

# Situated Knowledges in Art and Curating

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# Editorial

## Ronald Kolb and Dorothee Richter

Globalization does not only mean expanding production, consumption, and communication on a global scale, with profits channeled for the most part to big corporations, creating an increasingly comprehensive network of economic collaborations. It also evokes new forms of cultural identities, distinctions, coalescences, ambiguities, projections, or transformations, as well as new experiences of difference or belonging in a much more porous network. However, a redefinition in the face of globalization means that the cultural coordinates of the present also produce new perspectives on histories, genealogies, or traditions, as well as new perspectives of future visions, which form and articulate themselves not least in contemporary art. We want to understand and explore these processes through “situated knowledges.”

The term “situated knowledges” coined by Donna Haraway is a central topic in her concept of feminist objectivity. In her much-cited 1988 essay “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective” Haraway declares that all scientific knowledge is fundamentally conditional. For this reason, the concept of situated knowledge incorporates the social location and contextual advantages of the researcher into the research process.<sup>1</sup> Against an assumption of the apparently neutral and unmediated knowledge of the (male, white) Western idea of science and its representation through totalizing visualization techniques, Haraway develops her concept of situated (or embodied) knowledges by drawing on a description of the eye and “vision” (in the broad real and metaphorical sense). There is no such thing as unconditional observation, she argues, because every “acquisition of knowledge” takes place in a dynamic “apparatus of bodily production.”<sup>2</sup>

Haraway therefore argues for the recognition of an embodied objectivity and thus for knowledge located, i.e., situated, in a certain time, embodied and with partial instruments of vision. Situated knowledge is never universal, but rather contains excerpts and different perspectives that can change in time and context. Only by negotiating the different positions and partial perspectives, by the stuttering and irritations that arise from this does more adequate knowledge become possible. This seems to us to be a particularly valuable approach in collaborative processes that bring together different cultures and different political situations. Haraway retains the concept of the entities in relationships in many areas because she is concerned with understanding the situated and embodied power of actors in networks. This clear understanding of agency also puts her theoretical approach in opposition to some understandings of the Actor-Network Theory and New Materialism.

According to Haraway, situated knowledge forms the basis for political action. The inevitable involvement of scientists in the “apparatuses of bodily production” always requires them to accept and reflect on their own responsibility. Haraway already explains this in the “Cyborg Manifesto”: “Taking responsibility for the social relations of science and technology means refusing an anti-science metaphysics, a demonology of technology, and so means embracing the skillful task of reconstructing the boundaries of daily life, in partial connection with others, in communication with all of our parts.”<sup>3</sup>

Bonaventura de Sousa Santos comes to a compatible conclusion in “Epistemologies of the South”: he sees the problem of global economic inequality as based on the Western understanding of science and law, and therefore the fight for global social justice must primarily be a fight for global cognitive justice. This is first and foremost a matter of sovereignty of interpretation. These structures arise from “abyssal thinking” deeply rooted in Western modernity, which must be countered with an alternative, rebellious, popular cosmopolitanism based on equality and the recognition of difference.<sup>4</sup>

In her later writings, Haraway establishes a concept of kinship that is not based on biological heritability, but on the inseparability of human-animal-plant-technology in secular networks. In her latest contribution, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin,” she calls for a responsible “kinship” relationship to become the basis of political activist strategies in times of current crises such as climate change, pollution, migration, exploitation, and postcolonial oppression: “Making kin and making kind (as category, care, relatives without ties by birth, lateral relatives, lots of other echoes) stretch the imagination and can change the story.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Conference and workshop: “Situated Knowledges – Art and Curating on the Move”**

With this in mind, Dorothee Richter (ZHdK), Cedric Maridet (HKBU), and Ronald Kolb (ZHdK) organized a conference and workshop program under the title “Situated Knowledges – Art and Curating on the Move” from June 25 to 27, 2021, as a hybrid parallel conference and workshop event at Tai Kwun Contemporary, Hong Kong (on-site) and the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich (online). The event was embedded in the format “Curating on the Move” in the Shared Campus cooperation platform, an international education format and research network launched by seven higher arts education institutions.<sup>6</sup> Active partners for this conference were Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU), Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK), and University of the Arts, London (UAL).

The conference invited artists, curators, educators, and scholars from the Shared Campus partners and beyond to engage in the program of public talks and discussions as well as participatory workshops, all to be attended via Zoom, due to Covid restrictions all over the globe. Over three days, public talks and discussion took place with **Lucy Steeds** (Afterall, UAL) and **John Tain** (Head of Research, Asia Art Archive), **Michael Asbury** (UAL), **Jacopo Crivelli Visconti**, **Paulo Miyada** (34th Bienal de São Paulo), **Jeanne van Heeswijk**, **Angela Dimitrakaki**, and **Yuk Hui**. These public talks were followed by five workshops held in parallel on each day, three days in a row. The workshop format varied in structure and was experimental in nature, stretching the format of digital cooperation, and the workshops were held by **Bo Choy** and **Chloe Ting** (Afterall, UAL), **Gesyada Siregar** and **Angga Wijaya** (ruangrupa/Gudskul), **Antonio Cataldo** (at that time PhD researcher, ZHdK, and Director of Fotogalleriet Oslo), **Karmen Franinovic**, **Roman Kirschner** (ZHdK), **Nadim Abbas** (curator, HKW, Berlin), **Rose Li**, **Edward Sanderson**, **Lang Tu** (PhD researchers, HKBU), **Ron Yakir**, **Li Xiaoqiao**, and **Rose Li** (PhD researchers, HKBU), **Basia Sliwinska** and **Caroline Stevenson** (UAL), **Janet Fong** (HKBU) with **Choi Yan Chi**, **May Fung**, and **Lo Yin Shan**, **Dorothee Richter** and **Ronald Kolb** (MAS Curating, ZHdK), **Katalin Erdódi** (PhD researcher, ZHdK), **Debe Sham** (PhD researcher, HKBU) and **Georgia Kennedy**, **Noit Banai** and **Dani Gal**, **Maayan Sheleff** (PhD researcher, ZHdK) and **Ruth Patir** (Artist, Tel Aviv), **Be van Vark** (choreographer, Berlin), and **Alison Green** and **Lee Weinberg** (UAL).<sup>7</sup>

The conference was the starting point for this publication.

The conference brought together diverse artistic and curatorial practices from different locations all over the world. It tackled the positionality of the epistemes embodied in participants and opened up—hopefully—a commoning process of exchanging partial vision in a trustful manner. If we are inclined to speak of the global aspects of trans-locality with this coming together of situated knowledges, we need to be (context- and power-)sensitive not only to the context of the different art practices and its disciplines and media, but also of the educational format and its power structures, their embeddedness in epistemological frameworks, and of world views at large.

The proposed workshop tackled all these issues in one way or the other. In this sense, “situated knowledges” were realized as a method of permeability in unexpected and surprising encounters with other forms of situated knowledges with hopefully interrelated and interconnected effects.

### **Contributions to this issue**

The contributions in this issue exemplify the partiality and situatedness of one’s own position in our respective fields of expertise, within our educational frameworks and contact zones. The compiled texts reflect on Haraway’s concept of *situated knowledges*, and on each contributor’s own embodied practices and the hands-on experiences in the workshops.

In her contribution, “**From Space to Time: ‘Situated Knowledges,’ Critical Curating, and Social Truth,**” Angela Dimitrakaki follows the historical context of Haraway’s influential text “Situated Knowledges” from 1988: a globally politically charged situation with the end of the “Cold War,” leaving extractivist capitalist logic as its sole winner on the world map. Rather than an equalizing positionality, Dimitrakaki opts for historical factuality to find forms and actions that work towards a social truth.

**Jeanne van Heeswijk** and **Whitney Stark** join forces in their contribution “**Training for Together: Extended Bodies,**” providing insights into van Heeswijk’s ongoing practice-in-progress project *Training for the Not-Yet*, an open community-building practice. They develop their artistic practice in response to power-sensitive positionality in line with Haraway’s request in “Situated Knowledges.”

“**Situated Knowledges and Interdependence in the Exhibitionary-Educational Complex,**” the contribution by **Ronald Kolb**, borrows closely from Donna Haraway’s text in order to elaborate a set of skills moving toward a feminist objectivity in situated knowledges, and to open up these methods for artistic, curatorial, and educational contexts.

**Alison Green** and **Lee Weinberg** conducted the workshop titled “Six Degrees of Separation: Curatorial Practice/Objects of Desire,” aiming to think about the exchange of objects and the function of desire in capitalist logic as an ever violent relation between objects and subjects.

In “**Curing the Archive Fever: Filling the Gaps Through Situatedness,**” Antonio Cataldo aims to challenges “archive fever”—the formation that grants legitimacy and canonizes patriarchal knowledge to the point of its “naturalization”—by investigating the terminology of archive/arkhé, “while looking for freedom in action through notions of endangerment and implication.”

Their contribution, “**Cacoethes**,” speaks about their situatedness and background thought for the workshop, and reports on the workshop itself, which evolved into an unexpected encounter, with participants sharing stories of objects of desire with one another.

**Janet Fong Man Yee** follows, with her contribution, “**New Horizons: Ways of Seeing Hong Kong Art in the ‘80s and ‘90s: An Integrated Approach to Curatorial Practices on Exhibition-Making**” and the respective exhibition to which the text refers, a precise alternative perspective of Hong Kong’s contemporary art through different “vantage points of micro- and macro-history” by bringing in many voices of artists from that time.

