite word this year, *responsibility*. Everyone has to take their portion of responsibility. Not fault, fault is something negative. Nobody needs it. Mankind needs responsibility. Also, I think this lesson, this project, and these collaborations are a chance to take on different kinds of responsibility and set up a space to speak about the issues that nobody wants to speak about.

AR: I think what Carmenza shared crosses the two questions you posed earlier. The concept of the Global South, not as a geographical area, but as a kind of subordinate to the hegemonic one. In it, powers that are economic and political play a very important role. Our curatorial practice, together with ruangrupa, tries to reach this entanglement of organizations at a global level, operating in very different contexts, most of which are crossed by these power relations. Some of the countries where these organizations arise have been colonized in the past, or belong to the postcolonial present, that of extractive economies, neoliberalized economies or relations. So, to bring multiple different realities into that one concept of *pluriversalidad* (pluriversality), or planetarization, is like considering how many worlds, how many cosmovisions and practices live together? Usually, I have the feeling that

the hegemonic spaces in the arts do not wish for "different" realities like ours to be together, so being part of these interconnections is vital to the relevant struggles of the world and individual communities.

Art is not neutral, art can be part of oppression, but it can also be part of transformation, a tool to expand limits. One could say that in a way lumbung's practices/ideas/positions are really insisting on art being political, being on the side of the oppressed, with all the layers that the term "oppression" can carry. Some people relate to this term more than others—and this is an issue we discussed with Carmenza as well—the purpose is not to be in competition for who is more oppressed, but in the acknowledgement and construction, because our enemies are already huge. I think this whole process is a challenge due to racism or the colonized mindset in our roots. It's hard to understand that difficulty and all the layers that go through each of our bodies in different ways. Understanding and finding solidarity is the solution. Sometimes we have a lot of conflict within our respective societies, and we kind of "romanticize" the collective processes, but I think just having an invitation to take part in documenta is already an accomplishment. Most people around us don't even know what documenta is. I didn't even know what documenta was! I don't want to put documenta on a pedestal, "Oh I really want to be there!" but rather, "How can *documenta fifteen* be good for our processes and contexts?" This is where it is important for us to be. To be at documenta not as an end, but as a means.

VM: Do the city/state/your local funding bodies play a role in supporting your organization?

AR: Very little, but yes. Last year, for example, we decided to work with Carmenza and Marella on a submission for a yearly open call that the Ministry of Culture announces. But no matter how elaborate your proposal is, corruption culture and the rules for managing your project are very restricted: you have to comply and show how you spend every cent; it's very tough. The maximum we got is about €4,000-€5,000 for an annual project, which is not much, plus you are always competing with other organizations and institutions.

MaMa has been part of Arts Collaboratory and has been funded for almost ten years to pay for the basic functioning of the organization: we call it *Core Funding*. This a difficult situation that relates with another

complex issue Carmenza discusses, which is the precarity affecting the individual lives of cultural practitioners. We are constantly investing lots of energy for the collective/social process, the communitary or *barrio* process around us, which is never enough and in a way leave unattended the living conditions of cultural workers. Mainly because normally the one or two people who form the basis of an organization, and make it work, are the ones that nobody wants to pay. Normally, you can't pay rent or permanent workers who are doing administration and leadership, and our organizations are made up of that. You have to pay rent for your space where you develop the project (or where you live), and whoever is actually producing the work/administrative tasks also has to be paid. This is the basic structure of an organization, and many funds even in Europe don't allow the use of their support on living and structural expenses. Arts Collaboratory has been a unique opportunity to have a founding core free of agendas and restrictions, with the traditional conditions, to be in a position of having a basic operation system, plus having some money for an autonomous program. The question is always, how can we replicate this opportunity?

This interview was conducted on February 1, 2020, via Zoom, and has been edited for length.

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Jonathan Colin is the co-founder and core team member of Más Arte Más Acción. After studying art and cultural management, Jonathan worked as a cultural manager in the UK and Colombia and has spent much of the last twenty years in Chocó. Chocó's natural environment, and friends from the region, have shaped his interest in climate change and justice. He is currently working with the National Organization of Indigenous Peoples of Colombia's Amazon (OPIAC) and other partners on Possible Dialogues and co-producing the MaMa hub for *documenta fifteen*.

Carmenza Rojas Potes – Bambazú – is a Black feminist from the Chocó and a social worker (Univalle) with a specialization in cultural management (Urosario), currently pursuing a master's degree in management and development practice (UniAndes). Her experience has revolved around the management of cultural, environmental, educationa,l and artistic programs and projects with Black communities in the Pacific region of Chocó with Fundación Mareia. She is currently involved in Más

Arte Más Acción for management and cultural production.

Alejandra Rojas is a core-team member and legal representative of Más Arte Más Acción. Rojas is a designer and cultural manager, currently pursuing a master's degree in development, with an interest in the critical studies of development. Her experience has revolved around the management of cultural programs and projects in the public and educational sector, working for the Universidad Nacional and the Ministry of Culture. She has been part of the MaMa team for four years and is now in charge of the production for *documenta fifteen*.

Rossana Alarcón is a visual artist with an emphasis in graphic expression. Alarcón is also a specialist in pedagogy from the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional and is currently pursuing a master 's degree in cultural studies at the National University of Colombia. She has worked in design and editorial projects as an early childhood teacher and in research. She is currently part of the research project CARLA -Cultures of Antiracism in Latin America of the National University of Colombia and the University of Manchester. She is part of the Más Arte Más Acción team in knowledge management and communications.

Rosela del Bosque lives and works in Mexicali, Baja California (México), and is a curator, cultural practitioner, and researcher. Her interests focus on the local context and entwine empathy, memory, historical revisionism, and reconstructing more-than-human relations in the Colorado River Delta landscape. She studied art history and curatorial studies at the Universidad de las Américas Puebla. She has completed courses in curatorial practice and contemporary art from Central Saint Martins and the Università di Siena. She has collaborated with Museo Jumex on volunteer programs focused on art education and with MCASD (Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego) on curatorial research. She has co-curated projects at La Nana ConArte (Mexico City), with the curatorial collective base_arriba (Mexicali), Reforma 917 (Puebla), and OnCurating Project Space (Zurich). She is currently an associate curator at Planta Libre (gallery and project space) and pursuing a Master of Advanced Studies in Curating at Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK).

Veronica Mari lives in Vienna and works for TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary. She is a curator, photographer and researcher. She studied photography at Fondazione Studio Marangoni and later completed the MAS Program in Curating at Zürcher Hochschule der Künste (ZHdK). She worked at Lumen Museum of Mountain Photography and cu-rated the group exhibition *Organic Traces* in 2022 at 89cento Art Gallery, accompanied by her first editorial publication. She wrote the curatorial project for *Purificatio*, with the artist Valery Franzelli, presented to Spazio Volta.

Olena Iegorova is a Ukrainian independent curator, educator, and cultural practitioner. Olena holds her first master's degree in philology and pedagogy. After establishing her own art and education center in Odesa, Ukraine, she worked on multiple public art projects, including city-scale street art festivals, charity fairs, and exhibitions in Ukraine, and later in Qatar, since 2014. The main focus of her practice lies at the intersection of art and education, with a focus on social change. Olena is a graduate of MAS Programme in Curating at Zurich University of the Arts and is currently a research team member at Continuing Education Centre (ZHdK). She is also a curatorial member of OnCurating Project Space. Since the beginning of 2022, she has co-curated multiple big-scale art exhibitions in Switzerland, such as *Terra Omnium* and *Last Words from the Periphery II.*

fig 1. *Lumbung Nuquí*, Enganglement of cutural and artistic processes of the Colombian Pacific (and beyond), Chocó 2021. Photo by @PaulaOG courtesy of Más Arte Más Acción

fig 2. MAMA CORE TEAM WITH ANA GARZÓN, 2021. Courtesy of Más Arte Más Acción

fig. 3. *Lumbung Nuquí*, Enganglement of cutural and artistic processes of the Colombian Pacific (and beyond). Chocó, 2021. Photo by @PaulaOG courtesy of Más Arte Más Acción

fig 4. *Lumbung Nuquí*, Enganglement of cutural and artistic processes of the Colombian Pacific (and beyond), Chocó 2021. Photo by @PaulaOG courtesy of Más Arte Más Acción

fig 7. Atrato collaborations visit to Hamburg, 2021. Photo by @PaulaOG. Courtesy of Más´Arte Más Acción.

fig 5. *Lumbung Nuquí*, Enganglement of cutural and artistic processes of the Colombian Pacific (and beyond), Chocó 2021. Photo by @PaulaOG courtesy of Más Arte Más Acción

fig 8. *Sonidos enraizados.* Photo by Rafa courtesy of Más Arte Más Acción.

fig. 6. Cráter Invertido residency, Unpostponable project. Photo courtesy of Más Arte Más Acción

fig. 9. Postcards from the future project, *Buenaventura.* Photo Courtesy of Más Arte Más Acción

Defibrillator for the Independent Art Scene: OFF-Biennale Budapest
Hajnalka Somogyi, Eszter Lázár, Nikolett Eross, Katalin Székely, Bori Szalai, and Eszter Szakács
in Coversation with Anna Konstantinova and Giulia Busetti

OFF-Biennale Budapest is the largest contemporary art event in Hungary. It started in 2014 as a grassroots initiative, a "garage" biennial set up by a small group of art professionals in order to create a platform for exchange between art practitioners and other members of society. Since 2014, OFF has become an internationally acclaimed event. OFF's mission is to strengthen the local independent art scene and initiate public discourse about urgent yet neglected social, political, and environmental issues. OFF is a constant experiment that realizes the vision of a sustainable and democratic institution in the civil sphere.[1] OFF-Biennale Budapest is a lumbung member of *documenta fifteen.*

OnCurating talked to the curatorial team of the OFF-Biennale to learn more about the collective strategies of the organization, the ways the biennial sustains itself through a complex alternative funding system, the local state infrastructure adverse to alternative artistic initiatives, and how the biennial is connected to the global context, in particular to documenta and ruangrupa. The political context of Eastern Europe has always created challenges for independent cultural institutions, so in this interview the OFF-Biennale organizers share their strategies to continue being alternative.

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OnCurating: Thank you for accepting the invitation and for joining with such a great big group. I'll begin with a basic question—how did the project start and what was it motivated by?

Hajnalka Somogyi: The idea came in late 2013. It happened after a very turbulent time: in 2011 and 2012, there were a lot of civil activities in response to

the government's effort to redraw the cultural map of Hungary, and most of us were a part of it in one way or the other, as there was just not much alternative to the state infrastructure.

When the government started to centralize the art system, taking away the autonomy of the institutions, changing the leaders according to not necessarily professional criteria, the art scene felt that we were losing the ground to keep going.

It was a very frustrating time trying to make our voices heard. So, I decided it was time to think about how to work under these conditions and keep up certain discourses.

This is why I came up with the initial idea of organizing a grassroots biennial on a communal basis—basically just inviting a lot of people to contribute with projects that they found relevant and creating a single festival-like event.

Among the original premises was the condition that we don't apply for state money and we don't collaborate with the system, which was the craziest part because of what I said earlier—there was no real alternative. I think in that psychological moment, people fell for it exactly because it sounded crazy!

Early on, I invited two of my colleagues, Nicolette and Katalin, to join. We discussed the idea, invited more people to give their opinions, and since the feedback was overwhelmingly positive, the next step was—"OK, let's do it." Eszter Lázár, Bori Szalai, and Eszter Szakács joined us quite a long time ago, too, so we've been together for a while now.

It started not necessarily as a biennial. It was still a little bit in the spirit of protesting, instead of reacting. I wanted to create something like a cultural defibrillator in the sense of restarting energies. One of the goals

was to prove to ourselves that it was possible to pull off a large-scale project.

It had to be big so that people feel that it's possible, and the biennial means so much, right? It marks an *ambition*! It marks a certain scale of internationality, and it produces hype.

OC: So, how important to you was to actually position yourself as a biennial? Especially as opposed to the usual understanding of the biennial with national pavilions, the scale, and the regular structures. How much of the protest was already included in the format for you?

HS: There was an official biennial in the making. A couple of months before we started, it was officially announced that one of the institutions of the new system was appointed to organize the Budapest Biennial. That seemed really ungrounded, superficial, and meaningless and given to people who do not have enough expertise in the art scene. So, we wanted to steal the show as well.

That biennial actually never happened, but for a long time we were working under the understanding that we would function in parallel.

Nikolett Eross: After a while, seeing the art scene's responsiveness and openness, understanding how we all came together and seeing what a massive quantity of artists and simply engaged people joined, the biennial somehow became a form. So, it became a promise to the art scene that we will make it again, it was a statement. Now, after the third edition, we can really feel that people take us as a serious player in this field, yeah? Aren't we?

HS: We are on the top of the power list, the super schizophrenic power list!

Katalin Székely: It was also conceived as an "*off*" biennial, so it was intended to be outside of the system, as something that comes from a totally different direction with a totally different playing field and rules. That's why this "off" element, originally from Svetlana Boym's "Off-Modern" theory,[2] was also very important from the beginning. So, at first, everyone thought that it would be a one-time thing.

HS: Especially after we realized the first edition!

KS: Yes, it was so exhausting, but also euphoric in many ways, so that's why we continued.

Eszter Szakács: In retrospect, it is now clearer that the biennial is a sustainable format for us. We all have full-time jobs, and basically we do the biennial in our free time. This is our extracurricular activity.

HS: A hobby!

OC: So, if it's a deliberate point that you do not apply for state money, how is the project supported and sustained on a regular basis?

HS: First of all, we have international funding. That's at least two-thirds or sometimes three-quarters of the budget.

It's been always different for each edition, and it also says a lot about how the Hungarian system works right now. For the first edition, we received the EEA grant (also known as a Norway grant[3]). Norway, Liechtenstein, and Iceland are not part of the EU, but they benefit from the economic connections, and therefore they created a fund with which they supported the less developed half of the Union, which involves around fifteen countries, Hungary included.

At that time, the EU system was built in such a way that 90% was given to the respective states to distribute it the way they wanted. But 10% of it—so-called civil grants—is given to a consortium of local civil organizations in charge of evaluating applications to independently distribute the 10% in the given country. So, when the second round was already signed by all other countries, Hungary just decided they would rather reject the 90%, not to have 10% coming into the country that they don't have control over.

The EEA were our main supporters for the first biennial, and we really became a flagship project for them. But then the collaboration could not continue. Something similar happened to the Open Society Foundations[4]—after supporting the first edition, they revised their funding strategy to focus on more political issues and left art out of the picture.