In “**Whisper Game: Practicing Attention Through Caring and Pacing**,” **Basia Sliwinska** and **Caroline Stevenson** experienced embodied knowledge in conversation with Judah Attile, Giovanna Bragaglia, Maria Costantino, Fabiola Fiocco and Alison Green by playing a modified version of the “whisper game,” initiated by a text, asking the participants for other texts in a similar vein and related to it. This game enabled interrelating collectively in methods of knowledge transfer. This resulted in the shared written contribution, “reveal[ing] tensions, hierarchies, and agencies that shape the spaces with/in which we speak, listen, and are heard.”

**Debe Sham** and **Georgia Kennedy** conducted the workshop **Cloth Knowledge: Sculpting with a Missing Corner** with an awareness of contextual knowledge and the varied experiences of the workshop participants. The workshop used cloth as a material and tool to experience situated knowledge in a shared formation.

**Bo Choy** and **Chloe Ting** propose “**Situated Knowledge, Situated Works**” to discuss one’s personally situated context in conjunction with artworks and exhibitions. Choy and Ting start with *The Other Story*, the infamous exhibition curated by artist Rasheed Araeen at Hayward Gallery in 1989. Respondents are **Ashley L. Wong** (referring to Wang Hui’s 2011 book, *The Politics of Imagining Asia*) and **Anahita Razmi** (proposing a rejected project proposal of hers, recontextualizing imagery and objects of the Islamic Republic of Iran and “a West”).

In “**FOMO FREE RADIO**,” **Nadim Abbas**, **Rose Li**, **Edward Sanderson (with Fiona Lee Wing-shan)**, and **Lang Tu (with Anouchka van Driel)**, greatly influenced by Covid and the respective measures in Hong Kong and China in 2020/21, each follow particular discussions surrounding their artistic practices that revolve around technological instruments, parasitical programs, performative politics, the attention economy, etc., tackling the state of social media in which we live.

“**Memory Communities at the Crossroads**” by **Noit Banai** and **Dani Gal** seeks to bring together situated knowledges and multidirectional memory “as a way of renegotiating monolithic frameworks of contemporary memory cultures and national authority over historical narratives.” They propose situated and embodied readings of memory cultures through photographic and documentary media, starting with an image depicting Paul Celan in front of Mount Meron during a visit to Israel in 1969.

**Dorothee Richter** and **Ronald Kolb** present the playful project **Small Projects for Coming Communities**, for which artists, theoreticians, and the public were invited to deliver event scores. These event scores made it possible to start extensive

exchanges on ecological and political issues at the localities of each participant. The embodied realities became apparent in the shared digital space.

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## Notes

**1** Sigrid Schmitz, "Cyborgs, situiertes Wissen und das Chthulucene. Donna Haraway und dreißig Jahre politischer (Natur-)wissenschaft," *Soziopolis*, July 12, 2016, accessed August 1, 2020, <https://www.sozio.polis.de/erinnern/klassiker/artikel/cyborgs-situiertes-wissen-und-das-chthulucene/>.

**2** Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–599; 591.

**3** Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149–181.

**4** Bonaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

**5** Donna Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin," *Environmental Humanities* 6 (2015): 159–165; 161.

**6** "About," Shared Campus, accessed May 31, 2022, <https://shared-campus.com/about/>.

**7** For a detailed description of all workshops, please see: <https://shared-campus.com/themes/cultures-histories-futures/curatorial-workshop/curating-on-the-move-situated-knowledges/>.

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**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.





# From Space to Time: “Situated Knowledges,” Critical Curating, and Social Truth

## Angela Dimitrakaki

Donna Haraway’s “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective”<sup>1</sup> put forward a critical perspective about feminism and knowledge that was to be greatly influential for emancipatory epistemologies across fields and practices—including socially engaged curating. What follows, in the manner of reflections, concerns how the idea of “situated knowledges” might be scripted in an increasingly complex contemporary that critical curatorial theory is inevitably embedded in and, in many cases, also addresses. Haraway’s own article comes from 1988, and we might as well start from considering *that* contemporary. What marked that year?

“On December 7, 1988,” at the United Nations, says *The New Yorker*, “Mikhail Gorbachev [...] announced [...] that the Soviet Union would no longer intervene in the affairs of its Eastern European satellite states. Those nations could now become democratic. It was the beginning of the end of the Cold War.”<sup>2</sup> That was an interesting formulation, for what really happened was that those nations would become capitalist. This was what the Cold War, as known in the 20th century, was about, as was the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century: a clash between two conceptions of the economy that served *opposite class interests*—or, as recently summarised by Keti Chukhrov, who did not neglect sexual politics in her analysis, between an economy that demanded the extraction of (privatised) surplus and one that met needs.<sup>3</sup> In the decades that followed 1988, numerous theoretical expositions (and there was no shortage of empirical accounts) demonstrated that “democracy” was but a rhetorical device designed to appeal to those that had subtly or less subtly been designated as politically unprivileged (deprived of democracy). Since 1988, we have heard about (i) the conflict between neoliberal capitalism and democracy (read Wendy Brown), (ii) the corruption of democracy into post-democracy (read Colin Crouch), or (iii) how democracy had been an illusion (read Vivek Chibber on the colonised versus metropolitan nations, Nancy MacLean on the plot against democracy in the US, Jacques Rancière on how assumed Western democracies were oligarchies), to mention but a few angles on the matter.<sup>4</sup> In 2021, “post-democracy,” “totalitarian capitalism,” “neo-authoritarianism” and “post-fascism” circulate widely as descriptions of a transnational political predicament.<sup>5</sup>

Earlier, in May of 1988, President Reagan had given his famous address at Moscow State University, where he had spent “many hours” with Gorbachev, “focused primarily on many of the important issues of the day.” The American President announced a revolution without bloodshed or conflict.

Standing here before a mural of your revolution, I want to talk about a very different revolution that is taking place right now, quietly sweeping the globe without bloodshed or conflict. Its effects are peaceful, but they will fundamentally alter our world, shatter old assumptions, and reshape our lives. It’s easy to underestimate because it’s not accompanied by banners or fanfare. It’s been

called the technological or information revolution, and as its emblem, one might take the tiny silicon chip [...].<sup>6</sup>

And yet, bloodshed and conflict had defined extractivist, imperialist capitalism and were therefore essential for the information revolution underway.<sup>7</sup> There would be a lot more bloodshed and conflict. Let's think about lithium. Thirty years after 1988, the world was told that lithium "shall reign for the future" and, in 2019, the Nobel Prize in chemistry went to lithium technology.<sup>8</sup> Lithium is incredibly important for our technologies. Yet, from *National Geographic* to anticapitalist and indigenous groups, we are alerted to a disturbing truth: the "lithium wars"—wars *among very unequal sides* (corporate imperialism, the so-called indigenous peoples, and governments that have to sell the country's lithium to the world in order to survive in global capitalism).<sup>9</sup> Tech guru Elon Musk—Tesla executive and the richest man on earth for a while in 2020—tweeted about Bolivia, which has a lot of lithium to be mined: "We will coup whoever we want! Deal with it."<sup>10</sup> As Kate Aronoff put it, "The fact that people are talking about a 'lithium coup' at all could preview a new era of extractive geopolitics."<sup>11</sup> Shortly before the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine, investors from across the globe were speculating about Ukraine's rich lithium reserves.<sup>12</sup> This is what the technology revolution announced in 1988 looks like in 2022.

1988 was then an important year. If the contemporary we know began the following year, in 1989, as *Former West: Art and the Contemporary after 1989* has it, 1988 concluded an era—that of the Cold War.<sup>13</sup> It was the perceived end of the Cold War, which saw capitalism, in its neoliberal phase, take over the Earth and become "globalisation"—an eminently spatial term. Yet, although the "contemporary" was arguably launched in 1989, contemporary art did not. Contemporary art and its main narratives started in the 1960s, and, for many, the defeats and compromises of that decade (as in France's May 68) played a key role in its ideological make-up.<sup>14</sup> For the most part, up until the consolidation of capitalist markets as a global paradigm, contemporary art had experienced the cultural hegemony of postmodernism. Far superior to a mere genre such as Abstract Expressionism (also a Cold War weapon) in terms of the freedom it promised (the free play of signs), the concept of postmodernism defined the latest phase of this cultural and intellectual war, becoming fully dominant in the 1980s, when Donna Haraway was also writing, and continued to inform the science and culture wars of the 1990s.

One characteristic of postmodernism was that it regarded pretty much everything as space. Time became flat, losing its past-present-future sense of direction, as Fredric Jameson famously argued. Meta-narratives, where connections were possible for a "totalising vision," were out, as Jean-François Lyotard contended, and politics fragmented into smaller and smaller parts (micro-politics). Broken mirrors were used to reference a "self" seen as forever incomplete and fractured—as a notable artwork of Barbara Kruger's connected to feminist critique had it. References to "surface" proliferated overall. Signs enjoyed complete freedom, apparently. The "desert of the real," an apt spatial metaphor, circulated from theory (from Jean Baudrillard to Slavoj Žižek, more precisely) while the seminal film *The Matrix* (1999) gave substance to the phrase in an unforgettable scene. During the Cold War, postmodernism was exported from the centre of the capitalist West as a highly desired state of cultural being, with the "peripheries" claiming they were also postmodern or that they were postmodern even in advance of America. Postmodernism then arose as an extremely successful dominant ideology, imposing a spatial unconscious pretty much everywhere.