The first biennial was sponsored as well by the ERSTE Foundation,[5] some private companies, and the Goethe-Institut. We usually have good connections to cultural institutions that operate in Budapest, but there have been changes to that, too; for example, the Polish Institute was initially very supportive, but by the second edition in 2017 they moved away.

Each time we would establish a connection with a foreign partner that we could not maintain because of the political situation, we had to start from scratch, which made the situation increasingly difficult.

The second biennial was mostly funded through a collaboration with GfZK[6] in Leipzig. We became friends with the director Franciska Zólyom—she's from Hungary, too—who decided to join forces with us. Since our curatorial concept for that edition actually had another iteration at the GfZK a half a year later, the Kulturstiftung des Bundes stepped in as a major supporter to Franciska and to the GfZK.
And for the third edition, Nicolette made a connection with the FFAI,[7] the Foundation for Arts Initiatives, a New York-based foundation that supported not only that edition, but also the operations, which is very rare. This is another thing that makes our sustainability almost impossible—there are no available sources in Europe for operations because the EU thinks that it's a national competence. The whole funding structure is very project-based.
But the FFAI understood this need, and when COVID came, they also gave us a little grant to cover our bases and to regroup and postpone the event, which is where we are standing right now.

KS: We really want to diversify our kinds of support. We do have these major funding bodies, but we also try to connect to private collectors and individuals. We are also working increasingly on getting sponsorship from companies whom we are comfortable working with, which is also always a compromise, because we need to find companies that are comfortable giving us money.

HS: Unfortunately, in Hungary there is no culture for corporate support to begin with. New money doesn't necessarily go to culture. At the same time, we also have to be cautious not to use money that is gathered according to principles that are diametrically opposed to ours.
What makes it really difficult here is that for most of the companies a good relationship with the government is key, and the government has been proactive in telling these companies where to put their support. On the other hand, there is a lack of culture on our behalf as well. Communicating with these companies, finding out what they need, how partnerships could be developed—this is a totally new territory for us as well. For now, it's anyway quite insignificant compared to the international funding. We have a little more luck with collectors of contemporary art who are also politically sympathetic to our cause. But what you should imagine is €1,000-€2,000 each, even if it's a big supporter. So, it's almost like crowdfunding.

Bori Szalai: We also collaborate with a lot of people. There is a huge group of volunteers coming from the local art scene who always help us during OFF-Biennale, for whom the biennial becomes a common cause, so they really put their free time and energy in it. Though we cannot really translate it to direct numbers, this is a very important part of how OFF-Biennale can actually maintain itself.

HS: Organizationally, we have partners in our support network, too. Lately, we've collaborated with educational and other civil organizations that work with youth around the question of democracy. We have partnerships with the remaining free media.

OC: I guess it is also a separate full-time job to find these new opportunities and maintain them?

HS: Yes, and no one has the time to do it. This is why it's so difficult to maintain.
We also always have to build and rebuild the team. This group here is the curatorial team, and when we started, everyone was doing everything. Then obviously we realized that there are certain skills that are needed, and we don't have them. We started to involve specialists to work on specific areas.
We are still a little bit in the phase of doing whatever is not done by others while trying to build a team that can still function professionally. We are a think tank, but also we take on quite a number of management roles. Either officially through contracts or sort of unofficially because no one else is doing it.
The team changes throughout the process: before an opening, there is a communication team, an education team, and a fundraising person. The full administration team gets up to twenty people. After the biennial ends, we prepare the reports and put the finances in order, and then we either no longer need or cannot afford a team. It would be ideal if all these people could work continuously, so that our communication isn't so periodic, but we cannot afford it.

OC: How does the curatorial team function process-wise? Do you have weekly meetings where you discuss ideas, or do you have a shared document where you throw in various touchpoints?

KS: Both ways, I guess. We do have weekly meetings, and everyone's family members are really acquainted with our schedules: Tuesday nights are reserved for curatorial meetings. But in between we often share documents and develop ideas. If needed, we meet

more often. So yes, it's always a continuous discourse between the six of us.

Eszter Lázár: Sometimes we meet in smaller groups the same day or same week, and we continue the discussion. The other will then get the memo.

HS: It is important to mention here that we are not masterminds who curate the biennial; we only come up with the general framework for the edition. For example, the first biennial had to be very inclusive and address a lot of people. Everyone had to come up with something that he or she felt was urgent. We were not financially supporting the participating projects; everyone came and realized their thing. These kinds of structural ideas come from the curatorial team.
PICTURE - FIRST BIENNIAL
For the second and third edition, we did have a concept, which was quite loose yet a very intriguing frame. But still through an open call, people would come with their curatorial positions and project proposals. In the third biennial, there were also jury members invited to our group to select the proposals.
In the third edition, we only had twelve projects to begin with, so we not only offered our curatorial guidance, but also took up management support, organizing, fundraising, communicating, coordinating the educational programs, etc.
So, the *documenta fifteen* invitation is really interesting for us because this is the first time we really are working as a curatorial team.
We've always curated some parts of the biennial; our exhibition was one of many projects, not necessarily larger or louder than the others. *documenta fifteen* is the first time that there is a management team and we are invited as curators to work together, which is both super exciting and very challenging.

ES: But the invitation was rather open, and we decided to do this with the invitation.

HS: Yeah, we could have invited a curator and made ourselves managers again, but that was not very likely.

OC: Is there any distribution of tasks or topics within the curatorial team? Do you each have a direction that you want to go or do you rather all decide spontaneously?

KS: In the previous editions, it became clear that it's much easier to continue conversation within a more limited number of people. So, we have now two groups

that are working on two projects for *documenta fifteen*. But, of course, we know of each other's work, and we discuss it in the larger group, too.

NE: And some of us just couldn't decide between the two projects and are taking part in both of them.

KS: Yeah, that's me!

BS: Each of us is also in contact with one artist whom we invited, so we are constantly in active collaboration on a one-to-one basis. From time to time, we have group meetings with those artists, and we try to get them not only to concentrate on their artwork, but to be an active participant of the project as a whole.

NE: We also keep managerial responsibilities as well. *documenta fifteen* does cover the majority of production, but some parts happen here in Hungary, so we still keep at least a part of the organizational tasks.
HS: But at least we are invited by an existing institution to work with them. That's a big difference!

OC: What about the collaboration with documenta fifteen in general? How do you relate to the concept, and what is your position with regard to the ruangrupa values?

ES: In my opinion, we had to face two challenges. The first was our initial reaction: "Oh my god, it's documenta, what do we do?" The second was to decide how to negotiate this huge responsibility on top of the biennale when we are already doing it as an extracurricular activity. So, how do we do OFF-biennale and documenta together?
I think what we came up with went hand in hand with the lumbung process—we envisioned our participation in documenta basically as a satellite of the biennale. We're not doing something completely different and new specifically for *documenta fifteen*, but we are treating this project as something that the biennale would do anyway.
We are working on two projects that we have been involved in already before, and we plan to bring them back to Budapest for the next edition in 2023. It's a full circle.

BS: It's definitely a super exciting invitation full of new challenges for us. For me, it was very exciting that we were asked as a lumbung member to present our ecosystem. It was very interesting for us to think about this question and to understand what it meant. What

do we want to present? Who are those artists we want to work with and what are those projects which really represent what we are? It gave us a certain change in the perception of how we look at ourselves.

HS: Even though it's super frustrating that the whole idea that this documenta initially had—creating friendships and trust, meeting and visiting each other and hosting each other—has been made impossible with COVID, because everything was shifted to Zoom. But we still learned a lot in the process, so this idea of working on something we can later bring back to the biennale was also inspired by the conversations or by whatever we learned from other lumbung members while discussing these values. This exchange has been useful, and this is something that we would like to practice in the long run as well.

We are moving further and further away from this usual biennial model, when we do something for some months, put all the money in it and then boom—we forget it, everyone goes home, and two years later there's a new concept and new people and new stars and new stories. We now would rather like to keep on working on certain issues continuously, with certain groups, certain collaborations and make something out of it throughout the years.

We can still do it in a biennial format—there will always be new chapters, and we are invited more and more to collaborate with others. For example, we now have a little small-scale European project in collaboration with the Baltic countries and Poland. These collaborations are great for us to continue developing our ideas, and to bring our conversations into new constellations. In a way, this is also related or at least inspired by our connection to the lumbung members. We were strengthened by it, and it definitely gave us good examples of how to operate in the long run.

NE: Yes, exactly! We all have a background in institutional practices, we all work in museums, research centers, universities, galleries—we know those routines. But the lumbung experience helped us see those ways of operation that we would like to unlearn. Of course, it is easy to say that if you are a part of an institutional system, then after a while you feel the need to unlearn, but it's hard to put it into practice, as you don't get too many examples. So, the lumbung context gave us this revelation. It seemed rather utopian and revolutionary in the beginning, and, of course, there are still practices that we would not follow, but it is really important for us to try.

This meeting point of this high institutional actor, documenta, with this super collaborative and almost anti-institutional body of ruangrupa and the lumbung members—that is a real revelation—even though sometimes it's a very stormy experience and a conflictual situation, but this kind of conflict can bring up something we can learn and digest for a long time.

HS: The point about unlearning is certainly true, but the other point is how you learn to operate outside the system, right? This is what we didn't really have any models for, because, as I said, Hungary didn't have an alternative scene. Everyone was happy working within the system, even though it was never really perfect. But suddenly, there are these professionals for whom the status quo is just unacceptable, and they try to create something outside of it.

This is something that colleagues in Western Europe still don't get. What is super interesting, at least for me personally—having been to many professional symposiums and programs with various constellations of international people—is that it's actually getting increasingly difficult to explain to Western Europeans our project and its motivations, while I'm experiencing interesting and fruitful conversations with people who live outside of Europe.

This is why the lumbung has been really interesting for us—suddenly we learned about this whole new approach. Of course, I'm not comparing our situation to the art scene in Cuba or Palestine or Colombia. But still, these experiences at this very moment of our professional operations are just more relevant than talking to someone working for a Western European institution and hearing them say: "Oh yeah, we had budget cuts as well." Maybe it's also pessimism, seeing where our country is going.

When I started working in 2001, for Eastern Europe it was so clear that everything you wanted to learn was the Western way of doing things. This is how we were socialized professionally: we have to learn that language, we have to learn those practices, we have to mimic those institutional structures. We just never realized that the political and the social construction was so different that to consider the possibility of having a similar process was an illusion. So, currently for me it's astounding how irrelevant I sometimes find Western European discourses.

KS: Putting a more positive spin on that, it was also very eye-opening. Even though we were coming from this huge schism of what we think is professional, and what the state says—we really thought that it was a

rather tragic situation. And then we meet these people from all around the world who are really in deep ****, and we understand that we're still good. It sometimes makes one really optimistic and reassured that everyone can find strength. Even though we only met most of them through Zoom, all the collectives are very cool and nice and sympathetic people, and I'm looking forward to meeting them in person.

ES: It's amazing to find all these kindred spirits and find allies in the lumbung and to know that we are actually sharing common experiences, but there is a certain difference of contexts. For instance, in Hungary, the state infrastructure is still very strong, we're just not participating in it. But in many of the places where other lumbung members are from—there is no art infrastructure at all. So, although we are all outsiders, it's a little bit different. Not to mention that we are EU members, and our passport is really really good compared to some other lumbung members.
So, being the only Eastern European lumbung member is a huge thing for us. It puts us into this great context and makes us learn about ourselves.

OC: A beautiful answer! Perhaps as one closing question—what's the future for the curatorial collective then?

KS: We also have other collaborations, one of which is the East Europe Biennial Alliance[8]—it's also a way of looking into the future and seeing how we can help each other on many levels, and how we can find new approaches to doing things outside of the official way in this region.

ES: It is like **mini-*majelis***,[9] if we continue talking in lumbung terms—it's a collaboration that we started a few years ago with the Biennale in Prague, the Kyiv Biennial, the Warsaw Biennale, and then finally Riga Survival Kit Festival Riga. It's a great combination, everybody has a different background, forms, and opportunities, but this is exactly why it works. Someone has cotton candy, someone has pretzels, and we can join forces, because we have different things to offer. Someone can push more on the money side, someone can work more on the actual alliance; it's a powerful ecosystem, and we also involve them within our documenta project.

KS: The future is in these collaborations.

HS: Besides this regional collaboration, which is super important, we would like to do that locally as well, making our practice less project-based and more strategic as a network-based operation.
The other thing that we've been contemplating for quite a while—and perhaps the lumbung can provide us with good examples as well—is to step away from this model of grant-based and sponsorship-based existence and try to develop activities that actually provide income that we can freely use. In a way—to combine artistic curatorial activity with more entrepreneurial endeavors, so that the profits can be used for our goals.

EL: On the topic of the sustainability of the biennale, we're also thinking about how we can change the format of the biennale—meaning that we don't want to focus on these three or four weeks per year, but we would rather focus on the continuous presence with different projects and programs. We don't know yet how we can do that, but maybe that's one of the key questions for the future—to see how we can maintain the practice besides the biennale format.

The interview took place on February 14, 2022, via Zoom, and has been edited for length.

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Notes
1 "About OFF-Biennale," https://offbiennale.hu/en/about/budapest, accessed March 13, 2022.
2 Svetlana Boym was a Russian-American cultural theorist, visual and media artist, playwright, and novelist. "The word 'off-modern' was coined by Boym in The Future of Nostalgia, finished in 2000 and published in 2001. […] 'Off-modern' is defined as a detour into the unexplored potentials of the modern project. It recovers unforeseen pasts and ventures into the side-alleys of modern history at the margins of error of major philosophical, economic, and technological narratives of modernization and progress." From Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Off-modern, accessed on April 10, 2022.
3 "The EEA and Norway Grants are funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway. The Grants have two goals – to contribute to a more equal Europe, both socially and economically, – and to strengthen the relations between Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, and the 15 Beneficiary States in Europe." From https://eeagrants.org/about-us, accessed on April 10, 2022.
4 "The Open Society Foundations, founded by George Soros, are the world's largest private funders of inde-

pendent groups working for justice, democratic governance, and human rights." Taken from https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/who-we-are, accessed on April 11, 2022.

5 The ERSTE Foundation empowers initiatives for change and contribute to civil society development and regional progression. Taken from https://www.erstestiftung.org/en/inside-the-foundation/, accessed on April 11, 2022.

6 "The Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, a foundation based in Leipzig, is an exhibition space for contemporary art and a museum for art post 1945. GfZK promotes and imparts international artistic positions on its own premises and in public spaces, it initiates cooperations and carries out research-based artistic projects." Taken from https://gfzk.de/en/institution/position/, accessed on April 11, 2022.

7 "The Foundation for Arts Initiatives makes grants to institutions in the visual arts whose programs and activities are critical and whose practices they consider vital. Grants are also made to artists, activists, researchers, writers, and others in the visual arts to pursue their research without institutional, governmental, or philanthropic preconditions." Taken from https://ffaiarts.net/, accessed on April 11, 2022.

8 "The newly established East Europe Biennial Alliance (EEBA) is comprised of Biennale Matter of Art Prague, Biennale Warszawa, Kyiv Biennial, OFF-Biennale Budapest, and Survival Kit Festival Riga. As contemporary biennials have become an important vehicle placing art in new contexts and reaching new audiences, the Alliance is designed to enhance the role of biennials in shaping new forms of international solidarity, expanding socio-political imagination, and developing alternative cultural solutions. […] Through a number of artistic events, exhibitions, public programs, and the creation of a long-term collaboration mechanism, the Alliance attempts to discover the potential of cities in creating non-authoritarian cultural policies and finding ways to oppose the visions of culture based on a narrowly understood national identity." Taken from https://eeba.art/en, accessed on April 11, 2022.

9 "majelis is a term for a gathering or meeting. In person or digitally, regular majelis are an important tool of the lumbung network to exchange ideas and projects. mini-majelis are smaller gatherings, while majelis akbar (mega majelis) is a larger gathering between lumbung members, lumbung artists and other participants of documenta fifteen." Taken from https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/glossary/, accessed on April 11, 2022.

Anna Konstantinova is a curator and a cultural manager based in Zurich. Her professional interests include post-photography, process-based and participatory art, and digital curating. She is a part of the Swiss photographic collective *pool*, the curatorial team of the contemporary photography collection of the bank Vontobel and the contemporary art gallery Lullin + Ferrari, alongside contributing to the program "Screen Walks." She holds an MA in Media Studies from the Russian State University of the Humanities and is currently part of the MAS Curating in Zurich.

Giulia Busetti is an exhibitions producer and independent curator based between London and Zurich. After several work experiences in European art organizations, she is now focusing her collaborative research-based projects on the concept of cultural identity and its conflictual aesthetics, the role of the outsider and the necessity of dis-order, but also on all those practices that activate the political potential of artistic practice. She is a contributor to Ephemeral Care, a platform focusing on ethics, practice, and structures in the field of artist-led and self-organized (AL&SO) artistic activity. She holds a MA in Kunstwissenschaften at Kunsthochschule Kassel and Arts & Cultural Management at King's College London and is currently part of the MAS Curating in Zurich.

Project Art Works: Kate Adams and Patricia Finnegan
in Conversation with Smadar Samson and Giulia Busetti

Project Art Works is a collective at the intersection of art and care to create the conditions where people with complex support needs can work independently and collaboratively to produce paintings, drawings, sculptural objects, and film.
Together in their Hastings studio, the collective is made up of forty neurodivergent[1] artists, as well as artists, activists, families, and carers, who develop long-term supportive and creative relationships.

Project Art Works was nominated for the Turner Prize 2021 for their practice which celebrates and raises awareness of the dynamic and extraordinary contribution neurodiverse communities make to art and culture. Project Art Works is a lumbung member of *documenta fifteen*.

Smadar Samson: Could you introduce yourselves and your roles at Project Art Works?

Patricia Finnegan: I am an artist development lead, and I work across the organization on our impact program, as well as with children and families on outreach projects. We also work with other cultural organizations to involve people in our community and experience our culture.

Kate Adams: I'm an artist and co-founder of Project Art Works and a director currently. I come from a position of being also a mother of a man who is now 39 and has very complex support needs. When I started Project Artworks as an artist, I needed to bring art and life together, and in many ways what I learned about the whole network of social care and systems around the impact of the lives of people with disabilities has informed an approach to artistic practice. The first projects that we did were in special schools, because my son attended a special school, and it was quite small-scale then.
I just worked with an artist, a friend, the painter John Cole, and we did some big experiential workshops

then to discover how to enable mark-making that is absolutely personalized to an individual's way of being, that embraced who they were, their particular traits and characteristics, nature, and spirit, as well as accepting fully the disability and their ability. And that mark-making's presence has remained with the organization and our practice. The approach to all our projects is about making something that is often invisible, because of preconceptions around disability in all societies, visible. The practice has evolved and grown according to the context, both of art and social care. That's one of the very interesting things about documenta that would be extraordinary to explore because increasingly as a collective of artists, we are examining the systems that impact people's lives, and we also believe, as Joseph Beuys said many years ago, that everyone is an artist, but our take on that is that everyone has a creative potential to shape the forces, the impact on their lives. And that this content is the sense of much of what we do.

IGNITION at Hastings Contemporary, 2021. Courtesy of Project Art Works.

SmSa: Along with the attentive response to the different needs of your artists, Project Art Works has made the artists' creations highly visible in their own community and far beyond. The exhibition in Hastings Contemporary displayed large, bold, and striking canvases that have finally caught the pub-

lic's eye. How do you convey to the viewers the complex layers of support and interaction that have been invested in the process leading to the production of these canvases? How important is it for Project Artworks to convey the context of the artwork?

PF: Well, it's done in multiple ways. We do use a lot of films when we work with people. So, alongside some of those images that you would have seen, there may be films playing about process and how people are interacting with the work, because for some people we work with, it actually isn't about the end product. It's about the process and experience and valuing that. But the piece of work at the end also speaks for itself. It can create a conversation with an audience. Where the work is displayed, we tend to almost always have a studio space so the people that we support can work in front of an audience, which also bridges that gap and understanding around the support that someone needs, but also seeds the agency they have to make work and how they lead in making work on their own terms. Some people are non-verbal, and that's the way that they communicate to a wide audience. We also collaborate with institutions to connect with people to understand the work so that the institutions can share it with a wider audience. There are many different strands that we work in communicating the complicated needs of our artists.

EXPLORERS at Tate Liverpool, 2019. Courtesy of Project Art Works.

KA: We've always considered that the best way to communicate is both through presence and direct encounters—both between neurodivergent groups and institutional staff where an exhibition is being held and we are going to do some of that with documenta. It's the timing that's going to be quite hard. So, we call that "awareness-raising" and this particular methodol-

ogy, which involves mapping the social care sector for the organization or the institution where they're showing work or having an exhibition. We map around them; we literally create new Google maps that have connections to the care agencies around an institution so that they can see who lives in their locality. And then we build relationships between the institution, their staff, and the social care settings, because people are so invisible in communities around the world. We've always wanted to create a bridge between social care and culture and do it in different contexts, so part of our work with *documenta* is to create a bridge, certainly locally in Kassel, and then to do drawings that we call cosmologies of care.

We often create drawings that visualize where a person is in the center of a whole network of systems that they are dependent on to show how to navigate through those systems in order to reach life on the outside. Those drawings have started to become quite a major component of exhibitions. The first point of seduction for an audience is the image. And we do think about that as a seduction, and then there are gradual layers within any exhibition space that we curate, layers of insight that our film and these drawings of social care systems create. So, someone coming from a position of never having encountered someone with complex support needs or any of the learnt modes of communication and social engagements will see their ability, skill, and humanity first, and then the implications of disability within a society, and how a society and the systems both enabled and disabled that person to be involved.

Kate Adams, *Cosmologies of Care*, 2021. Courtesy of Project Art Works.

SmSa: It's a brilliant way of engaging viewers because when people are looking at these dia-

grams, they may place themselves within these social networks and connect to become part of it.

KA: Completely! We try not to be too politically confrontational because actually it's about our humanity and our shared humanity. It's also about acknowledging the one-to-one. The connection is often there along with the empathy and the tolerance, but often societies, politics, and preconceptions about disability are what's getting in the way of that human connection. So, we always aim for that intimacy of understanding and commonality of experience.

Giulia Busetti: I find your commitment towards a dialogue with institutions extremely needed, although it must be challenging to write new narratives for neurodivergent artists and to leave associations with art therapy or Outsider Art behind. How do you communicate with the contemporary art world?

KA: The main driver is not to be in the education department, but to be in the exhibition department. It is hugely difficult. We've been lucky in the last year. We've been working on trying to get this understanding that this is of importance and relevance to contemporary art practice. It's so many things, like different ways of making work, what art is even, and what audiences want. Trying to communicate that to curators and directors and exhibition people has been really hard. But we could do it last year because we were nominated for the Turner Prize. We leapfrogged over a lot of barriers, and so now people are going, "Who are these Project Art Works people? What do they do?" The whole idea about using the language of neurodiversity, for example, starts to be a word that you can see and hear in the discourse.

SmSa: Is using the term "neurodiversity" another way for bringing more people into the conversation?

KA: Yeah, language is very complex and it's also like race. It changes and it's part of the evolution of identity, inclusion, understanding tolerance; it is part of that evolutionary process. So, at the moment, we are using the term neurominorities and neurodivergent to describe artists who are autistic or have other ways of engaging. But it may come to a time when we change that because it is just for the moment. It also varies in different contexts, and for this reason it has been a real challenge for us in working with documenta since we

don't have an understanding of the structure of the social care system in Germany yet, except for the fact that it's predicated on productivity and that there is a sort of undercurrent of activism.

SmSa: The recent exposure to documenta seems to have opened a unique opportunity for Project Art Works to share your expertise in caring with an art world that is not often associated with care. How would you position yourself within the global contemporary art discourse?

KA: We don't necessarily engage with contemporary art discourse globally. We haven't yet, but we're very open to a conversation and to be interrogated actually, because it's incredibly useful to have these conversations, like with this interview. It's just been so exciting to work with documenta and the lumbung over the past year. I think that what connects us is an interrogation and a willingness to change and to challenge the convention of contemporary arts in our own localities as well as globally, because there is a big difference between the commercial operations of the contemporary art world and the practice of artists who are working in many different kinds of ways that don't have necessarily the artifacts of commerce as a result of the work.
It's been really extraordinary. What will be great for us as an organization and group of artists is to be able to work within the lumbung with audiences from all over the world and also artists to draw these cosmologies of care that we talked about, to interrogate systems, and to see how artists are positioned and how people with disabilities are positioned in different parts of the world. But within this very open and discursive context of *documenta fifteen* because it's so conversational and empirical, I suppose.

PF: Also, during the global pandemic, we and other collectives continued to work with people because it was important whilst larger institutions closed down. That's why there's a question around care and what that means to culture that overlaps with how we make these spaces relevant for everybody.

GB: Do you have the feeling that though the experience of the pandemic, people are becoming somehow more sensitive towards certain topics?

KA: I think a lot of people that we work with live in the pandemic all their lives in terms of being able to do so. It was quite interesting that we worked with fami-

lies that are used to having to change their plans, not being able to go places, or places being shut off to them. People that don't have those experiences suddenly had that kind of thrust upon them.

I also think that the pandemic has revealed social care. In the UK at least, people were trapped: care homes became prisons, and they were also trapped in contagion. Two thirds of the deaths through the pandemic in the UK were disabled people because of the system that holds them all together.

I set up a company for my son and signed a contract with a government agent to look after him ourselves. So, we employ care staff, and we have a budget ourselves. So during the pandemic, he wasn't in a care home, and I would have kidnapped him if he had been, because, for families whose adult children were stuck in care homes where they couldn't see or visit them, it was traumatic. It was completely traumatic. What's happened for societies is that there has been an understanding that there is this thing, this social care thing, and people need care and that there were these care homes where they were really cut off. Then, with the great swell of support for people who work in health and care, it was obvious to communities and societies that they are THE valuable people to us all in these moments.

SmSa: How do you then reconcile the conflicts of interests or ethical considerations between the contemporary art world and your artists who may not be aware of or consent to having their contribution be part of this global art scene?

KA: Absolutely, it's the ethical tightrope, because we often show work in exhibitions, by artists and makers who can't knowingly consent to their involvement in this big exposure. For this reason, we have a process of collaborative working that monitors assent and dissent in order to achieve consent, both with the individual and with the significant others in their lives. Because if someone lacks the mental capacity to understand the context, there is a whole ethical dimension that we address all the time, but it's one of the ways in which people are excluded because people say: "That's just too complicated. And it's also too difficult to manage the ethical framework." But the ethical framework can work, although it has to be different to how everybody else functions.

SmSa: Could you give us an example? How do you make it work?

PF: We worked with people for a long period of time. We've known them for years. As Kate mentioned, there is assent and dissent that happens within the studio when someone is helped to make a mark and interacts with the work. Then we continually have conversations with the families and support teams on how we represent that person with the artwork when they're not present in exhibitions. So, there are continual conversations and looking at different ways to gain consent that's not verbal. It could be bringing someone to say how comfortable they'd feel to be in the space or working with people around them. It is a lot of work. I think that's why people shy away from it because it can become quite confusing. There is an assumption that someone can't agree to something if they can't verbalize it, but there are lots of people with whom we have a connection, people we can understand. It just takes time.

Courtesy of Project Art Works

KA: I think it has to do with relationships and monitoring those inconspicuous signifiers—the things that people are communicating very subtly. We take responsibility for the consent. We have accessible consent forms for all people who we work with, and either we support them to understand and fill it out, or we share those with families and key workers. We have people in the space so that they can represent themselves and understand experientially the concept of exhibition. But there isn't a huge international pool of neurodivergent artists because there are no art schools that do this work.

At the moment, we've identified three venues: the top floor of the Stadtmuseum, an exhibition space on the second floor of Fridericianum, and we're talking to the Kunsthochschule to do some work with them. And before the exhibition, we were planning to do two weeks of very intensive collaborative encounters between people from social care settings, and also art students and the lumbung artists. We will take that

collaborative and encounter work into those two exhibition spaces with the Fridericianum and the Stadtmuseum, and there'll be installation of sound and stories.

PF: When we work with people from institutions at these encounter workshops, they actually become the more vulnerable persons than the persons with complex needs, because it's such a new experience and they're not used to working or having connections with someone who communicates in a different way. So, by having those encounter workshops before documenta opens, we're allowing that space to people to come, but to become vulnerable and to understand that within themselves as well.

SS: Would these workshops potentially embrace the values that drive documenta's ruangrupa? Values such as Local Anchor, Humor, Independence, Generosity, Transparency, Sufficiency, Regeneration? How do you relate to these concepts and where do you position yourself within the lumbung environment?