This was the historical, cultural, and intellectual context in which Haraway's "Situated Knowledges" was produced. The emphasis on spatiality is already betrayed by the verb "to situate," the synonyms of which are "to establish," "to fix," "to put," "to park," "to position," "to put in place." Yet overall, the text brims with spatial indicators, despite its author's conscious effort to disidentify from key postmodern tenets. Although therefore Haraway sees that relativism, as such a tenet, stands against a politics of emancipation and so against feminism, she writes:

The alternative to relativism is partial, *locatable*, critical knowledges sustaining the possibilities of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology. 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 (emphasis added).<sup>15</sup>

I want to suggest two things in relation to the above passage and how it can be connected to critical curatorial theory. First, that to give in to the spatiality that underwrites it means to leave unexamined how postmodernism has functioned and remains relevant today, as dominant ideology: as a set of internalised values that mostly function *unconsciously* in predisposing subjectivities in the reception of their lifeworld and in their interaction with it. Second, that the prevalence of "display" in the extant conditions of exhibition-making already enhances the pull of spatiality (I have examined elsewhere the disciplining function of the exhibition form on the radical and even centrifugal tendencies of contemporary artistic labour).<sup>16</sup> To counter the ongoing naturalisation of the hegemony of space, we could take time as the axis of "situating." Opening this paper with a revisiting of the past year 1988 was a way of introducing this intention. Why however am I suggesting a turn to time as a route towards situating the gap between emancipatory intentionality and a social reality that frustrates it?

### 1. On "the Equality of Positioning"

First, because doing so can help us address the problem Haraway pointed to already in 1988: the "equality of positioning" that postmodern relativism had generated. It is this that is hidden into calls for diversity, including "diversifying the curriculum." Numerous art history and curatorial programmes, but also art biennials, museums, and independent art institutions have interpreted "diversity" in terms of *enriching the synchronous* with so-called marginalised positions—"positionality" being another of Haraway's keywords. Yet to think in terms of "margins" and "centre" is already to think in terms of space. To think diversity through these concepts means to imagine a flat terrain that marginalised agents are called to occupy a bit more. The centre is thus assumed to shrink. But what is the reality? That the centre does not shrink! The ethically (rather than politically) correct acknowledgement of marginalised positions has not so far meant the displacement of central-dominant ones. Art-world inclusivity, much like liberal "pluralism," can seemingly expand without undoing the extant regime of power. Why is that so?

In answering this question, my short answer would be: because the spatial logic of diversity is flawed. The margins-and-centre metaphor is wrong. What we are told are "margins" and "centre" are not "locations" at all. Rather, they are antagonistic relations the current appearance of which can only be grasped if we think of their interwoven *histories*, because it is these histories that construct the agents of the antagonism as often vastly *unequal*. In having an exhibition that maps and puts on display feminist art from different geographies does nothing for uncovering the colonial and imperialist

relationships that have shaped not just each geography but also how they connect to each other. Let's take Greece where I come from as an example: the colonels' junta (1967 - 1974) that cut off Greece from the emergence of a feminist (art) revolution in the centre of the capitalist world, and especially the USA, was hardly unrelated to American foreign policy and interests. That *Womanhouse* was created in the USA and not in Greece in the early 1970s is tied to *this* history and any feminist "display" that would fail to think of this relationship of American to Greek feminism would be distorting the current, 21<sup>st</sup>-century "contemporary."<sup>17</sup> In short, working today towards a global feminism means also researching and understanding the impact of the *historical truths* of capitalist geopolitics rather than speaking of "peripheries," "semi-peripheries" and "centres" in terms of "partial" and "locatable" perspectives.

We can have a broader enquiry into the appropriateness of "partial" and "locatable" knowledge. An example drawn from a state of emergency in current geopolitics would be Israel and Palestine. We can only go so far if we think of this relationship in terms of a "central-dominant" and a "marginalised" agent—even if here, the "dispute" is literally about a territory. And there is good reason why a recent Open Letter on US media coverage of Palestine, which bravely opposed the "equal distance" reporting on the so-called dispute, did not call for "partial, locatable, critical knowledges" but rather for "the full contextualised *truth*, without fear or favor" (emphasis added).<sup>18</sup> There is a difference between "knowledges" (even if situated) and "truth" (even if contextualised), for knowledge, as understood after the paradigms of deconstruction and post-structuralism, favours indeed criticality rather than factuality. What could the 500 journalists mean by "contextualised truth"? That truth exists and has a context. Truth can be revealed, and researching its context is necessary for revealing it. This context is not merely about the current "total asymmetry in power," as put by the Letter or "crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution" described by Human Rights Watch. Although no locatable knowledge could oppose these facts, the context would include the practice of settler-colonialism, which has a long history, and which has shaped a number of territories.

Settler-colonialism is notoriously hard to redress. As we know, there is much discussion in contemporary art and curating about "the Indigenous" as peoples victimised by settler-colonialism. The Indigenous are marginalised, and efforts are made by art institutions to give them visibility. I don't want to refer to whether the Indigenous claim visibility as agents for themselves, because I want to first ask about the identity politics we have here: why should a politics of recognition name "the Indigenous" and not "the descendants of the settler-colonialists"? Why should visibility not be about the perpetrator who should be named as such? Why shouldn't the latter be burdened with particularising "identity"? This reminds me very much of what happened to artists who were women in the similarly positive approach to visibility sought by second-wave feminism in art. They became "women artists" rather than "the artist" becoming "man artist," which would reveal the operative gender privilege in art production. Although there is no doubt that second-wave feminism claimed "women artists" as a political category, this political category led to the marginalisation of feminism as such in art: feminism became a typically locatable, partial field of critical knowledge. Meanwhile, everyone else continues teaching/collecting/valuing Picasso, no matter what Carol Duncan wrote already decades back or that man-artist's documented misogyny in life as in art.<sup>19</sup> The art world has thus managed to both have its cake and eat it: women artists were accommodated as a supplement which did not disturb the mainstream lineage of artistic achievement.

We know this because rewriting art histories—for instance, through artwork labels in museums—continues to be flagged up as feminist art projects today.<sup>20</sup>

Diversifying the curriculum will never take care of the problems I am pointing to above. And *decolonising* the curriculum, about which we hear so much nowadays, certainly does *not* mean diversifying it. To decolonise means to remove the staples of dominant discourses and the embedded ideology that underpins them from the whatever curriculum. Yet, the spatial logic has so far led to a moral imperative of polite inclusivity rather than the critical exclusions that an examination of historical factuality might suggest. Tied to the ideological dominance of spatial politics, diversity has been, overall, co-extensive with positive visibility and a politics of recognition fashioned to honour the former. I have already addressed above the elementary concerns that arise when visibility is offered to the victimised rather than the perpetrators: the latter can carry on being visible, enhancing the distorting additive model that hides from view their ongoing power over the victimised. Where feminism is concerned, a politics of strategic exclusion has mainly taken the form of parenthetical (read “partial”) women-only shows—an art-world separatism that is seen, mostly, as outmoded today. Now to the politics of recognition: they have gradually come to dominate emancipatory politics in the art world since the 1970s. There is much to say here, but to keep to the focus of these reflections, I will just say that recognition always implies a modality of differentiation from “the many.” Greg Sholette’s “dark matter” analogy should suffice: an undifferentiated invisible mass is necessary for the few art-world “stars” to shine.<sup>21</sup> Sure, some of these stars can be women, or non-white people. And yet, looking deeper we see that recognition is anchored on the culture of meritocracy which is immensely useful to liberalism, which sustains neoliberalism. As we recently argued with Nizan Shaked in *OnCurating*,

meritocracy imagines that a society giving everyone the chance to “develop” will naturally lead to the best accruing rewards. And so, the *natural inequality that will arise out of culturally ensured equal opportunity* will, in a familiar loop, be the justification for the competition principle (that the market ideology, and especially the deregulated market ideology, needs) to carry on. This is the logic that presently informs all art institutions that are committed to equality and diversity but are forced to also honour the competition principle. It is the culture that strives for inclusivity while it revels when a figure signifying difference scoops an award.<sup>22</sup>

The “equality of positioning” then that Haraway sees as the threat of relativism is an *ideological effect* of structural, foundational inequality. If “in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a camera obscura,” as put by Marx, “the equality of positioning” inverts the social relations that give rise to it.<sup>23</sup> These relations are reproduced daily (and “social reproduction,” a key concept of feminist critique, finds several conceptual applications here yet primarily its anchoring in temporality) not by chance but through highly specific mechanisms ranging from coercion to consent. Before we think about women in these mechanisms, it should be said that the latter are also characterised by *duration*, which is why it is so hard to change them. (Duration, in the art exhibition universe, translates to prestige—just think of the Venice Biennale, documenta, etc.). The reason that the figure of revolution has been prominent in some emancipatory politics is precisely because revolution promises an *abrupt break of the durational and daily reproduced, and thus naturalised or hidden, relations*. Revolution, in other words, uses time (indeed, an exceptional temporality) against the reproduction of space as we know it. This is why it has been imperative for

capitalism to not only defeat actual revolutions of the subaltern, but also demonise and delegitimise the concept of revolution as such—by reducing it to “terrorism.” An additional ideological strategy against revolution has been, however, appropriation: to call a revolution what is not. This has been the most interesting strategy, including if and how feminism is implicated in it.