KA: I think that this is very nurturing. It feels very welcoming. I also think that ruangrupa are very open to discovery. Within the lumbung, though, disability isn't really present, and we still don't really understand where it is in different communities of the artists' collectives. And also whether some of the practice, and openness, whether that exists at all the lumbung or whether there are other artists who wouldn't want to have any contact with disabled people. So, unless we bring the practice to the Fridericianum and to the Staatmuseum and actually have a presence with the lumbung and within the lumbung, that's also a process of discovery.
We are working with a lot of risks when working with people with profound disabilities. And this I don't think is yet fully understood. We were talking the other day about accommodation in a big meeting, but when we have meetings, they're often having a sort of party as well. So, when we were talking about accommodation, I found that really hard because we won't take neurodivergent artists from our studio to Kassel. The complexity of doing that is huge, it's really huge. I don't think that that's been taken on at all, but it's okay.

SmSa: Well, you're already bringing such rich and compelling connections to the lumbung. Can you also tell us about your strategy for sustaining your work beyond those hundred days?

KA: At the moment, we're working with a collection of organizations in Hastings, and we're going to open the gallery within a building that is a community asset transfer from our local authority. We are going to be the first inhabitants of this building that is within a collection of buildings on a site in Hastings that is being developed by the community rather than it being a top-down development.
That's a very interesting and complex project because we also want to develop supported housing for some of our artists. We're running a housing summit later this spring, so we're going slightly deeper into some of the systemic barriers to inclusion. We are working on a big project called *the explorers*, with setting up a national, possibly international network of neurodivergent artists, makers, and supported studios, like Project Art Works.
We have exhibition plans and publishing patterns as part of that project, because one of the things that's missing is the narrative of neurodiversity and arts. There are no texts. There are outsider art texts. The history of that from the Prinzhorn Collection on, it has a rich history of outsider art, but it's still a separate articulation academically. And beyond that, we will try to establish a consortium within the UK cultural institutions that want to promote and develop and nurture neurodivergent artists and makers and share this learning and understanding.

PF: We're getting quite a lot of requests from galleries and institutions to learn from us. And it's just how we share that without having to necessarily lead on it or do it. But I think it's really interesting that there's an openness to that. That's big, and it hasn't been there before. We've always been knocking on doors before.

SS: But throughout this journey of knocking on doors, Project Art Works seemed to have always been focusing on what's happening inside the studio space. How would you describe a good day at the studio?

PF: Oh, every day.

I suddenly feel very warm when you ask that question because although we're talking about quite big things that are happening, at the heart of what we do is the studio and working with people to make art on their terms. It feels like a fairly simple thing to do, but it's quite overwhelming what that means to individuals and families who see the environment changed. And that is just what's at the heart of it. It's life-changing.

KA: it's magic. So, a good day at the studio could be anything from one of our artists who has had a long period of distress and not being able to come to the studio at all with complexities around his care and the impact of the pandemic, coming in on working with someone on a painting for 45 minutes before running out of the building. That is amazing, it's an amazing moment. It's just so wonderful. And last week, one of our artists (with all of the publicity we had last year) was interviewed as part of a radio program on two occasions and on both cases, she said she wanted a solo exhibition at the local museum. She'd never told us this. She just said it on national radio. So, we took her to a local museum and she is now curating her own show that will happen next year.

The interview took place on February 14, 2022, via Zoom, and has been edited for length.

Courtesy of Project Art Works

Notes

1 Neurodiverse is a term used to acknowledge different states of understanding and living in the world. Neuro-divergence and neuro-minorities are terms that embrace autistic people and/or those who have learning or intellectual disabilities.

Kate Adams MBE is an artist, advocate, and activist. She is Artistic Director & CEO of Project Art Works. She has initiated and curated many responsive, collaborative projects with people who have complex support needs, families, caregivers, artists, and galleries. Kate co-founded Project Art Works in 1997 to explore an expanded concept of art that was and continues to be influenced by Paul Colley, her son, who has profound and complex support needs. Project Art Works collaborates with many individuals and their circles of support.

The work embraces personalized studio practice, peer support, award-winning films, art actions, installations, and exhibitions. Kate's practice disrupts preconceptions about what people can and can't do, who they are, and how they live. It reveals other ways of being in the world whilst subtly the exposing the constraints of neurotypical constructs and environments.

Patricia Finnegan has been working as a freelance artist and educator for over ten years. Her practice focuses on elements of painting and printmaking, and she works from drawings and photographs to create layered images on wood, paper, and canvas. There is a focus in her work based around nature and the human form. In 2010, Patricia completed an MA in Art and Design in Education. Through this, she was able to combine research with her work as an artist facilitator. This process has strengthened her evaluation and research skills in all the types of projects that she works on. Patricia continues to explore this field as she feels that the arts can be essential to mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing.

Smadar Samson is a curator and designer who works at the intersection of socially engaged art and design. Having graduated in Industrial Design, Education and Psychology, Smadar founded a multidisciplinary design consultancy integrating Inclusive Design in museums, hospitals and cultural institutions throughout England and Wales for over fifteen years. Smadar was appointed senior lecturer in Design at Sir John Cass Department of Art, Architecture and Design, and a postgraduate course leader of the Design Research for Disability master's pro-gram at London Metropolitan University. In California, Smadar earned a Therapeutic Uses of Art certificate at UCSD and applied her artwork to therapeutic settings, public art, and social design. Before completing the MAS in contemporary curating at ZHdK, Smadar curated several exhibitions including *Israel – 70 years of Craft and Design* at the Mingei International museum. Her current curatorial and design research focuses on social injustice.

Giulia Busetti is an independent curator based between London and Zurich. After several experiences in European art organizations, she is now focusing her collaborative research-based projects on the concept of cultural identity and its conflict-

ual aesthetics, the role of the outsider and the necessity of dis-order, and on all those practices that activate the political potential of artistic practice. She was part of *Pneuma* (2019 Italian Council Grant) by artist Christian Fogarolli, a trans-European project questioning the concept of mental health in contemporary society aiming to de-construct the binary categorization that distinguishes "deviance" from "normality." She holds a MA in Art Sciences at KHS Kassel, Arts & Cultural Management at King's College London, and is currently part of the MAS Curating program at ZHdK.

Thinking Beyond the Donor Economy: Collectivity as the Answer to the Question of Funding
Interview by Anastasia Baka and Giulia Busetti

The Question of Funding attempts to redefine the terms and processes of funding by establishing a network of discourse. Emerging from cultural practitioners, members of different institutions that came together to question the infrastructure within which they were operating, the collective reflects on cultural and social conventions as a result of their practices, expertise, and experience of refusing that funding system.

In the following interview Yazan Khalili, Amany Khalifa, and Rayya Badran reflect with us on the importance of affirmative critique to create a different structure through which the delicate balances within communities can be safeguarded without being dependent on a donor economy. The underlying premise is that in order to avoid the crisis within these small economies, the communities need to be involved in finding a way to support each other.

Yazan Khalili, Amany Khalifa, and Rayya Badran tell us about the development of what started as a public program at a leading Palestinian arts organization and turned into a complementary economy raising questions of responsibility and sustainability to the wider ecosystem (also) though a children's book.

The Question of Funding is a lumbung member of *documenta fifteen*.

Giulia Busetti: It's great to have the chance to talk to you today. It was not easy to find information about your activity; actually, it wasn't easy to find any information about you at all. The name you've chosen is extremely catchy though, we can all relate. Could you tell us what motivated you to start the project?

Yazan Khalili: Well, The Question of Funding is kind of an accumulation, bringing together different cul-

tural and community workers, artists, and activists that have been engaged within the cultural and social field in Palestine, mainly in institutions. All of us met when we were still part of cultural institutions: I was part of Sakakini[1]; Amany was part of Grassroots Al-Quds.[2]

We were sporadically meeting to talk about the problems that our institutions were facing, mainly regarding the economic and financial crisis, something always looming and erupting every now and then.

We were reflecting on how to come together as individuals, as members of different institutions and as a potential collective to rethink the structures through which cultural and social practices take place within Palestine, but also in the rest of the world.

So, we did these meetings, which we called The Question of Funding. Our main drive was how to move from the public program—which is what the project initially was—into a kind of affirmative critique of the economic structures with which we're working. We had a couple of public meetings with different cultural and economic groups from what I would call cultural farmers: farmers who work in the field, but who also have a kind of cultural concern about what kind of food we are eating.

This happened nearly at the end of 2019, and then at the beginning of 2020, the big surprise: Corona came in a time where we were really pushing forward with these meetings, but suddenly anything that was happening on a public level had to stop. So, we formed a smaller group to continue working, but still inviting others to join by looking at the lists of people who had joined the previous sessions. Since it was the beginning of the pandemic, we were also trying to understand what Zoom was, what's this new space through which collectivity has to thrive and be formed as well.

When I left Sakakini to come to the Netherlands for my PhD, the new director was hesitant about continuing the project. We were all part of the institutions as employees, but we decided our participation in the collective to not be related to our institutions, so we became independent as The Question of Funding.

Amany Khalifa: It was a political decision to be in the collective and not bring our identities and the hats that we were wearing in the different institutions. When we initiated these public meetings, where Sakakini invited cultural practitioners to speak about the funding context in Palestine, we found ourselves in the position of needing to repeat all the time that ours was not a funded project, but an initiative that we as individuals came up with. We still had to convince the audience that we were not using them for the sake of a proposal that had been given to us. That was an essential moment to gain their trust as well.

YK: This is crucial because it tells you how much cultural practice in Palestine is embedded within the donor economy. Even the critique of the donor economy is funded by the donor economy itself! To try to speak about it outside of that economy and to initiate something that doesn't begin with a proposal and then gets funded but comes out from the guts was kind of a challenge.

It was also a challenge when we got the invitation from documenta. We have to be careful about how we frame it. How do we work with it? How does the money flow within the collective? Does it flow? There have been many discussions to try to understand how the economy of documenta would interfere on something like The Question of Funding.

Because The Question of Funding is a kind of a dilemma or paradox, I guess; it's a contradiction: are we refusing funding as a structure or are we refusing funding per se? What about the global structure that interferes with economic structures in the community? Our suggestion is to actually engage with funding instead of working against it and rethink how the community can be involved.

GB: That is definitely an issue that in collectives always comes up, even if not on this scale. Assuming the fact that the reason for refusing funding is to be as independent as possible, how were you

sustaining yourselves in order to have that privilege?

AK: It's a privilege to even have the chance to think about creating an alternative to the hegemonic system in Palestine. In the beginning, we all had jobs in institutions, therefore we could engage voluntarily in time and space outside of our working hours.

And this actually brings up the issue of the relation between the organization and yourself, because although some bring their expertise and their history to the collective, they refuse to represent themselves within a certain structure, institution, or organization. In that sense, we are privileged by the fact that we could afford to invest in this project.

Anastasia Baka: Was it challenging to stay active and create this collective outside of the institutions you worked for? How did you manage to separate yourself in a way from the agenda of the institution?

AK: I remember an interview Yazan gave when still in Sakakini,[3] in which he explained that this was an issue that accompanied the restructuring of the organization, how this could be sustainable, and how much it should rely on the individuals. Coming from Grassroots Al-Quds to the collective The Question of Funding, I can't say; I'm an Amany who's separate from the Amany who has been an active part of Grassroots Al-Quds.

We shouldn't forget then that this match between Grassroots Al-Quds and Sakakini wasn't a coincidence, since in their practices as institutions they both rejected the traditional system of funding. At Grassroots Jerusalem, we have renounced EU funding as of 2015, because we didn't want to be following their agendas, resorting to different smaller projects for self-generating income. Even us coming together and asking these questions came as a result of our practices, expertise, and experience of refusing that funding system.

GB: So how come you left it to join The Question of Funding?

AK: I found The Question of Funding was a different space compared to Grassroots, which still had a certain freedom. I was looking for a space to move, think,

and be even more free, without deadlines or reports to submit.

Rayya Badran: Talking about my personal experience in having to negotiate my individual membership as a new member of this collective, I should preface that I'm not Palestinian and I'm also based in Beirut. But from the point of view of someone who joined very recently, I must say that there are many similarities between funding models in cultural institutions in Palestine and in Lebanon. In particular, the question of economic sustainability has always loomed over all the cultural institutions in the region because most of them rely on foreign funding. That is the case because the public infrastructure is almost non-existent, and so we do not benefit from government support. For this reason, not only is it important for us how to survive, but also how to find alternative ways of operating in the fields of arts and culture.

It's not just about continuing to have the same conversations that we've had over the past fifteen years in a number of forums, symposia, and different kinds of cross-cultural and transnational conversations as a result of which no other solutions were being put on the table. It's utterly urgent to start sort of devising strategies rather than continuing to say that this isn't working.

What draws me to The Question of Funding is that it doesn't focus only on cultural or artistic practices, but it extends to other types of disciplines and sectors. These institutions, these infrastructures, and their legal models, what kind of freedoms do they allow? And what about the people working within these institutions? What are the different hierarchies that exist within it? How are the funds distributed among the members, etc. Questions of responsibility, as well of sustainability, not just towards the members of the institution itself, but obviously towards the wider ecosystem. Therefore, you're also talking about the audience, how to reach out to them, etc.

I used to work at the Arab Image Foundation,[4] which is an organization very much like KSCC and Grassroots. Although I haven't been part of an institution for a very long time, I'm still always engaging with these institutions. It's impossible to do any kind of cultural or artistic work outside of these paradigms.

YK: In the end, what The Question of Funding tries to argue is that funding here is not an issue of finance, as much as it's an issue of economy and culture, meaning that that type of economic structure of funding created certain cultural practices that, for instance, use the institution as medium and infrastructure to function and evolve. We are trying to work outside of institutions, because we see them as part of the whole economic structure of the donor economy, which is different from what funding is. We always say that bringing gifts to weddings and giving money to the newlyweds is a kind of funding, and that's how the community supports itself.

AB: How does documenta enter the path of The Question of Funding?

YK: Well, first of all, it is important to mention that the group has very few artists. At the beginning, we had to do informative sessions on what is documenta, although that is the biggest dream to be included in if you are an art practitioner. I, myself, I'm an artist, so the core member of The Question of Funding is an artist. But still, it's a very promising opportunity to be able to participate even if coming from outside the art context. We perceive it as a chance to invite and host, like we are hosted both by documenta and other groups living in Kassel. This kind of playing with the format of what an exhibition can be, what an art practice can be, is very alive within our working ethos. And this is about being in lumbung. Lumbung as a concept and as a practice allowed, facilitated, and actually encouraged such an approach.

AK: It was fundamental for ruangrupa that we were not practicing art and culture within the mainstream framework, but being invited to be part of and to take part in this lumbung structure made it much easier for us to decide to join.

Everyone was shocked to learn that we were going to get funding and to take part in documenta, which contradicts everything for how this collective came to live. When money and funding is involved, the dynamics within the group change somehow. Abstract discussions left the place for concrete conversations.

AB: So, the way you position yourself in this context is not as an artist, but to mainly act as a forum for other artists while being a host in this exchange.

RB: Yes, but I wouldn't say artists as individuals, but rather as entities working collectively. We call them

circles, and the whole project is built out of different groups. I mean, our structure is a collective, and thus in every aspect of the project you have people who are involved collegially in the decision-making, even to decide how to use the budget in a particular part of the project.

YK: And, of course, we also don't want to become an institution. Two factors should be borne in mind here. Firstly, we don't want to sit and keep criticizing power. The question is "how do you practice power once you have it?" Meaning that we wanted to create models, namely a certain experience of critique, like lumbung as a concept, but as a practice.

GB: So how do you practice your question about funding?

YK: We depend a lot on our bigger ecosystems that we connect to as individuals and as collectives, and bring them together, all of them. In this way, we're bringing not only our contemporary history of working together, but also our bigger history of collectivity that we belong to, within the group. We had to work with and within many circles and eventually challenge them to see what works and what doesn't. There is no fear of the future in the sense that we are not an institution worried about dying as a structure.

And this brings me to the second important factor to consider, which is how to work with a budget. In the specific case of documenta, it's around €180,000 for production (a huge budget for a collective). So, for instance, what we decided is that we, as a collective, don't get it. And this goes back to your first question of how we sustain ourselves. It's a challenge. It's a challenge to have to do this while doing other things at the same time and also working, applying to do a PhD like Amany has been doing for the last three months, me doing my PhD. But you know, what we all see here is an opportunity to put on the table a manual that is not based on an administrative sponge that at the end absorbs all the finances of a project.

That meant that we had €180,000 to be shared within the community, rather than being a channel for paying salaries, administration, etc. What we are trying to do is to push through these kinds of economic questions towards a model that answers it for the few. And I would say, if you allow me, it's not out of privilege, but out of necessity, and as Rayya said, this is our personal cause, right?

I mean, being a Palestinian within the current political context, you have no privilege, you live in this context, and you have to create this for your own dignity, life, liberation, whatever. So, it's a practice that is necessary for us to try because we want to free ourselves from this hegemonic system.

The trust amongst ourselves is the guiding value that ties us all together. We didn't know each other, but since the first meeting and hearing that we share the same experiences, it felt like that our trust would sustain us. And this is different from any mainstream institutions, where the salary will keep you running. Here, our desire is to create something different, to practice that alternative and not only talk about it. It doesn't matter if it's 1:00 am in the morning, we will come together, and we will do it.

GB: Since you mentioned trust, which embodies the ultimate clash between institutions and collectives, in which you can choose who you want to work with, I was wondering how the local community responds to your project. Are you already working with communities in Kassel and still doing what you were doing in Palestine?

RB: You could also view it as working with another institution. This is something that is actually quite different from the models from which The Question of Funding is trying to circumvent or bypass. These large funds are not going to be a sort of foundation on which we'll then start to work. It is merely an activation of what these encounters produced as ideas as working mechanisms, as systems, as circles.

YK: I don't want to take the trust here as a totally utopian metaphor. We've had problems and we keep on having them. Here, trust is something that extends beyond this and towards, I would say, a system of care. It's kind of scalable in between trust within a bigger community and trust between individuals, knowing that there is no fixed decision of how we are going to move forward afterwards.

And when things fall, they fall because they have to fall. It's simply that the plan wasn't well-made enough for it to continue. We have to stop and divert.

Every experience can be only compared to the previous one. For example, when I was the director of Sakakini and we had a big fund for which we had to write a proposal, we had to finish the project in a year and a

half, and if something had to change, we had to go through a huge administrative process to explain the reasons in detail.

These structures of funding don't allow you to even be part of your context and belong to your moment. For us, it is different, we don't need to report to anyone, we do it among ourselves and we are the decision-makers. We spend on the project as much as we need; the project is not the size of the budget. So, if at documenta we only need to spend €100,000, we'll tell the lumbung collectives we have €80,000 extra to use somewhere else. If we need more money, we have to really speak to the community about it. We can be transparent in the way it's working. We can say "look, we need to take another 10% here," or "we have this extra that we put in this pot." So, in a way, this kind of movement in the group, in the economy of the collective, allows it to be spontaneous and responsive to changes that happen along the way.

It's not the outcome that is leading the process, although some sort of external pressure is definitely helping us to, otherwise, you know, we would sit talking for years.

AB: And talking about framework, do you think that in the context of documenta you're going to face any other restrictions in your practice?

AK: To answer this, I want to go back to your question on the local community and how we are communicating with them. For us, there is no such a thing as the local community. At least not in the common understanding that there are beneficiaries which are the local communities. Nor are we speaking on behalf of a community leading the project at documenta or in Palestine. We are the local community. There is no external entity that is called the local community, and we are not part of it. The local community is embedded in the project with all its different circles at documenta as well as in Palestine, as well as in Beirut.

All of the different pieces are like a puzzle, and the community is there. Every piece of this puzzle is taking an active decision, and we are together with them. So, I don't know about restrictions, nor do I think about the funding as a restriction.

The moment of the decision to accept the invitation from documenta was a political moment. It wasn't restrictive to us. It was a moment to think politi-

cal-economically, whether we wanted to accept the funding in order to help us, the practices and ideas that we were discussing for a year and a half before documenta came into the process. We look at it as one phase of the project in which we create the infrastructure to sustain ourselves post-documenta.

GB: Do you feel like sharing something you are working on for the project?

YK: I would love to show you something. Look at my chart with illustrations and drawings.
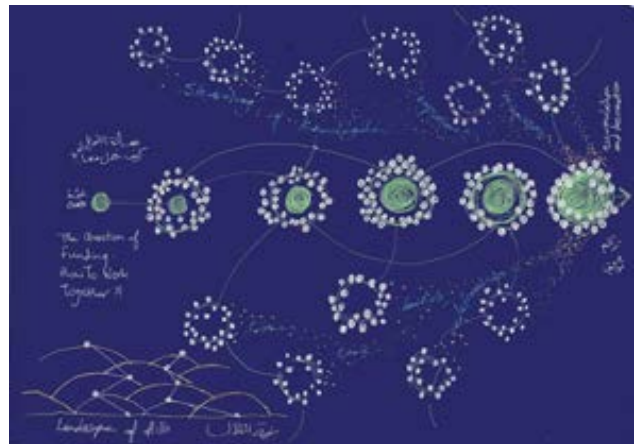

fig. 1: the economic cycles

AK: I mean, the difference between our collective and most of the organizations in lumbung is that they are institutions, and we are a structure developing, I would say, another structure.

GB: But it's also what makes it extremely interesting, because you could be the structure of those. At the same time, it doesn't make it easier of course, on the contrary. Especially since it's so difficult to even recognize a certain structure, let alone suggest an alternative one, which is something that you cannot aim for since it doesn't exist yet. It may make it harder to visualize, but I guess there is no other way, right? It has to begin with a sketch!

AK: Yazan has the beginning of that sketch! (*laughter*)

YK: Yeah, it's a bit of a mess, but I have to explain. So, this is *The Question of Funding*. It's composed of all these different collectives that we are working with. Each one of these circles is kind of feeding *The Question of Funding* as a structure, and people move in and out between it. What we are doing is splitting between

what is being produced in Palestine and what will be shown, exhibited, and practiced in Kassel during the hundred days, and what's between them. So, there's a process in between: how do you take this knowledge that has been produced here and bring it to Kassel? What we call "the harvesting" is the process in which experienced knowledge can be understood and presented or represented in another context. What we are doing in Palestine is what we call "an economic cycle." The main part of it is that we are proposing to create a local token, both currency and crypto coin. We're producing a token that can be only used within four kinds of economies. One is the small cultural institution economy; the second is the small businesses economy; the third is the household economy; and the fourth is the freelance economy. This is not a cross-economic-layer token, but one that works within one layer of the economy that's the most vulnerable, the most subjected to fall apart when the crisis occurs. It's an economy that usually connects through other layers. For example, if I am a freelancer and want to do something at a cultural institution, the relation to the economy normally occurs through the funding (donor) economy, which is a higher level of economy. We want to create one layer with different hills, but still kind of horizontal. A sort of B2B economy, still an exchange, not in the sense of "I have tomatoes, you have fish, and we exchange," though, but through the medium of a token able to store value across time and place. So, you can exchange your tomatoes with these tokens, and then I can exchange my tokens with fish later on. The underlying idea is that in order to avoid the crisis within these small economies, they need to find a way to support each other, because these economies are not dependent on long supply chains. Here, I'm talking about cultural institutions that are socially engaged, the small ones, whose budget doesn't exceed $100,000 a year (not like the big cultural institutions which require much funding and depend on philanthropy).

Then we have a small economy of people who run their businesses. Imagine a shop in the hood or a creative industry, like a small designing workshop or a small carpentry shop.
With the household economy, I'm talking about people who produce things at home or people who use the house waste to create value. Plus the gig economy, or freelance economy, the freelancers who depend a lot on being hired for gigs and small jobs, and so on.

The reason why we are connecting them within the cultural economy is that they have so many resources

that they can share when needed and sustain themselves. So, the idea is not to become an alternative economy, it's not even to become a mainstream economy, but it's a complementary economy. Let's say it's an economy that scales up and down, depending on the needs of the community. The goal is not to keep growing to the level that you can speculate on it, but to instead maintain a kind of a shrinking trend: it gets smaller when it's not used.

In order to do it, there are governance systems of validations that take place in between the digital and the real. So, people actually use it in a digital (crypto) sense, but there's also a governance that checks things are happening on the ground in reality.

fig. 2: sketch of The Question of Funding

The idea of it is not circular in the sense that everything ends up rounding, but that things could make different cycles. Economic cycles begin to connect together. Let's imagine I'm an individual and say "I'm doing a project. I need a space, but I don't have a budget." In that case the cultural institution could mine a certain number of tokens. This mining happens on the basis that they give their space to the community, and the people who use this space in turn have to enter the system and validate the fact that this kind of social interaction took place. Finally, the governance of the token can visit the space and validate that this happened.

Suddenly, out of the resources within the community, you have an amount of tokens of value being produced out of nothing. You had no money because you gave it to the community. The community approves the fact that you are community-based, and therefore you can create changeable value out of this action.

You are indebted to the community all the time and you cannot spend this money to buy a TV, because you are crossing here another layer of economy. You can only spend this debt, or you can only pay this debt to other members in the same layer of the economy.

GB: Is that what were you referring to when mentioning the "affirmative critique"?

YK: Yes, exactly. Affirmative critique is not about saying that our economy is shit. What is it that we can do to gain a different structure through which the economy can continue without being dependent on a donor economy?
If we have money, what do we do with it? That's the central question, which is of course also the framework of documenta. For this reason, we are trying to find the essence of this structure and how we take it to documenta so that it is not an issue of representation. But then how can this be practiced within the context of an art exhibition in Kassel, as a place that we don't exactly belong to?

AK: And how do we, after all of this, maintain a certain knowledge through the structures of The Question of Funding? Now, I can finally answer your question, Giulia! We work through three elements. One is a website, the second is harvesting through children's books, and the third is inviting a collective from Gaza and other political collectives from Kassel that don't have a space to campaign to have a space after documenta.

The children's books started from all those economic questions that brought us together, and we thought we don't want to answer only by boring reports. So, we reached out to artists, writers, and people who work with children. Economics is a subject mostly seen as threatening, since you need to be an expert to engage with those issues. So, we thought, why not children's books as an accessible way to share this knowledge? The book will be produced in Arabic and translated into German and English and will be sold during *documenta fifteen*.

RB: The website that we're conceiving should be up by the time *documenta fifteen* opens. Rather than a sort of repository of documentation, we want the website to be as interactive as possible. We would like internet users to be able to engage with the material, to ask questions, and to perhaps also get involved in the future. It's going to reflect the sort of growing nature of the collective itself, but also the questions that were sort of crucial to the conversation that The Question of Funding is attempting to sort out on issues related to institutions.

YK: Economy here is not only a way of representation, but also a way of practicing. Yeah, it's definitely a practice of economy.

This interview was conducted on February 3, 2022, via Zoom, and has been edited for length.

Notes

1 Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center (KSCC) is a leading Palestinian arts and culture organization located in Ramallah. Accessed April 17, 2022, https://sakakini. org/?lang=en.
2 Grassroots Al-Quds is a non-profit organization that supports community mobilization by building networks between the different Palestinian communities in Jerusalem. Accessed April 17, 2022, https://www. grassrootsalquds.net.
3 Amany Khalifa is referring to the interview about Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center published in Field: "Cultivating Creative Spaces in Palestine: An Interview with Yazan Khalili", accessed April 14, 2022 https:// field-journal.com/issue-9/an-interview-with-yazan-khalili.
4 The Arab Image Foundation is a non-profit organization in Beirut that aims to track down, collect, preserve, and study photographs from the Middle East, North Africa, and the Arab diaspora. Accessed April 14, 2022, http://arabimagefoundation.com.

Yazan Khalili lives and works in and out of Palestine. He is an architect, visual artist, and cultural producer. Currently he is a PhD candidate at Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis, University of Amsterdam, and a guest artist resident at Rijksakademie. His works have been exhibited in several major solo and collective exhibitions, including at KW, Berlin (2020); MoCA-Toronto (2020); New Photography, MoMA (2018). He is the co-chair of photography at the MFA program at Bard, NY, and co-founder of Radio Alhara.

Amany Khalifa is a researcher, community organizer, and former local mobilization director at Grassroots Al-Quds, a platform for Palestinian community-based mobilization and long-term

strategizing in Occupied Jerusalem. Within this capacity, she has led local campaigns and supported local communities and partners. She provides political analysis and has a broad and experienced understanding of development and resistance to oppressive policies under the Israeli occupation. She has a BA in Social Work, a Master in NGOs Management, and a Master in Cultural Studies. amany@grassrootsalquds.org

Rayya Badran is an art writer, translator, and editor based in Beirut. Her writing has been featured in various publications such as *ARTnews, Bidoun, Ibraaz, Art Papers, Norient, The Wire*, and more. She has taught courses on contemporary art and sound studies at the American University of Beirut since 2014 and has a bi-monthly show on Radio al Hara. rayya.badran@gmail.com

Giulia Busetti is an independent curator based between London and Zurich. After several experiences in art organizations, she is now focusing her collaborative research-based projects on the concept of cultural identity and its conflictual aesthetics, the role of the outsider and the necessity of dis-order, and on all those practices that activate the political potential of artistic practice. She holds a MA in Art in Science Kassel and Arts & Cultural Management at King's College London.