## 2. The Gap between a Feminism of Positionality and the Need for a Big Picture

Sheila Rowbotham published *Women, Resistance and Revolution: A History of Women and Revolution in the Modern World* in 1972. One of the most important books one may ever read about women and time even fifty years later, it made clear to me that women, as the subject addressed by modern feminism, never had their own revolution (that is without linking their own emancipation to another revolutionary cause). They never rose to claim the instantaneous rupture and the immediate, furious overturning of the *status quo* that oppresses and exploits them. And yet, we find the word “revolution” in philosophy addressing gender and sexuality, and we hear often about women’s revolution in art.

Recently, Fanny Söderbäck’s *Revolutionary Time: On Time and Difference in Kristeva and Irigaray* (2019) examined these two philosophers’ efforts to address women’s affiliation to cyclical time, “a temporal structure [that] works to maintain the conception of women as embodied creatures reduced to spatiality and repetition.”<sup>24</sup> Predictably, revolution here is thought of as a future-oriented time of “becoming.” It is a long-drawn process with an open future—and as such it lacks, precisely, a concrete revolutionary vision as much as it severs itself from the idea of a break. In art, “revolution” has had an equally complex but perhaps darker fate. It describes mostly the transference of feminism as a social movement in the art field. This was a fervent process that did entail strategies and objectives, internal fights, a degree of disobedience, a lot of activism, groundbreaking ideas and practices—as seen in Lynn Hershman Leeson’s important documentary *!WAR Women Art Revolution* (2010). There was organised radicalism—that is certain. But given that the visibility politics (politics of recognition as described above) prevailed, the expression of this social movement in art sought change that aimed at women’s incorporation and inclusion in the field it critiqued. Italian art critic Carla Lonzi’s distancing from the art world because she understood it as being structurally against feminism is the closest to a revolutionary consciousness—but abandoning the art world is not the same as revolting in terms of overthrowing the status quo that has shaped it.<sup>25</sup> That said, could a feminist revolution occur just in *one* sub-context of oppression—in one, in fact, that bears a distinct class stamp despite efforts to overcome it? The transference of what is a social process into a context that has maintained its purposeful distance from the social (think of all the “art *and* society” titles you know) can either be accepted as metaphorical license or else it is pure idealism.

In the widely discussed roundtable “Feminist Time” (2008), which considered recent feminist curating and exhibitions since 2007 had been deemed “the year of feminism,” Rosalyn Deutsche drew on Marxist philosopher Alain Badiou’s concept of “event” to describe feminism and referred to time:

An event is something that happens in a situation, something that supplements and reveals the void of the order within which the event takes place—for example, the political order. [...] Feminism was an event because it disrupted the phallogentrism of traditional left political projects. [...] Feminism is a more

democratic form of politics, one capable of political transformation as it articulates with other political aims and projects. [...] [F]eminist history takes place in the tense of future anterior because in it the past is conditional on an inconclusive future. The past isn't there to be recovered. Rather, past actions gain meaning—they are what will have happened—as feminism mutates into something other.<sup>26</sup>

In 2022, with neo-authoritarianism and the Alt-right on the rise and the backlash against feminist advances so widely felt, we might have more questions on the above than early in 2008, when the global financial crisis had not quite become *the* event of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Although there is no doubt that second-wave feminism challenged phallogentrism, the global data of the persistently patriarchal capitalism are dismal.<sup>27</sup> There has been no sustained and sustainable disruption, while feminists such as Hester Eisenstein and Nancy Fraser, active since the second wave, have detailed how capitalism used feminist claims to introduce a world order of greater inequality, diminished labour rights, and deadly precarity, while today “women’s rights” do feature in anti-immigrant biopolitics.<sup>28</sup> As for feminism’s relationship to democracy, this is complicated and certainly not straightforward: if you look back to the forgotten history of first-wave feminism, you will find Suffragettes who became fascists (Mary Richardson who famously attacked *Rockeby Venus* in a militant foundational act of feminism against the art institution!); feminists who denied working-class women voting rights;<sup>29</sup> but also the radical gender politics and writings of women revolutionaries in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that are largely excised today from feminist memory. Why isn’t this past there to be recovered? What knowledges would be gained from such recovery and a study of these ensembles of contradictions? I am also concerned with the idea of a constantly mutating feminism, especially if what determines the mutation is (left) unknown. That feminism has been pluralised into feminisms—in ways that do not prevent but encourage *antagonistic* conceptualisations of feminism—is already an effect of feminism being overdetermined by conditions that do not enter feminist consciousness.

These observations hopefully open to a questioning of the trajectory of feminism, and its understanding of its own history—precisely, in art *and* society. Art and society are not, of course, equivalent terms for feminist politics. Griselda Pollock had rightly talked about “feminist interventions” in art making and its histories.<sup>30</sup> But such interventions are “feminist” *only if they serve social change* guided by a feminist vision. (A generation of feminist art historians strove to show how images of women in art and visual culture connected to the oppression of women in the world.) For several years already, to have feminisms rather than feminism has implied that feminism has been working without a vision at best, and with *antithetical visions* at worst. I can’t see how bell hooks’ vision of feminism can co-exist with Sheryl Sandberg’s lean-in feminism, and hooks’ arguments against Sandberg’s back in 2013 already explain why: “dig deep,” she says, or understand history, to move beyond lean-in.<sup>31</sup> Are these parallel feminisms positional, locatable, and partial, to return to Haraway? No, unless we concede that Sandberg’s is located in her class privilege and hooks’ in her black-woman experience. But hooks’ experience makes her see that the feminism advocated by Sandberg is no feminism at all, because it perpetuates the subordination of most women on Earth and empowers their oppressors.

Should we imagine a curatorial project featuring works that correspond to hooks and Sandberg? I note here, again, that “display” is necessarily a spatialising concept and context. For the feminist curator to work against this magnetism of spatiality, a special

effort must be made towards a view of time that allows the presentation of *interwoven, but not common*, histories. If not, we do end up with a display as an “equality of positions.” In the art institution as we know it, we can have a diversity-sensitive curatorial project where the artists of countries ravaged by the lithium wars can show work alongside the artists from the imperialist countries that ravage them. This would be considered a good thing on the grounds of visibility and the politics of recognition as so far interpreted. In fact, this *is* the dominant model of exhibition inclusivity. It is a model that rescripts political imperatives as ethical frameworks and that implies a call for the peaceful co-existence of the oppressed with their oppressor. And so, Haraway writes: “There is no single feminist standpoint because our maps require too many dimensions for that metaphor to ground our vision,”<sup>32</sup> I am not so sure. I think there is no single feminist standpoint because women are locked into a global history of antagonisms among unequal forces—in short, because women have exploited, and continue to exploit, women; and because maps are inadequate representational tools when it comes to tracing causes and effects. Feminist curating cannot be reduced to the display-based reconciliation whereby Afghan women artists are merely shown alongside women artists that have benefited from imperial(ist) feminism—a point that hides more historical complexity and enforced complicity than I am able to discuss here.

With this in mind, Haraway’s assertion that “feminism is about a critical vision consequent upon a critical positioning in unhomogeneous gendered social space” might be construed as an epistemological weakness of feminism.<sup>33</sup> The gendered social space is not unhomogeneous—rather, it *tends* to be homogeneous where structures are concerned, as we are all subject to legal frameworks that organise gender relations, as there are international treaties that suggest this or that in relation to gender, as we travel with gendered passports, as we endure the pandemic of gender violence, as social reproduction is scripted as persistently gendered across continents. Nation-states use “their” women as property to plan demographic policies in a global context designed, precisely, as a web and a network, where everyone finds their place in the central planning done by, and for, capital. The wide applicability in recent years of the term “biopolitics,” as the large-scale management of life and lives so as to maintain the state of things, highlights this, and it is in this context that antagonisms proliferate, that power over others becomes materialised so as to generate hierarchical “difference”.

Thinking of biopolitics, during *documenta 14*, in 2017, a group of LGBTQ+ refugees hired as collaborators of an artist stole the stone they were given to carry around symbolically (a replica of an ancient stone from Socrates’ trial) and refused to give it back saying:

You have come to Greece to make art visible, graciously offering to purchase the participation of invisible exoticized “Others”. Your stone is supposed to give us a voice, to speak to our stories. But rocks can’t talk! We can! So, we have stolen your stone and we will not give it back. And like the millions of others who are seeking better lives in Europe, your stone has disappeared. [...] But unlike [for] your stone, no energies have been spent searching for those who have disappeared—not minerals or even artworks, but flesh and bone. And we’ve had more than our fair share of funerals. So, we will use our energies otherwise.<sup>34</sup>

This is not positional knowledge. It is the elementary truth of the homogeneity that biopolitics, scripted as border necropolitics, generate. To have the “contextualised” truth, you’d need to look at the long process of the formation of the dispossessed. What



was positional was the artist's defiance who thanked the refugees for making the artwork become more "visible" while he questioned "their political agenda or their artistic parameters," as *Artforum* relayed.<sup>35</sup> In 1992, during an Alfredo Jaar show at the Whitechapel, London, the girls from racialised communities that were made photographically visible in the gallery rejected this visibility and demanded that their images be removed and not associated with the text that described them. In relation to this incident, Gayatri Spivak argued that shows can be imperfect and fail—fail better!<sup>36</sup> But as discussed by Rasheed Araeen in 2000, identity as visibility for the "other" tends to entrench "the other" in depoliticised victimisation.<sup>37</sup> The "other" may well oppose positionality in favour of the complexity of truth.