A New Home for Trampoline House: Morten Goll
in Conversation with Nadine Bajek, Thamy Matarozzi, Alejandra Monteverde, and Anna Wälli

Trampoline House is an arts and community project located in Copenhagen, Denmark. The project gives asylum seekers, rejected asylum seekers, and refugees the possibility to receive counseling, develop capacities, find community, and bear testimony to the shadow sides of Danish refugee policy.

The house is a gathering place for displaced people as well as Danish citizens and international residents who think that the Danish asylum and refugee policy has become too tight, and who work for a more humane and inclusive refugee policy in Denmark *together*. Trampoline House is a lumbung member for *documenta fifteen*.

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Thamy Matarozzi: The first piece of information we read about the Trampoline House was that it had closed quite recently. What led to this and what will happen with Trampoline House now? Are you still structuring the project, but without a base?

Morten Goll: The problem of living in an asylum center is that you don't feel at home. You don't feel that you have the right to be in society, because you've actually been excluded, physically. In asylum centers, even with doors open, one cannot feel like a citizen. One of the most important aspects of *Trampoline House* was that we had a physical place. If you have a territory, you can change the rules. So, I don't think that the *Trampoline House* is possible without a physical space or territory.

When the house went bankrupt, it was a complete loss of all the opportunities that we had, and I think we're still traumatized by it. People are lamenting the loss of the house on social media and continuously asking for its reopening. Fortunately, today the first informational meeting for volunteers for a new house took place, which we are opening next week [01/22/2022].

It is going to be a smaller venue in the congregation halls of a migrant church. The priest's idea of how to work with people and what culture is, is very similar to the way *Trampoline House* operates.

Nadine Bajek: How was Trampoline House funded? What was the reason the funding ceased in 2020?

MG: We have ten years of fundraising experience and have tried different organizational schemes. In the beginning of a project like that, you will easily find philanthropic foundations to support the development phases. As soon as a project becomes operational, they lose interest.[1] Many projects only work for the first three years because they have not found a way to create their own revenue and reach sustainability.

Since we were aware of the abovementioned dynamic, we worked for several years to gain governmental support. After all, *Trampoline House* was doing integration work by offering people networks, language classes, and a lot of activities that are related to integration. This should match the interests of the Danish state. We managed to receive partial funding from the state for two years[2], until the government went through substantial changes under immigration minister Inger Støjberg[3] in 2015.

After the cancellation of governmental support, we tried to find private donors that could help us survive—we managed to raise one million Danish krone (c. €135,000) almost every year from 2016-2019. But it wasn´t enough. In 2017, we received funding from two major Danish foundations,[4] to develop *Trampoline House* as a service provider to the municipal job centers, which are in charge of the integration process. But collaboration with an overpowering institution comes at a price. We were trying to walk the line between being able to work with the public administration and still maintain our identity as *Trampoline House*. And

eventually you could say that we did not manage to convince the Danish welfare state that we were worthy of their collaboration, since we insisted on giving voice and opportunity to the rejected asylum seeker.

We wanted to keep the house as a place of radical democracy, one that allows people to develop in their own direction. In that sense, it is very important to understand the difference between institutional democracy, which allows the encampment of refugees, and the culture of democracy that we promote. *Trampoline House* democracy is a culture of critique, providing tools of how to improve society.

NB: How does funding under the new organization, the Weekend Trampoline House, work?

Now, we want to navigate *Weekend Trampoline House* in a different direction and develop it as a much smaller operation. To run it, we need approximately 750,000 DKK for one year, which can be collected from smaller foundations who believe in the original idea of *Trampoline House.* There will be no conflict in including rejected asylum seekers, because we don´t need to please the government or any municipality.

NB: How do you see your relationship to the global art discourse, and what role should collectives have in it?

MG: *Trampoline House* is an artwork with multiple authors. The global art scene is embedded in the patriarchal structure, which demands a hierarchy of single authorship versus multiple audiences. What if the artwork is made by the audience? What if *Trampoline House* was created and is recreated every day by all the people who have ever worked and work in *Trampoline House.* When we were invited to *documenta fifteen*, it was the community of *Trampoline House* that was invited. So, how do we define the artistic identity here? We need to start thinking of a feminist notion of collective authorship that is challenging the patriarchal order of the neoliberal capitalist society. I clearly see some potential here.

Anna Wälli: How is Trampoline House organized, and how have you tackled cultural differences?

MG: One important instrument is the weekly house meetings, a social gathering, where everybody is seen and acknowledged. The house meeting allows direct deliberative democratic discussions. Unlike represen-

tative democracy, it's the democracy of those who are present. We always used this talking stick I brought home from a trip to Utah. *(MG shows object with feathers).* Talking sticks have been used for thousands of years in Native American communities to organize democratic discussions, where everybody is equally heard. We want to show our community that democracy can exist in many different ways. Of course, we also use… say Danish or Congolese democratic traditions. What is important is that people in the room understand that their diverse cultural backgrounds are welcome and heard, and that we will build our improved democracy from these common sources.

AW: Which structure did you use to organize the people working at Trampoline House, and how is the new project governed?

MG: In the new organization, the board is no longer self-supplying, as it was for the independent institution of the first *Trampoline House.* Now, we have created a temporary association with the purpose of launching a Weekend Trampoline House and the presentation for documenta. The ideal solution should be an association where the members (volunteers and supporters) elect the board amongst themselves. We tried this structure in the first *Trampoline House,* but it disintegrated within three months, because the people who came from the camps did not prioritize showing up at the meetings, were deported to faraway camps, or were even sent back to their countries of origin. With a community this volatile, the more stable Danish participants gained too much power in the decision process. That's why we developed the "house meeting" as the immediate democratic fora of those who are present today. Due to this nature, the house meeting actually often ends up like a collective therapeutic process, re-establishing identities through establishing community. The house meeting is also the backbone of Weekend Trampoline House.

AW: How will you take part in documenta fifteen, in the whole process as well?

MG: At first, we thought we couldn't participate since *Trampoline House* was gone. By losing the house during the corona lockdown, we partly lost touch with our community for over a year. But the artistic team of *documenta fifteen*, ruangrupa, suggested relaunching it in a sustainable way. We agreed and began working on Weekend Trampoline House. But the next problem was representation at documenta. People who live in

Danish camps are not allowed to go to Germany. So, the very invitation by documenta reveals a latent conflict, and its base of unequal privileges.

We have to find ways to represent this conflict and *Trampoline House*'s response at *documenta fifteen*. As a collective, we are planning a series of workshops and events, like a fashion show titled *In a closed world – visible and invisible walls*, or a theater workshop giving voice to the people of the camps, titled *The Chain*, or building life-sized self-portrait dolls of the people who can't travel to Kassel, titled *The Puppet Workshop*. It's an exciting process, and I have to say we are grateful for the invitation to documenta. Given our collective authorship, I´m not sure we would have received recognition from the Danish art scene without it. We are at a cross section. We are in between, but it's a super creative place to be.

This interview was conducted on January 21, 2022, via Zoom, and has been edited for length.

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Notes

1 Trampoline House´s main sponsor from 2010-15 was was Oak Foundation

2 Trampoline House´s main sponsor from 2014-15 was the national fiscal budget.

3 Inger Støjberg was the integration minister of Danemark from 2015-2019. In 2020 she was impeached for lying to the parliament as a minister of integration, in one particular controversial case from 2016, where she enforced an illegal practice, allowing to indiscriminately separate married couples in the camps, if one of them were under 18 years old. For this offense she was sentenced to 4 month of unconditional imprisonment, which she is presently serving.

4 Trampoline House´s main sponsors from 2017-20 were Trygfonden and Tuborg Fondet

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Morten Goll is a socio-politically inspired artist working with social platforms for political change. He is presently the general manager of *Weekend Trampoline House*, and co-founder of Asylum Dialog Tank (2009), where asylum seekers and Danish artists, art students and others conceptualized *Trampoline House*. Established in Copenhagen in October 2010 by more than 100 volunteering asylum seekers and Danish asylum activists, *Trampoline House* was in operation until December 2020 as an independent institution. *Weekend Trampoline House* is a reconstruction, continua-

tion, and development of this non-profit, self-organized, user-driven community center, where asylum seekers, Danish citizens, and anybody else can meet, share experiences, and learn from one another on equal terms.
https://www.trampolinehouse.dk/

Thamy Matarozzi is a creative producer with background in art, cinema, and cultural studies.

Nadine Bajek is a curator and exhibition manager with a background in event production and cultural studies.

Anna Wälli is a curator and project manager with a background in art, history, and literature.
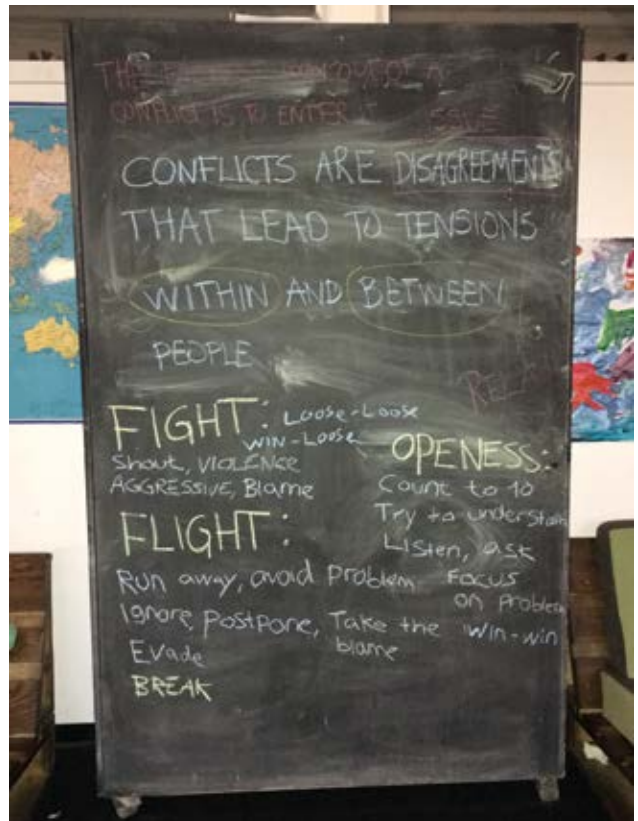
House meeting in Weekend Trampoline House Aprill 2022.
Photo by Morten Goll

Trampoline House at People's meeting 2018. Photo by Morten Goll

Trampoline House event 2018. Photo by Morten Goll

January 2018, Conflict resolution workshop Trampoline House.
Photo by Morten Goll

Wajukuu Art Project:
Shabu Mwangi and Ngugi Waweru
in Conversation with Chiara Borgonovo, Rosela del Bosque, Marina Donina, and Lotte Van Ermengem

Wajukuu Art Project is a community-based organization situated in the Lunga-Lunga neighborhood of the Mukuru slum, near Nairobi, Kenya. Founded in 2004 by a group of young artists, the initiative was born with the aim of providing the new generations with a space for self-expression and emancipation from a condition of grave environmental degradation and social violence.

The Mukuru slum sits on a hillside below the factories that make up the industrial area of Nairobi. A nearby dumpsite draws youth from the slum, who are largely shut out of employment in the factories that pollute their community. Scavenging for items to sell is one of the few economic opportunities available to them. Many eventually turn to crime and selling drugs. Violence and sexual assault are all too common, jeopardizing their well-being and claiming the lives of many young victims.

Through joyful resistance, Wajukuu Art Project found a way to emerge from this dire situation and provide a better future for their community, particularly for younger generations. The aim of their project is to create governance through art practices and cultural activities, to provide a space for critical reflection and to revalue traditional forms of knowledge, without necessarily complying with Western cultural values.

The very name "Wajukuu" (literally "grandchildren") originates from the Swahili proverb "Majuto ni mjukuu huja baadae," which translates into English as "The actions of our parents and grandparents are felt by the next generation." For however severely the choices our predecessors may have impacted on local communities—and the world at large—Wajukuu is committed to opening up new, virtuous paths for the generations to come, promoting the sustainable development of Mukuru (figs. 1-2).

We had a very interesting and warmhearted conversation with Shabu Mwangi and Ngugi Waweru, founders of the project, who shared some insights into their work as artists and many different initiatives that Wajukuu has been promoting. Among them are the Kids Club, the Slum Art Festival, and Documentary Nights.

Wajukuu Art Project is a lumbung member for *documenta fifteen*.

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Chiara Borgonovo: We read a little bit about the history of Wajukuu Art Project and how the initiative was born. We know that you started as a collective of artists and then became a registered community-based organization, which works a lot with your local community in the Lunga-Lunga slum. We wanted to ask you about the other members of your group—who are they, and what was your first project?

Shabu Mwangi: My name is Shabu Mwangi, I'm a visual artist based in Nairobi and at the moment I am the director of Wajukuu Art Project. I'd like to start with the genesis of the project and how we came together. It began in 2003, but we officially registered the group in 2007; at the time, I was the oldest, being seventeen years old. The initiative came out of a need to survive: working individually as artists was difficult at that moment. So, since we lived in the same neighborhood with other members, we saw the opportunity of coming together and forming a collective. The first project we developed was the Kids Club (figs. 3-4). The idea for this initiative came to us when we were given a small space in our neighborhood to practice our art; however, kids were always coming out of curiosity to see what was happening in this space. In most cases, we found ourselves having a lot of kids crowding at the door, but since that was the only source of light we

could use in the space, we were chasing them away. But in the end, we sat down as a collective and we decided to start the Kids Club. Only a few of us were willing to facilitate, because we didn't have experience working with kids. What could we do with kids? This project was about providing them with a space where they could reflect, express, and where they could be themselves. That was the first activity we did together as a collective. The other activity we were always engaged in was individual painting. Everyone would do their job, not concerned about our community or its future, or about giving back. But after starting the Kids Club, we became really concerned about our community and realized that there was another way, that there had to be a shift from being individual artists to agents of social change (fig. 5).

CB: We know that Kids Club is still very active and that you promote a lot of activities for children, which usually focus on the enhancement of your cultural heritage. For instance, you have oral storytelling, mask-making laboratories, and you also play local instruments (fig. 6). Is this also a way of educating and caring for your community?

SM: Yes, when we began, kids were like the bridge for their community: they're the ones who brought to us the concept of community and understanding different perspectives. You know, art is something which, if you are not an art lover, or if you don't know anything about that, sometimes you will never understand it. The majority of the people living in the community did not or had never encountered art. So, what happened is that we really had a backlash when we started the collective, and thanks to our kids the attitude towards art changed with time. Parents started accepting that their kids were participating in our projects and coming into our space. We try to incorporate multidisciplinary activities in our program, so that we can be more effective in the community. For instance, we now incorporate dance, and music performances (fig. 7). Also, as a way of involving parents and teenagers, we organize Documentary Nights, where we screen different movies and then discuss them with the community reflecting on the subject that we have screened, which usually affects our context. Afterwards, we try to adapt what we have learned from a certain documentary and moderate a discussion, which ultimately is really enriching for every participant. Now I will introduce my colleague: his name is Ngugi Waweru.