### Totalising?

To conclude, we can, if we want, hear the words of Gorbachev and Reagan from 1988 as merely "positional," "locatable," and "partial". But a knowledge of history, before and since these words, marks them as untrue. How can we make space for truth in our systems of knowledge, even if truth is the hardest to establish? And yet, I can't see how at this moment in history, feminism in the art field would shy away from such a necessary shift. To do so would mean to stay trapped in the political fiction of eternal becoming, of changing with the times, of accepting a pluralism of (sometimes antagonistic) perspectives but rejecting an emancipatory programme for the future. Against the fixation with end-ism that dominated the postmodern milieu, in which Haraway thought of situatedness as an adequate premise against relationality, today "The End of the End of History" is on the agenda. Today, we need to ask: how can feminism oppose "a world-historical scenario in which one people's history has permanently dominated that of all others—the end of history by fiat?"<sup>38</sup> Although this was said about American hegemony, the emergence of BRIC countries at the turn of the century as contenders to the throne<sup>39</sup> – an imperialist throne made by appropriated social wealth, a throne dripping the blood of the subalterns – implied a far more complex, but no less brutal, course for globalisation. In 2022, the only imaginable end of history is by climate destruction or by nuclear holocaust – two prospects that call for transitioning from "situated knowledges" to our common truth.

Dialogue and listening do not presuppose the absence of coherent political visions on the part of the interlocutors—and we can no longer be stuck in the intellectual privilege of favouring criticality over factuality. Femicides are a fact; the offshores of the wealthy are a fact; the 13,000 nuclear warheads on the planet are another fact; the move of the dispossessed as migrants and refugees yet another, as is the use of fascist values against the very possibility of a united, revolutionary class of the people—including women locked in "unproductive" labour and prisoners who have no choice—who make wealth only to see it privatised in the hands of the very few.

To persist with feminism as a politics, we then need boundaries and criteria regarding what practices are accommodated. Is truth such a criterion? Working towards a totalising feminist vision, *contra* Haraway, would have us examine arguments and test evidence, and detect connections that are lost when we succumb to positionality. The *Feminism for the 99%* manifesto of 2019 pointed in this direction already in striving for an overview and a propositional feminist politics.<sup>40</sup> Yet, in 2022, the escalation of conflict and the divides that imperialisms realise signal a huge challenge on feminist epistemologies. Being positional is a tactic; but building strategies for struggle (including the struggle for feminist unity) requires access to the biggest, and deeper, picture possible. Or, put another way, building strategies for struggle needs a political deployment of knowledge to uncover the historical trajectories that end up forming

social truth as a “contemporary.” If not, we may even lose sight of the gap between the noble and often ambitious intentions of our projects in the field and the social reality that naturalises the power these projects seemingly oppose.

*This article is based on the paper “Situating the Gap,” presented at the online conference Situated Knowledges: Art and Curating on the Move, organised by Shared Campus Universities PhD students, Tai Kwun, Hong Kong, and Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich, on 26-27 June 2021.*

## Notes

- 1** Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective”, in: *Feminist Studies* 14 (1988).
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- 4** See Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015); Colin Crouch, *Post-Democracy* (London: Wiley, 2004); Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Spectre of Capital* (London: Verso, 2013); Nancy MacLean, *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right’s Stealth Plan for America* (New York: Penguin, 2017); Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, trans. Steve Corcoran (London: Verso, 2006).
- 5** See George Liodakis, *Totalitarian Capitalism and Beyond* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Enzo Traverso, *The New Faces of Fascism: Populism and the Far Right*, trans. David Broder (London: Verso, 2019); Berch Berberoglu, *The Global Rise of Authoritarianism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2021); Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen, *Late Capitalist Fascism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2022).
- 6** See <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ronaldreaganmoscowstateuniversity.htm>.
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- 9** See <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/article/lithium-is-fueling-technology-today-at-what-cost> and <https://newrepublic.com/article/159848/socialist-win-bolivia-new-era-lithium-extraction>.
- 10** See <https://twitter.com/evoespueblo/status/1287064230835957762>.
- 11** See <https://newrepublic.com/article/159848/socialist-win-bolivia-new-era-lithium-extraction>.
- 12** Hiroko Tabuchi, ‘Before Invasion, Ukraine’s Lithium Wealth Was Attracting Global Attention’, *The New York Times*, March 2, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/02/climate/ukraine-lithium.html>
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- 14** On this, see Grant Kester, "Lessons in Futility: Francis Alÿs and the Legacy of May '68," *Third Text* 23, No. 4 (2009): 407-420
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**37** Rasheed Araeen, "A New Beginning: Beyond Postcolonial Cultural Theory and Identity Politics," *Third Text* 4, no. 50 (2000): 3-20.

**38** Maximilian Alvarez, "The End of the End of History," *Boston Review*, 25 March 2019, <http://bostonreview.net/print-issues-politics/maximilian-alvarez-end-end-history>. Originally in the print copy of the *Boston Review* titled "Evil Empire," Fall 2018.

**39** BRIC stands for Brazil, Russia, India and China. The acronym was coined in 2001 by British economist Terence James O' Neill. In 2010, BRIC changed to BRICS with the addition of South Africa. The 14<sup>th</sup> BRICS Summit (2022), chaired by China, states that BRICS "conforms to the historical trend of a multi-polar world and economic globalization".

**40** Cinizia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, Nancy Fraser, *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto* (London: Verso, 2019).

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# Training for Together: Extended Bodies Exercise

## Jeanne van Heeswijk and Whitney Stark

The exploratory qualities of the arts can help to collectively renegotiate conditions of our existences and imagine possible futures. How to understand the conditions of power and enact actions for change? How to move toward collectivity despite differences? How might new organizational and economic forms emerge, and how might these emerge from existing practices in all their complexity and contradiction?

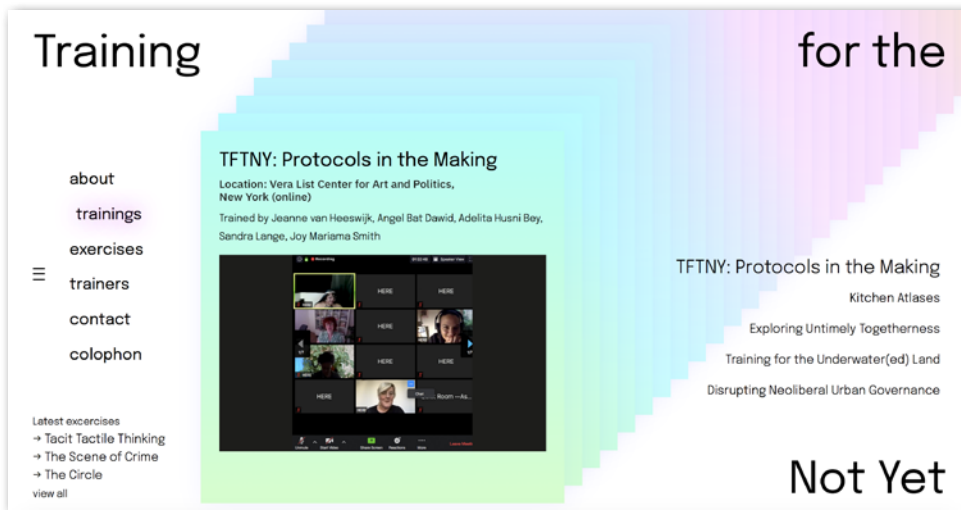
These are political questions, and they are also questions of the imaginary.

Jeanne van Heeswijk's *Training for the Not-Yet* (TFNY, 2016-ongoing) is a series of radical experiments in collective pedagogy that she has been developing since 2016. The ongoing series commits to training for a world yearned—the not-yet—through mutualizing community knowledges and learnings. In its first manifestation *Trainings for the Not-Yet*<sup>1</sup>, an exhibition as series of trainings for a future of being together otherwise, took place in 2019-2020 in BAK, basis for actuele kunst. This iteration involved a wide range of practitioners from (social) design, dance, film, architecture, science, education, art, activism, and different aspects of society gather to train each other in practices and knowledges of social engagement, radical collectivity, and active empowerment.

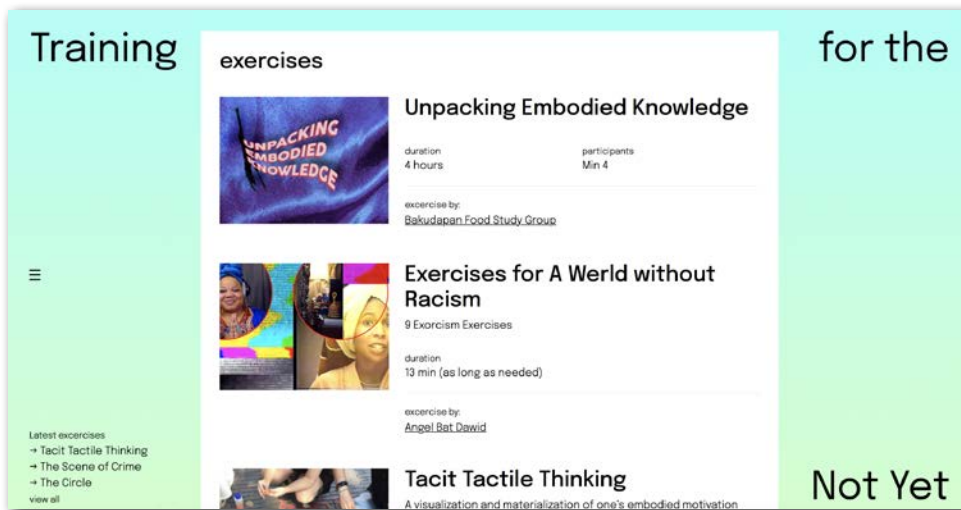
*TFNY* aims to create and enact conditions in which those who struggle against structural violence and unbalanced resource distribution can collectively inhabit alternative imaginaries. And it especially helps to strengthen the transversal relations among them without requiring anyone know in advance what may emerge or how it might go.

Aimee Carrillo Rowe describes belongings as “the movement from being constituted as an individual self to ‘be longing’ towards the other [community, another person, an object, a space, a place, a feeling, an urgency], thus creating a type of fluid relationality.”<sup>2</sup> Our belongings are deeply rooted in experiences, definitions, political conditions, and power relations. Learning and understanding our belongings allows us to actively question, imagine, and tinker with our relations to one another, our surrounding world, and structures of power.

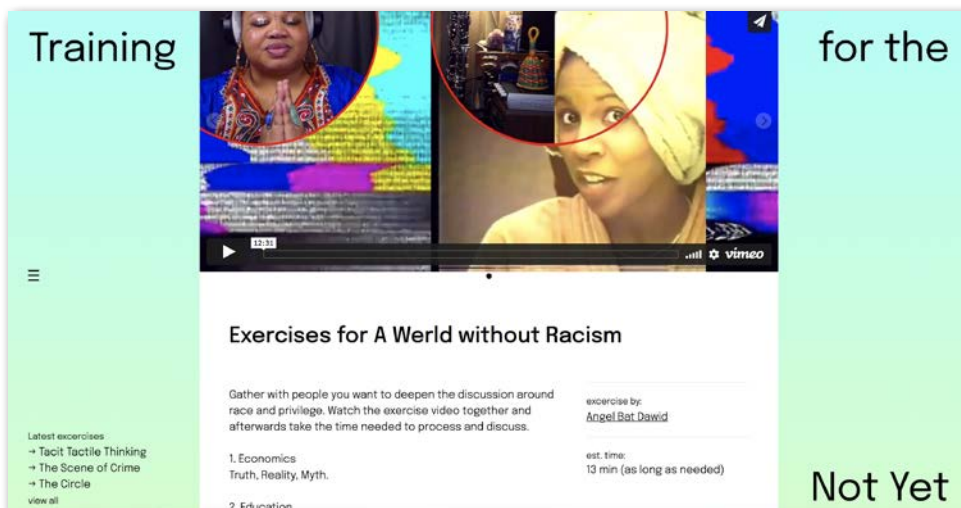
Understanding the collective—a belonging—as a performative activity, we can approach the notion not as a pre-existing social structure but as actively becoming in context. *TFNY* is driven by the ideal that if only the extraordinary wealth of community competence generated from everyday life and ordinary struggles for survival could be linked up, we could build new, radical forms beyond what seems thinkable today. We don't always know where to begin, and we do not necessarily share lived realities with those with whom we want to build. It is important to create independent community spaces that can accommodate people's myriad realities, collective learning, and production, and allow makers to pool their resources and strengthen their ties, knitting stronger networks and building embodied, relevant imaginations of care.



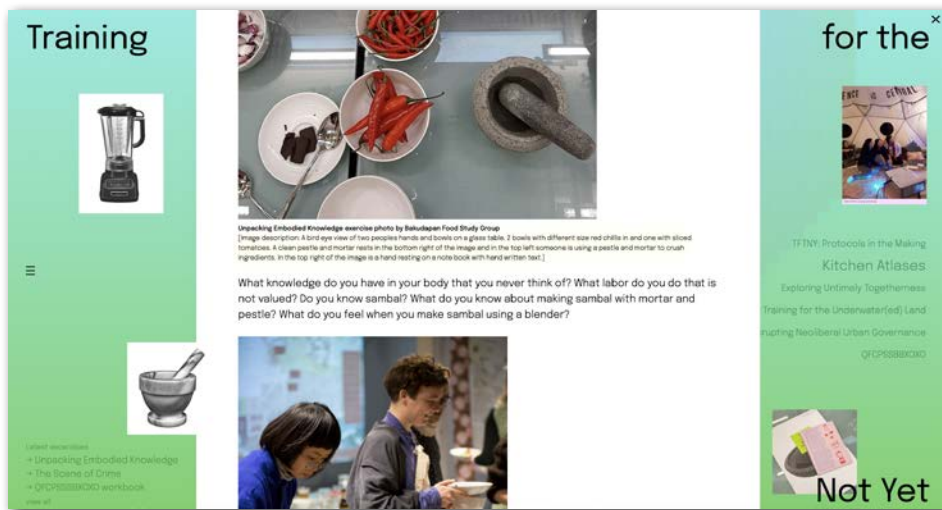
Training for the Not-Yet – A collective online publishing platform, homepage



Training for the Not-Yet – A collective online publishing platform, exercise page



Training for the Not-Yet – A collective online publishing platform, 'Exercises for A Werld without Racism' exercise by Angel Bat Dawid



Training for the Not-Yet – A collective online publishing platform, 'Kitchen Atlases' training page by Bakudapan Food Study Group



Training for the Not-Yet – A collective online publishing platform, 'Mad about Study' training page by Joy Mariama Smith

Imagining unprecedented ways of being together means listening to one another, becoming frustrated and uncomfortable, and practicing learning and unlearning together. It is an open, paradoxical, durational process, with steep learning curves and uncertainties for all involved. And it is incredibly nourishing.

A curriculum of community learnings has emerged and transformed within *TFNY* through written texts, in-person and online training, talks, exhibitions, workshops, study sessions, writings, into a collective online publishing platform from an open-access website of toolkits and training curricula, and through programming that brings together people, communities, ideas, objects, art, food, research, politics, performances, screenings, and learnings. The hope is that *TFNY* collective publishing platform becomes a sort of open-source resource guide and toolbox for those within communities of solidarity, for care, accessibility, imagination, and agency—to (re)design the present and train for the future. To make change in meaningful, effective ways.

Trainers' exercises explore themes like traditions, food, power structures, race, land use, plants, care, consent, alternative economies, and conviviality. They host embodied forms of learning that connect to a wide set of urgencies and imaginaries that shape personal, cultural, creative, social, and political landscapes.

As an example and a resource, we share with you an exercise created by Whitney Stark: "Extended Bodies, Operationalizing Theory: A Guided Practice." This, its audio component, and other exercises can be found at <https://trainingforthenotyet.net/>.

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## Notes

**1** Trainings for the Not-Yet, BAK basis for actuele kunst, Utrecht, 14 September 2019-12 January 2020, <https://www.bakonline.org/program-item/trainingsforthenotyet.net/>.

**2** Aimee Carrillo Rowe. "Be Longing: Toward a Feminist Politics of Relation." *NWSA Journal* 17, no. 2 (2005): 15-46. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4317124>.

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**Jeanne van Heeswijk** is an artist who facilitates the creation of dynamic and diversified public spaces in order to "radicalize the local". Her long-scale community-embedded projects question art's autonomy by combining performative actions, discussions, and other forms of organizing and pedagogy in order to assist communities to take control of their own futures.



## Extended Bodies, Operationalizing Theory: A Guided Practice

By Whitney Stark  
2021

*This is a performative guided thinking/experiencing exercise that goes through ideas of space, connection, accountability, bodies, materiality and ways of spatializing and thinking. This can be listened to or read alone or in groups. It was designed as a way of entering collective or group conversations and practices.*

*This annotated transcript, which points to some references that this exercise draws in, on, from and with, accompanies an audio file of the recorded version available on the Trainings for the Not-Yet website. You can choose to listen or read or both. I invite you to make yourself comfortable, in whatever way that means for you – sitting with eyes closed, taking a walk, or whatever feels alright. Feel free to pause, stop, return.*

Breathe.

Breathe in through your nose for 3... 2... 3  
and out through your mouth for 4...2...3...4

in 2, 3

out 2, 3, 4

in 2, 3

out 2, 3, 4

feel the cold prickles of the air as it goes – how deep can you feel it inside?

Concentrate.

Can you feel it now elsewhere?

feel its movement?

Think through the feeling of its movement.

(breathe)

breathe out.

As you take your breaths, give honor to what is in them, the particles, the air that circulates between, through; moving inside and outside of our bodies. Touching crevices, exchanging, oxifying, carrying into and out and into another again.  
 Feel the warmth that is present in the cool.