CB: Thank you for joining us. We were discussing the genesis of your group and the work that you're currently doing in your community. We just talked about the Documentary Nights. It's inspiring to see how your projects have expanded from the kids to their parents, as a way of involving the whole community.

Marina Donina: Was this one of the tactics you employed to get new members, specifically adult members, who could help you develop more projects, ideas, and the community itself?

SM: Yes, that was one way. We knew that we couldn't get everyone to volunteer and then welcome them with empty hands. This is why we allowed to be part of the collective only those who really wanted to. Since the beginning, many people have left: it was not their calling, not their field, but for us it is our life. It's the only thing we really see for ourselves. For those who stayed, we know we share the same core values. That's why Wajukuu is a family: it is a place where we do whatever comes our way as a collective, not as individuals.

Ngugi Waweru: Also, a lot of new members usually came from the Kids Club: among those people who grew up in Wajukuu, many then wanted to join the collective. So, we normally get new members from the Kids Club, once children become young adults.

CB: How do you support all of these initiatives? Do you receive funding from other institutions? Do you have the support of other organizations, from outside of your local context?

SM: When we started, for the first ten to twelve years, we relied only on our art. There was a percent that went to the group. That was what we survived on. But around seven years ago, we met an organization, a foundation from the US, called the Lambert Foundation. They were funding one of the organizations that we have here, and we were hired as consultants to paint murals. They met us through this program and showed interest in supporting our initiative. Since then, they have funded some of our programs, such as the Kids Club and the Documentary Nights. We also try our very best to invite friends and to ask who would like to work with Wajukuu. We are always open for new friends to join us; that's how our collective operates. We don't have a permanent financial source to rely on. We live by the day, but we are happy.

NW: The advantage is that we are not a foreign organization operating in different places. We grew up here, we started here. So even without funding, we will still be here, but we look forward to having more funds to support our projects. We have only had one Lambert Foundation as a long-term donor.

SM: They are also playing a major role in D, from our side. Certainly, documenta couldn't fund everything, we understood that and knew we had to look for other sources of funding to fill in the gaps. However, we are grateful that the Lambert Foundation came in and covered most of the administrative costs for all programs that are now operating.

MD: Moving to another topic, you're quite active online promoting your initiatives, especially on Facebook. However, we would like to know how you promote your events and initiatives offline. Particularly, within your community, in your city, in your area. How do you engage new people, new kids, new families?

SM: Locally, in our neighborhood, we are known because of our kids, as they go to different schools and they pass information to different people. At the same time, we do a lot of murals around the community, so people know us through this practice (fig. 8). Also, Documentary Nights is another program by which we get a lot of people from all around the community. Most of the events, such as the Slum Art Festival that we had in December, brought us a lot of publicity. As we have said, we depend on ourselves sometimes, we don't have funds, so the more publicity we get, the more people we get involved. If we look into our future plans, we think of expanding and having a farm. That's one way to cater to some needs which come our way as we are growing.

NW: We've been more active on our social media platforms since last year. Past years have been slow due to the lack of equipment and challenges with an internet connection. But during this recent period of being active online, we received positive feedback, even from people who are not in Mukuru. Mostly after we had the Slum Art Festival, we saw people starting to gain interest in our projects (figs. 9, 10).

CB: Speaking of which, how did you move to the international scene? For instance, how did you meet ruangrupa and how did this collaboration with documenta start?

SM: Maybe I will talk about ruangrupa, and then Ngugi can add more. ruangrupa first came to Kenya with the Lambert Foundation, a few years before documenta; on this occasion, they visited our collective and had fun during Kids Club, playing with the kids. Back then, we didn't know they'd be curating documenta. After about two years, ruangrupa contacted us with the information that they wanted us to be part of documenta, but we did not know much about this event. So we were wondering, "What will we do for documenta?" These were important questions, but we didn't want to ask, you know? When someone tells you something, you want to be polite. So we were like: "Wow, we are in documenta, but what *will* we do?" But after a while, we got the concept. We are artists: it's easy to digest and then create something out of it. [Talking to Ngugi] Maybe you can add more on our global visibility.

NW: Yes, like Shabu said, our connection with documenta started off with the Lambert Foundation. Michelle from the Foundation introduced us to ruangrupa and after their visit, ruangrupa started following our activities on social media and then contacted us during the lockdown. That's when we started having conversations with them on Zoom, and one day they asked if we would have liked to join the lumbung network. We started by joining lumbung members who are expected to take part in documenta; this is how we got involved with documenta. The interesting thing about ruangrupa is that they started like us, organically, because we both began our projects at a very young age. In a way, we also come from similar contexts: Indonesia and Kenya share the same challenges. When we heard the story of ruangrupa and saw their development, it gave us great hope for the future of Wajukuu.
Regarding our international visibility, I would say that our individual work as artists has played an important role: when artists from the collective say that they belong to Wajukuu, this helps us in terms of promotion and visibility. We are a collective, but people also act individually, especially since we are at different levels when it comes to art. As Shabu said, it is very challenging—I know you understand.

SM: But also very satisfying.

MD: Do have any kind of strategy about sustaining your projects after participating in such a big and international event like documenta? Do you think it will influence your practice?

SM: We have a strategy and we are putting more in place, because we will be on an international stage, and there will be many things to do: emails to reply to, bills to think about. When it comes to sustainability and what we will do after documenta, it has always been our dream to have a community farm. We hope that at some point we will achieve this—maybe in two or three years. Through this, we know, the cycle of soil is the same: you look after it, and then it looks after you. If we have a farm, we will look after it, then it will look after us and our families. This is our number one strategy for sustaining ourselves after documenta.

CB: This idea sounds very much in line with the concept of lumbung, which is basically to store resources for the community. In general, your work and your practice really reflect the values of lumbung: generosity, humor, local anchoring, independence, regeneration, transparency and frugality. So, if we may ask, do you already know what will be your contribution to documenta fifteen?

SM: Of course, one contribution will be ourselves and secondly the installations we are currently working on.

NW: I will produce an installation using knives. The inspiration for this piece comes from the Kikuyu proverb, "Kahiu kohiga munu gatemaga o mwene," which means: "A sharp knife cuts the owner." The concept behind my work is a reflection on our modern obsession with development: as humans we are in a constant rush to develop, to make our lives better, but in this process we carelessly dispose of the world like it is our home and we repress our humanity. What remains, in the end, is just a body devoid of a soul. In other words, when you have a knife and you want it to work better and faster, you sharpen it, but at the same time you consume it. Its blade becomes thinner and thinner until you have no knife anymore. This works as a metaphor for what is happening to us as humans: we are in a rush to be better, but in the end we are left with only our bodies; we become just empty walking bodies.

SM: This is one idea for our contribution, whereas another concept will revolve around cages. At the moment, we have only created a small-scale model of the installation that we will present at documenta. To me, the cage represents the education system in Kenya and how it has been designed in a way so that once you are born, the only way to make it in life is through education. They instill a fear in humans that makes you believe that you have to go through a system to be

successful. But is this system providing the same education that they get? When I said them, I mean, the West. Our education comes from the West. They actually replaced our education with *their* education. And this is the system that is ultimately training us as individuals, as human beings, as subjects. In our country, there are many cases of pupils dropping out of school and this happens out of frustration. We are putting a lot of pressure on kids, we are not letting them *be*. So, the cage will represent the educational system: while you're inside, you can see outside, but you are not yet free, you're in a cage. I will have four to five figure forms that will look like melting bodies. Then I'll have different newspapers from around the world, highlighting how education is affecting cultural ways and also our way of being as humans. We are losing our freedom, because of education. I mean, education can be good when you use it in a way that it might impact societies, but at the same time, it is making us more and more "programmed." We as humans are mysterious, and we should always remain mysterious. We don't need to be programmed. Education doesn't leave room for self-expression: you have to follow what is prescribed, and this is really draining our humanity.

Moreover, we are working on another installation which will consist of a bed made of rubber bands cut out from old car tires. When I was growing up, we had beds with these bands as strings. We are working around the idea of home and what defines it. For me, home is a place where I can rest, but to others home is something different. With this work, we want to portray how dehumanized Africa has become. You can only know that we have been dehumanized if you travel, otherwise you think everything is okay, but everything is not okay. We are questioning big global democracy. Do they really mean what they preach? Does democracy have the same meaning in our context as it does in the West? It's political.
We will have these three installations and also a sort of tunnel that before you reach the installations you pass through and enter in a kind of a trance, which takes you from Europe to our homes. Because in this tunnel, you will hear all kinds of noises we hear on our streets every day and then, when you reach the other end of the tunnel, then you will meet this silent space with our installations.

CB: So, you will bring us to your dimension, your perspective.

NW: Yes, we bring you to our home through a sound landscape.

SM: You should come for our "pre–exhibition," it's happening in March.

NW: Yes, we will have an exhibition in March, where we will present the installations that we will bring to Kassel. We thought of sharing what we are going to do in Europe with our community.[1]

SM: That's one side of what we're going to do, we will also have music and storytelling.

MD: Going back to the context of your community, do you receive any proposals from people other than your usual collaborators? I mean, especially the people who take part in your events? Do you have this kind of connection and dialogue with your audience?

SM: What we do is that before we organize something like a festival, we invite other collectives in the community who are specializing in other areas. For example, in Wajukuu, we don't have any musicians, whereas there are people who do music in our community and they can give us very good advice on how to organize events involving music. So, we normally invite them and partner with them, because we don't want to represent something in which we don't have experience, but, at the same time, we want to give a platform to what is happening in our community. We invite professionals or people who are doing things in that area, so that we can talk and plan together. The problem comes to the budget part, because you will invite people, but at the same time, where there is a lack of resources, as soon as someone has a resource, everyone wants to get access to it. So, you invite people, but they often expect to achieve their long-term goals all at once. You may invite someone and then tell them "let's do the budget for this area," and then the budget you get turns out to be even more than the funds we receive from documenta. Some people can dream, you know, and it's normal to dream. In any case, we are always open to inviting people and collaborating from within and outside our community.

This interview was conducted on January 26, 2022, via Zoom.

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Notes

1 The exhibition, called Systems to Emptiness, was presented at Circle Art Gallery in Nairobi on March 16, 2022.

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Lawrence (Shabu) Mwangi lives and works in Mukuru Slum (Nairobi). Feeling that he had something meaningful to share with society, he joined the world of art in 2003 and became a founding member of Wajukuu Art Projects in 2004.
To him, art became a window on the world, a tool to give deeper meaning to everything he observed, as well as a form of resistance on behalf of a minority that exists in the shadows and at the edges of the majority. Most of Shabu's ideas derive from the view of the frustrating inequality that deeply affects the context in which he lives and from a reflection on the widespread condition of isolation resulting from existing social and cultural barriers.
"Scavenging for our identities from information that we have been fed by the people in power," he claims, "makes us forget the purpose of revolution and why we should change as a society."Shabu strives to analyze social behavior and human interaction; with his work, he advocates for a culture of unity and emphasizes the power of empathy as a form of resistance to the greed and individualism pervading our modern society.

Ngugi Waveru was born in Nakuru, but grew up in Nairobi, where he currently lives and works. He started practicing art as a self-taught artist, learning from his friends, who had graduated from an art college. Ngugi's practice focuses mainly on woodcut prints and mixed medium paintings on canvas. The recurring subjects of his prints are human figures stitched together by ropes, an allusion to those invisible forces that in many situations restrain our will to act. Ropes and stitches also appear in Ngugi's paintings, which are characterized by thick layers of paint, rough surfaces, and dull colors evoking a sense of struggle. His works highlight the innate strength of individuals and their power to overcome insurmountable odds in life.
To Ngugi, growing up in one of the biggest informal settlements in Nairobi, art was a form of self-affirmation and an alternative to drug abuse, crime, and unemployment. To promote this vision, he and other young artists decided to create a collective, Wajukuu Art Project.

As of today, Ngugi is an active member of Wajukuu and teaches art to children and young kids in his community, passing on his passion and enthusiasm to the new generation. In 2015, he placed second in the Manjano Art Competition.

Chiara Borgonovo lives and works in Milan, Italy. Trained as an art historian, she is a researcher and curator with a particular interest in visual studies and socially engaged artistic and curatorial practices. In Milan, she works as an external collaborator at Fondazione Prada's Research and Publications department and as a teaching assistant for the course in Iconology and Visual Culture at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (UCSC), Milan. She earned an MA in Art History from UCSC, Milan, and is currently pursuing a Master of Advanced Studies in Curating at the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK). In Zurich, she actively collaborates with the independent curatorial platform OnCurating Project Space.

Rosela del Bosque lives and works in Mexicali, Baja California (México), as a curator, cultural practitioner, and researcher. Her interests focus on the local context and entwine empathy, memory, historical revisionism, and reconstructing more-than-human relations in the Colorado river delta landscape. She studied art history and curatorial studies at the Universidad de las Américas Puebla. She has completed courses in curatorial practice and contemporary art at Central Saint Martins and Università di Siena. She has collaborated in volunteer programs focused on art education with Museo Jumex and curatorial research with MCASD (Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego). She has co-curated projects at La Nana ConArte (Mexico City), with the curatorial collective base_arriba (Mexicali), Reforma 917 (Puebla), and OnCurating Project Space (Zurich). She is currently an associate curator at Planta Libre (gallery and project space) and pursuing the Master of Advanced Studies in Curating at Zurich University of the Arts.

Marina Donina lives and works in Zurich. She earned a bachelor's degree in linguistics and is currently pursuing a Master of Advanced Studies in Curating at Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK), for which she explores process-based art. She has worked as a curator and production manager at various cultural projects in Shanghai, China, and is currently engaged in several events by Compost Network at the OnCurating Project Space.