What do you consider a body? (bodily)<sup>1</sup>  
 An object? (discipline)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Frantz Fanon declares in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), and Arun Saldanha later discusses (2006), in the operations of racialization of Black people through/by whiteness and white people "I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects" (82). He continues later: "In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third person consciousness. The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty" (ibid.). Judith Butler, in many texts, speaks of the ways in which bodies come to (be) matter, for instance: "the body is not merely matter but a continual and incessant *materializing* of possibilities" (1988, original emphasis, 521). Donna Haraway, in "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" (1985) questions why the body should end at the skin. Often this is interpreted to think about mechanical technologies, like computers, phones, implants, etc. extending what is understood as the human body as, for instance, cyborg. However, this can also be read to include teleological technologies, like social constructs, histories, communities, and many other bodies that are often considered immaterial and thus not (the) matter. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, [1952] 1968); Saldanha, "Reontologising Race: The Machinic Geography of Phenotype," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 24 (2006): 9-24; Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theater Journal* 49 (1988): 519-531; Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," *Socialist Review* 15, no. 2 (1985): 65-107.

<sup>2</sup> Haraway frequently discusses the creation of boundaries and "what counts as an object," and how that constructs narratives – or what kinds of narratives seem possible – like hegemonic histories and understandings. See, for instance, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Autumn, 1988): 575-599. See also Karen Barad's discussions of objects and apparatuses, "Getting Real: Technoscientific Practices and the Materialization of Reality," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (1988): 87-128.

How do we decide that we decide a certain visuality,<sup>3</sup> arrangement of prioritized ideas<sup>4</sup> of closeness, kin, intimacy decide what is tangible, manipulatable, technological, logical, natural, affect(ive/ing), intuitive, alive, agential, singular<sup>5</sup>; the thing that can be inside or outside the other thing that has an inside and outside?<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Barad addresses optics, explaining how particular hierarchies of visuality produce biases in hegemonic understandings of truth and matter (2003).

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Povinelli describes ontology as “an arrangement of existents at/on/in the plane of existence. We are, in other words, grappling with a meta-existence-existence dynamic. Entities and their arrangements are immanent to the plane of existence. But the plane of existence is also immanent in relation to itself and the entities it produces. In other words, *the* plane of existence is not *one* plane of existence. It is always more than one, even as it is becoming hegemonic or maintaining its hegemony. Why? The plane of existence is the given order of existents-as-arrangement. But every arrangement installs its own possible derangements and rearrangements” in “Geontologies of the Otherwise,” *Society for Cultural Anthropology* (2014): <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/geontologies-of-the-otherwise> last accessed October 7, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> See Saldanha’s discussion of slime molds and emergence (2006), which thinks through the slipperiness of collectivity and singularity using the structure of slime molds.

<sup>6</sup> Barad explains “What often appears as separate entities (and separate sets of concerns) with sharp edges does not actually entail a relation of absolute exteriority at all... the relation of the social and the scientific is a relation of ‘exteriority within.’ This is not a static relation but a doing – an enactment of boundaries – that always entails constitutive exclusions and therefore requisite questions of accountability” (2003, 803). Sara Ahmed offers an affective understanding of what creates the skins and boundaries of objects explaining that “emotions work to create the very distinction between the inside and the outside” (2004, 28). Or, Ahmed explains, “emotions play a crucial role in the ‘surfacing’ of individual and collective bodies... they define the contours of the multiple worlds that are inhabited by different subjects” (ibid., 25), “they ‘affect’ the very distinction of inside and outside in the first place” (ibid., 29). Additionally, Butler, in *Bodies that Matter*, proposes “a notion of matter, not as a site or surface, but as a *process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce its effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter*” (1993, original emphasis, 9), and how bodies that do not meet the considered norm become not understood as bodies, or not materialized, and then are deemed to serve as the outside of (the deemed) bodies (15-16). This could be read to mean that the consideration of some as non-normative humans or outside the ‘standard’ of human (those not meeting a Western centered hierarchy of

Feel the parts of what you deem your body,

What seems to act as your body, at their boundaries? Feel the  
static, the cold, the warmth  
Notice how it feels to feel this space amongst spaces as  
boundary.

Listen to the ways and vibrations and my spit echo in the  
sounds.

Can you feel the movement of the matter?  
Colliding, taking shapes, diffracting, marking, denting,  
pushing.

Focus; center on something you consider a material part of what  
you understand as your body most readily.

Do you feel something now? What does it feel like if you do?  
Can you locate the atoms?

The pain?

The memories?

The melancholy?

How many things shift there? Can you pinpoint  
it? Does it move? fluctuate?

Can you feel the spaces between what is in movement or settled?

And if between and felt,  
how between?  
Between what?

Feel the meeting space. Feel "yourself" solidify and diffuse in  
tandem; inextricably as processes of each other.<sup>7</sup>

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white, male, able-bodied, heterosexual, etc.) creates an Other, and propositionally also to mean bodies not of linear spatial and temporal closeness, for instance social identities: which are often not considered bodies with multiple parts and people making them up, but as the immaterial social stuff between and moving bodies. Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," *Signs: Journal of Western Culture and Society* 2, no. 3 (Spring 2003): 801-831; Ahmed, "Collective Feelings: Or, the Impressions Left by Others," *Theory, Culture & Society* 21, no. 2 (2004): 25-42; Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> Barad (1998) discusses Niels Bohr's scientific and philosophical conceptions of object and apparatus and how cuts, or the decisions

Put your hand or a felt body part, if you can, on an "object."

Multiplicities of particles have changed form, exchanged,  
electrons jumped in the process.

Can you feel the space between *it* and the object?

What are these felt spaces between?

focus.

Shift again on a part inside of your felt body that you do not usually seem to feel unless experiencing pain.<sup>8</sup>

Concentrate.                      Center.                      Bring its feeling  
primary.

Know you feel it even as it is not pain.

it is connected and moving. It is part.

extend out.

feel your body's boundaries, their connections, extensions.

Where do you hold tension? Weight? Sediment?

Feel outside your body.

The edges.

Know they are real even if not as pain.

bring its feeling primary.

the body as a viscous<sup>9</sup> and congealed gathering of  
identities, histories, particles, water, flesh, electrons

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that determine the boundaries of an object are conditional to the apparatus within which a measurement occurs. Meaning, what counts as an object or force, and also what then is outside or not the object or force, depends on conditions, what is to be measured or understood, and the formulation of objectivity.

<sup>8</sup> See Ahmed's (2004) discussion on the legacy of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic understandings of pain and how the flowing of feelings that come to be understood as pain establish surfaces.

<sup>9</sup> Saldanha explains, "The spatiality of race is not one of grids or self/other dialectics, but one of viscosity, bodies gradually becoming sticky and clustering into aggregates" (2006, 10), and later continues "Neither perfectly fluid nor solid, the viscous invokes surface tension and resistance to perturbation and mixing. Viscosity means that the physical characteristics of a substance explain its unique movements. There are local and temporary thickenings of interacting bodies, which then collectively become sticky, capable of capturing more bodies like them: an emergent slime mold. Under certain circumstances, the collectivity dissolves,

operating in what is decided and enacted as a political body or field or something-as-such; as you.<sup>10</sup>

settle.

What bodies shift through, solidifying, congeal, concentrate in your body? your presence?<sup>11</sup>  
Feel your extended body.

What do you bring in the room when you enter?

Feel the social bodies that settle in you. Sediment. that extend from your physicalized form.

Your identities, social categories, experiences, memories. Feel how they are ingrained in, inextricable from the body-as-named.<sup>12</sup>

Feel how they extend from the body-as-named.<sup>13</sup>

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the constituent bodies flowing freely again. The world is an immense mass of viscosities, becoming thicker here, and thinner there" (ibid., 18).

<sup>10</sup> I have previously (2017) written more extensively on this notion of the body as a political gathering, and how this might help to be accountable with taking up different kinds of space in different situations. Whitney Stark, "Assembled Bodies: Reconfiguring Quantum Identities," *Minnesota Review* 88 (2017): 69-82.

<sup>11</sup> "Materialization is an iteratively intra-active process whereby material-discursive bodies are sedimented out of the intra-action of multiple material-discursive apparatuses through which these phenomena (bodies) become intelligible" (Barad, 1998, 108). And, "The organization of social and bodily space creates a border that is transformed into an object, [which happens also] as an effect of... intensification of feeling... reform[ing] social space through reforming the apartness... Or, to be more precise, the skin comes to be felt as a border through reading the impression of one surface upon another as a form of negation" (Ahmed, 2004, 33).

<sup>12</sup> Ahmed explains how emotions are "what attaches us, what connects us to this or that place, or to this or that other, such that we cannot stay removed from this other, is also what moves us, or what affects us such that we are no longer in the same place. Hence movement does not cut the body off from the 'where' of its inhabitation, but connects bodies to other bodies... The relationship between movement and attachment is contingent, and this suggests that movement may affect different others differently" (2004, 27).

<sup>13</sup> Saldanha's speculative mapping helps to think how these kinds of extended bodies may be recognized: "What conventional sociological and geographical conceptions of 'class', 'company', and 'racism'

Notice the space in the room. The space taken up when you move through space.<sup>14</sup> What you bring. What is kin. What is dragged with you, floating around you, shooting through you, emanating from you, soldered to you.<sup>15</sup>

expand the border of body.

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lack is a sense of how these are glued together by bodies – bodies which could theoretically all be mapped by mobile global positioning systems. Imagine time-geography not for one body, but for thousands simultaneously, and in real time. Then imagine all these trajectories colored, with gross simplification, according to the affects fuelling them: famine, pleasure, fear, heroism. The trajectories rapidly become entangled, creating local concentrations of hue, hazy and dynamic like clouds. The impossibility of representing planetary complexity like this should not keep us from theorizing what exactly makes it impossible: simultaneous mass embodiment” (2420–2421). Saldanha, “Skin, Affect, Aggregation: Guattarian Variations on Fanon,” *Environment and Planning* 42 (2010): 2410–2427.