Lotte Van Ermengem lives and works in Zurich. She earned an MA in Art History at the Catholic University of Leuven (KU Leuven) in Belgium, where she was born and lived for most of her life. Currently, she is co-curating an ongoing project called "Terra Omnium." The focus of this project centers on sustainable and upcycling art practices. Currently, she is also engaged in the exhibitionary project, *Compost—The Open Bin (Composting Knowledge)*, at the OnCurating Project Space. While working on these projects, she is pursuing a Master of Advanced Studies in Curating at Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK).

fig.1. Community clean up organized by Wajukuu Art Project. Photograph by: James Wamae. Courtesy of Wajukuu Art Project.

fig. 2. Tree planting during Wajukuu Slum Art Festival. Photograph by: James Wamae. Courtesy of Wajukuu Art Project.

fig. 3. Wajukuu kids during a woodcut print workshop. Photograph by: James Wamae. Courtesy of Wajukuu Art Project.

fig. 4. Wajukuu kids during a woodcut print workshop. Photograph by: James Wamae. Courtesy of Wajukuu Art Project.

fig. 5. Artist talk during a workshop organized by Wajukuu Art Project. Photograph by: James Wamae. Courtesy of Wajukuu Art Project.

fig. 6. Wajukuu kids learning how to play traditional instruments. Photograph by: James Wamae. Courtesy of Wajukuu Art Project.

fig. 7. Wajukuu kids learning how to play traditional instruments. Photograph by: James Wamae. Courtesy of Wajukuu Art Project.

fig. 8. Artist participating in a public art initiative organized by Wajukuu Art Project. Photograph by: James Wamae. Courtesy of Wajukuu Art Project.
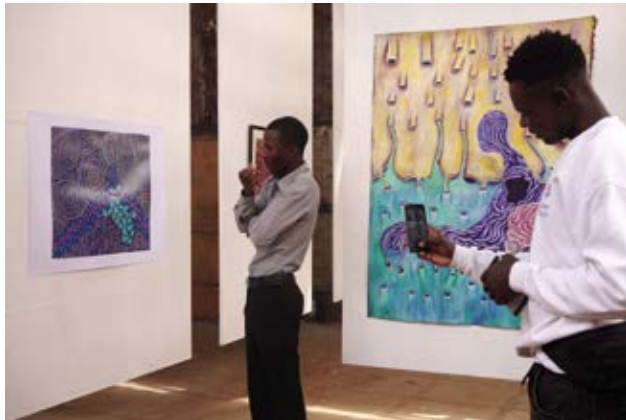
fig. 9. Exhibition during Wajukuu Slum Art Festival. Photograph by: James Wamae. Courtesy of Wajukuu Art Project.

fig. 10. Artists performing during Wajukuu Slum Art Festival. Photograph by: James Wamae. Courtesy of Wajukuu Art Project.

Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistik Berlin: Philip Horst
in Conversation with Marina Donina
and Regina Tetens

ZK/U – Center for Art and Urbanistics (short: *ZK/U Berlin*) is an artist residency, a space for research and production, and a platform for exhibitions, conferences, and workshops related to social and cultural topics. The artist collective *KUNSTrePUBLIK* founded *ZK/U Berlin* in a former railway depot located on the grounds of Stadtgarten Moabit, an urban garden. Its doors opened to the public in 2012. Around fifteen artists and urban studies researchers from around the world live and work at *ZK/U*. During their residencies, which last several months, the processes and results of their project work are presented to the public on a regular basis. Many of the social and cultural projects *ZK/U* initiates center on challenges to urban society. Co-founders and current board of directors: Philip Horst, Matthias Einhoff, and Harry Sachs.

Regina Tetens: Thank you for meeting with us today! You are a co-founder of several artist groups—when did you start and what motivated the founding of the KUNSTrePUBLIK and the ZK/U, Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistik?

Philip Horst: We started working as *Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistik* in 2006, and we were not only a collective but also founded an association to be able to get funding for our ideas.
At that time, we had a lot of space; in Berlin, there was still a lot of free space available, but we didn't have a lot of money. So, we had to organize money, and this structure as a non-profit organization gave us possibilities to acquire different funds. We started with doing our own artwork, both as individual artists and then later also as a collective, and we made artworks in a common authorship under the name of *KUNSTrePUB-LIK*, which is the association behind the legal entity of *ZK/U*, but we are also an artist collective under the same name.
When we started in 2006, we were five men; two of the group have now dropped out to concentrate on their own art. In 2010, we acquired the building and we had

to get a million euros of investment; it became a long-term project.
It was already during the project *Skulpturenpark* where we had organized everything, fighting and curating, while we also always had an art piece in these shows. Maybe to complement or to bring in new aspects, same as the artist colleagues.
ZK/U somehow became more visible as a name than *KUNSTrePUBLIK*. So, when ruangrupa asked us to participate, we decided to take part as a whole ecosystem and not only as a group of artists.

RT: What is your role within ZK/U? Do you have specific roles?

PH: We are all equal within the structure, but after working together for fourteen years, certain roles have developed. This naturally falls into place. I am mainly responsible for the residency program, new partnerships, and taking care of running the business. And Matthias Einhoff is responsible for acquiring projects and the educational framework. And he manages our building construction.
In the first phase, all three of us covered all themes together, but now we don't have the time to do that anymore, especially with *Haus der Statistik*. It's a project we all work on; everybody does a little on a daily basis. We normally all work together on our artistic production and for artworks. At the very least, we discuss ideas and brainstorm, but do not necessarily execute together; the creative process is the important part.

RT: What was the most innovative or interesting project so far?

PH: I think the *ZK/U,* like all our ventures, has an experimental aspect, and I think that was really interesting. Also, *Haus der Statistik*. Even though *Haus der Statistik* is much bigger and involves much more and many more stakeholders, whereas *ZK/U* was more

controlled by the three of us. I see it as a kind of artwork, as a social sculpture.

There was, for example, *Stage to Go*. That's a machine which goes over parking cars, lifts them up, and uses the car as an energy producer to produce light and electricity for sound on this kind of stage. So, its use was also to make electricity run. The engineering part was very interesting, also the result and the product. You could lift the car with two hands: a human being can lift up a car.

And then maybe the crazy stuff we did once, like *Fairpetuum Mobile*. It was a race between two cars; one car consisted of a car and a trailer. It was a wood gasifier with dried horse shit running the engine. The other one was an Opel Corsa, which was running on ethanol alcohol, produced from old fruits. We had a race in a former trotting track. It was a fantastic summer day, but then suddenly we had an enormous thunderstorm, and everything was sinking, water everywhere. During the race, you could bet on the future of the area, on demographics, the job developments, the language, and how it will be in 2050. This way, money was collected, which is in a bank account now and will be released in 2050. When one can see the real development over that time.

It was at the same time when we opened a farm for culture champions, a mushroom farm, which served as an exhibition design. We acquired the material from the mushroom industry. So, these are always different aspects, when we enter into new fields and find ways on how to turn them into an artwork.

RT: Is there a project you would like to realise—a dream project?

PH: Yes, like what we want to do for *documenta*. We took down the former roof of the ZK/U building and will transform it into a boat, on a boating trip—a very adventurous project. Along the way, we will have about fifty events, touching base with the local communities and with other artists.

It's the roof of ZK/*U*, and now it has been turned 180 degrees upside down and will be used as a raft. It looks like a roof, a floating roof. It's 16 meters long and 5.5 meters wide. So, it is a little shorter than the actual hallway, but this was a legal issue; it has to go through all the rivers with the regulations in place.

We will start on the Havel, then go on the Mittellandkanal and then enter the Weser but against the current. And then on the Fulda to Kassel. We want to move without fossil energy, but with people. We have paddles and we'll install bikes, but we need others to

pull us, maybe with rowboats, swimming, fishing lines—all different ways of moving us forward. If no one helps us, we will stand still or on the Weser be moved back to the Atlantic, which is also an interesting option. But we want to reach Kassel; then we will turn it upside down again, like a campsite for the community. The estimated journey is 60 days. There is the *Around the World in Eighty Days* novel. That was the beginning of modernization when everyone started going fast. And now we turn the 90 upsidedown to 60; 60 days from Berlin to Kassel. We are trying to be slow in opposition to all the speed around us.

And one day, we could maybe continue with this slow journey to go and visit the other *Lumbung* members.

RT: Besides communicating with the community or the people you invite, how would you define your collective practice? You said you work together and discuss ideas together. Is there something that you would define as important for you or how you work?

PH: Maybe it's also interesting to talk about what a collective is. The three of us, we mainly do the art projects. Sometimes we involve other members of *ZK/U*. Then, there is *ZK/U* as an organization, which maintains the residency and partnerships. This is done with other people who are not necessarily part of the artistic output. And that's the biggest challenge, on how to cross that line and how to bridge it. And there are people we hire; they are paid for working at *ZK/U*, while we are kind of freelancing. It's also maybe that difference that they are rather not necessarily employees.

Marina Donina: ruangrupa introduced a lot of their cultural background into the way they work and are curating documenta. In this collaboration, are there any cultural differences that have affected your working practice in some way?

PH: The whole *lumbung* concept, if you look at it globally, is also the scaling of ruangrupa. There's always this colonial discourse embedded, even though it's not spoken out loud. We are from Germany; documenta is a German festival. There are a lot of *lumbung* members invited who live in former colonial countries (not necessarily colonized by Germans, but by Europeans), and therefore there's always a little gap between us. Mostly in terms of resources. Because we have a build-

ing, we don't always have to look for new studios, which makes us privileged in the Berlin scene. There is a certain responsibility, but also a lot of knowledge about how to spend money. Since documenta is almost all public money, it must be spent in certain ways. For us, it was so difficult in the last fifteen years to understand the *Vergabeordnung* (awarding regulations), and it is hard to explain to people from other countries, too. A lot of the talk was about how to sustain and reuse the resources of documenta. The needs were very different, even though everyone has the same problems in a way, like money and land. That's also why there is this big question about land, how can we acquire land, or is a different economy possible? These are the core questions of the *lumbung*. And the press, like how can we publish ourselves and how do we build a digital network outside of Google, Facebook, and YouTube. It's a classical Marxist question, how to get your production in your own hands. Normally, we find a specific thing that seems interesting. And either we develop it on the site, while we are there, or we do it from a distance, like in Washington, DC. We were invited there to do public work, and we were researching different aspects of the city. And we found two things that Germans were famous for. A lot of alcohol production, like breweries, belonged to them. Then, there was a straight-edge movement, which also originated from Washington, DC. Like don't drink, don't smoke, don't fuck within the hardcore scene. And then we thought it would be interesting to bring these together: our German traditional alcohol-making and the straight edge anti-movement. There was one dentist from California who made a lot of money with some patents. He was installing freshwater fountains all over the US, and he placed one in front of German pubs. To give people an alternative to drinking alcohol. Very simple idea. We found one of the remaining fountains in Boston; it led to the first public art commission in the city. After it was placed there, there was a group of people saying: "Hey, why can everyone just put their shit in our public space," and they formed this commission to decide what is allowed in public space. Temperance movement. Now, from 200 of these fountains, only two or three still exist, in New York and in Washington, DC. We made a one-to-one replica and put it onto a trailer to make it moveable. And on the front of this fountain's roof, there were engravings like "temperance", "modesty," etc. We made them with a magnetic sheet, and you could put your own letters, find your own morality. Then we gave it to people to use as a protest tool, because Washington, DC, like Berlin, is also the federal

capital. We created a reform or demonstration tool with a very conservative shape. We did a similar thing in *Skulpturenpark* with *LandsEnd* with opera or kind of conservative songs in burnt-out cars. So, trying to move different cultural forms of expression into a new meaning, but in the context of its location.

RT: This is a very basic connection to ruangrupa as well, who very much work with the local context.

PH: I like it very much. It needs a lot of time and (not necessarily) money, also dedication to find and learn about these structures, a good connection, and ambassadors who can translate the locality.

RT: How are your projects normally funded or supported by project money?

PH: On different levels: from the EU, the federal state and locally. Not so much locally anymore, but in the beginning, because the amount of money is relatively small to the administrative things you must do to prove how you spend it, etc.

RT: And how do you share the money in the group, and how do you divide it?

PH: The three of us always share everything, and we also work over full time, every one of us. Others have contracts, some are employed or freelancing. It also depends on the engagement level and when they joined our group. Some employees behave like employees. And others are very caring. Distinguishing this may be stupid, but people who are employed often work according to a different logic towards where they work.

RT: Do you document or archive your projects? Is that an important part of your work?

PH: Of course we do that. It's never the main aspect of our work because during documentation, we have the next project already. We never really invested or put a spotlight on this process. That's why we are not represented by galleries or not visible on the internet. We were invited more by social science and technology, the art market.

RT: How do you see your visibility in the art world and the art discourse? What is your relationship to it?

PH: We were never really interested in being hyped in the art world. I often experienced art events as something not so favorable. Especially those lingering and collaborating with big companies or grants. It's always a bit shiny-shiny and double-faced. I rather have our little ecosystem, which is more honest somehow. I think it's important to put more effort into that. Within the *lumbung* network, there's the idea of having a gallery taking over, as a Marxist idea of what's not only the production, but also the distribution, but of course you need also the contacts and the ability to work within the system. For *lumbung*, distribution of art is not their core field. They are interested in more aspects. That's why they formed this group. There's also this big shift now toward collectives and socially motivated practices, beside the shiny art market stuff.

MD: Please tell us more about the collaboration with ruangrupa? Is there some more common ground or motivation?

PH: We met ruangrupa before their tenth anniversary, and they invited us to Indonesia. It was 2010. Since then, we have invited each other to different projects, such as the Jakarta Biennial, the *Archipel in√est* in Ruhrarea, Sonsbeek, etc. So, we always had some kind of working relationship and friendship.

MD: And how do you refer to their key values that they always emphasize?

PH: I think humor is a very important aspect of our work. It can be serious, but not necessarily only serious. For me personally, it is very important for life. And then a local anchor. I told you how we develop our artwork. Also, *ZK/U* is locally rooted in its surroundings. Then, transparency. I'm very transparent now. And I think with the public, not everything can be transparent. That's what I believe. Because it must be understood and read in a way that it can be understood.
It is also difficult not to be simplistic, because sometimes we make things more complicated by adding more layers. There are sometimes too many, and maybe it's too much. In its form, it should be simple again, in its explanation it can be complex.

MD: How do you see the composition of your collective evolving in future, after documenta?

PH: It's important to be a part of it and an honor to be invited, but also without documenta, we have many

things going on, and it adds another layer. It's expanding our network and our knowledge into regions we didn't reach out to before. We will see how it changes our practice for the future. I think one important aspect and the idea of *lumbung* is that we visit and spend time with each other in the different localities to understand also how the others work. This wasn't possible because of Corona. And that is something I would really like to do. I like to understand a place. I don't know if you ever can fully understand it, but getting a glimpse by being present is really important. This interview was conducted on February 4, 2022, via video conference.

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Philip Horst was born in Hamburg (1972) and lives in Berlin. As co-founder of *KUNSTrePUBLIK* (2006) and *ZK/U Berlin* (2011) he has worked as curator, artist, and researcher.

Regina Tetens is a freelance curator and art producer, based in Berlin. She currently works for ART+COM Studios.

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