<sup>14</sup> A common phrase in many discussions regarding activist and pedagogical organizing, especially organizing in ways that do not replicate oppressive patterns, is that people relatively privileged in a group tend to “take up a lot of space,” often not consciously recognizing that they/we are doing so or that we/they are assuming an entitlement to do so. For instance, this could be masculine (whatever that means) people in mixed discussion, those whose native language is being used in a conversation with those who may be less confident in the language being used, those that experience white privilege, etc. This space can be “physical,” as in spreading arms and legs over multiple chairs or couch space, though this space is most often referred to as space in conversation, so speaking first and/or for long periods of time, continuing to pull the center of conversation to the topics they are most interested in or which affect them in ways they feel as most directly, etc. Saldanha asks after “a concept of space in which fixity can emerge from flux under certain conditions” (2016, 18) and proposes the term viscosity, mentioned in FN 9.

<sup>15</sup> Fanon discusses how in the racial schema invoked through a white child being afraid of him and his interpellated Blackness, he becomes “responsible at the same time for [his] body, for [his] race, for [his] ancestors” and the harmful stereotypes that have been created to keep hierarchical order in this racial schema (1952, 84).





1. Think of the spreads that enact the structures and spatializations of oppression. Think of the ways you can control your spreads like these.<sup>18</sup> What can you do to shrink back? Where *does* and also *where* should that indicate something may be *not your place*?
2. Think of a part of you often structurally pushed out, made to feel crowded, out of place<sup>19</sup>, pushed away. Think of a time when that part was embellished, treasured, given space and nourished – when it expanded and blended and intra-acted in the place.<sup>20</sup>

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"purity" of whiteness to certain bodies and threshold of "violation" or "threat" (2004, 26). She goes further to say "feelings make 'the collective' appear as if it were a body in the first place" (ibid., 27), justifying and naturalizing these determined thresholds. She also explores further "impressions left by bodily others" (ibid.), which she later phrases, like Barad, as marks left on bodies. In this case, of course, the threshold and violation may not only be formed via hierarchical racial hatred, nor is the violation only of some claimed purity and/or whiteness. Rather, the setting of thresholds – like that claiming the purity of whiteness – can already push, step on, and violate differentialities and what becomes Othered through their imposing determination. For instance using this example, the racial schema described assigns purity – and thus the possibility for alleged violation – to the deemed white bodies, while simultaneously imagining differing (meaning not-white) bodies to not be capable of those things like purity and violation; this itself is a cutting, shrinking violation.

<sup>18</sup> Many anti-oppressive facilitation practices and alternative pedagogies include concrete practices that are designed to help. For example, see the guides and practices provided by AORTA Anti-Oppressive Resource Training Alliance, "Resources," <http://aorta.coop/resources/> last accessed October 7, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Katherine McKittrick discusses (Western colonial) Man's geography and conceptions of (un)habitability, space and place, and how the "place of black women is deemed unrecognizable because their ontological existence is both denied and deniable as a result of regimes of colonialism, racism-sexism, transatlantic slavery, European intellectual systems, patriarchy, white femininity, and white feminism" and questions "present geographic organization" (133) in order to respatialize. McKittrick, "Demonic Grounds: Sylvia Wynter," in *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 121-142.

<sup>20</sup> Audre Lorde explains, "My fullest concentration of energy is available to me only when I integrate all the parts of who I am, openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow

What made that possible? What were the conditions? The arrangements?

What bodies were felt as immediately present – and which not?

Settle.

Feel the expanded and diffuse of your body. the pulses, closenesses, movements, intimacies, settlings, changes, the solidities, expanses

feel it congeal and solidify; feel it entangled; tie elsewhere not close

When you're ready, acclimate again in the room  
feel your body felt as body-as-named  
breathe in and out

move parts, roll shoulders, open lips, assess space.

*This exercise was developed during research supported by the COST Action Network and FACT Liverpool and was originally presented during the workshop "Toward Quantum Affectivity and the Materiality of Being Together," held November 21, 2017 as part of the New Materialist Training School "Thinking with agency – towards a materialization of a new materialist politics," Barcelona.*

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back and forth freely through all my different selves, without the restrictions of externally imposed definition. Only then can I bring myself and my energies as a whole to the service of those struggles which I embrace as part of my living" (120-121) in "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," in *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984), 114-123.

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**Whitney Stark** is a theorist and facilitator who works with alternative pedagogies and organizational practices, theory, resource advocacy, and the space of art to embellish relevant models for being together in less oppressive ways. Stark currently is a researcher working with analogue audiovisual practices and experimental research methodology, and has served as a co-chair in the COST Action group on new materialisms, co-founder and Curator of the Fellowship Program and Summer School at BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, journalist and editor, as well as an educator and youth worker. Stark guides various workshops and trainings on issues related to gender and racial oppressions, anti-oppressive facilitation and organizing practices, collective authoring, feminist new materialisms, safer spaces, critical media production, and trauma-informed approaches at places such as the BAK Summer School, BAK, Bratislava and Utrecht, 2017–2019; Santa Monica, Barcelona, 2017; Tate Modern, London, 2016; as well as with activist collectives, groups of young people, NGOs, and international conferences. Stark's curricula and other forms of writing and video have been published in academic journals, textbooks, exhibitions and news media sites.

# Situated Knowledges and Interdependence in the Exhibitionary-Educational Complex

## Ronald Kolb

*The world neither speaks itself  
nor disappears in favor of a master decoder.<sup>1</sup>*

Donna Haraway's influential concept of "situated knowledges" came to life in her article "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" in 1988,<sup>2</sup> at a pivotal historical moment on the cusp of the end of the "Cold War," with a conservative (traditionalist) backlash in US politics and society under Ronald Reagan.<sup>3</sup> I want to use her proposal of "situated knowledges" to approximate where we are today, because what Haraway identifies as problematic back then (specifically directed to the scientific discourse at that time), is, in large part, still with us and continues to haunt the cultural fabric and "common sense" to this day. Her text, written with wit and humor against the masculinized scientific objectivity of her time and towards a feminist objectivity,<sup>4</sup> promotes recognition of one's positionality and privilege therein.

However, this text does not want to stay in this specific historical context but aims to propose the use of "situated knowledges" as a resilient methodology that, first, resonates in our more than ever intertwined current global context and for future situations, and that, second, can be transported into the curatorial, artistic, and pedagogical field within the exhibitionary complex.

Haraway broadly addresses—as I understand it—the paradigm shift from modernity to postmodernity and has prescribed a specific reductionist narrative of postmodernity (the playfulness of signs as the sole carrier of meaning, dissolving factuality to relativism) to become a somewhat dominant formation within the discourse of truth—where "truth" is only rhetorical practice—, which comes to the full and darkest vision as a revival of a constructivist idea of the construction of truth<sup>5</sup>—post-truth apologists and "fake news" devotees—ending in a constant struggle for the hegemony over representation and signification.

Haraway's simple but pervasive idea points out that all "knowledge" and therefore forms of "truth" are shaped from a positional perspective: the formation of knowledge is positional, and objectivity is situated in a specific context and environment, historically, societally, culturally, personally, bodily, and embodied.<sup>6</sup> Our positionality inherently determines what is possible to know about an object of research.<sup>7</sup> The concept of situated knowledges therefore "allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see."<sup>8</sup> With this epistemological logic, scientific objectivity needs to be locatable, therefore responsible, and only then can it be held accountable.

In juxtaposition, supposedly neutral and universal objectivity, or a supposedly naturalized "common sense," is likewise positional<sup>9</sup> but has developed a sophisticated apparatus to disguise its positionality as universality. Important to remind us, this historically universalized scientific objectivity is rooted in patriarchal structures and reproduced through the mechanisms of funding, representation, and distribution,

and has been thoroughly explored historically by Michel Foucault through the concept of “discursive formations.”<sup>10</sup>

To be as clear as possible, Haraway does not want to abolish objectivity as a scientific and (cultural?) instrument; instead, she wants to reshape the instruments of objectivity into situated knowledges and thereby preserve (feminist) objectivity and rules of science as a common ground for encounters and discussions. Even if one accepts the positional aspects of objectivity, this should not lead one to dissolve objectivity as a concept or to dismiss science and “truth” as merely biased, leaving “truth” as a legitimate machinery of opinion. In what can be seen as an unfortunate prediction into the future, Haraway already identifies one of the major fissures in most contemporary societies:

So much for those of us who would still like to talk about reality with more confidence than we allow to the Christian Right when they discuss the Second Coming and their being raptured out of the final destruction of the world.<sup>11</sup>

As I find, Haraway proposes a new mode of operation for the discourse of truth—a discourse that was clearly established under bourgeois, capitalist, and patriarchal hegemony, and to a large extent still exists as such. This new mode of operation clearly borrows from Michel Foucault’s “discursive formation,” although Haraway opposes it, in part because of its indifference to various “subjugated” or excluded subjects (and positions) in relation to the sovereign. Her proposal changes the relation of the operation of the discourse of truth, from universal rationality to positional rationality, to a web of positional knowledge. The rejection of Marxist theory as a totalizing theory is even more evident, which—originally—also does not differentiate intersectionally between the conditions of life and therefore cannot reveal a more adequate account of the world,<sup>12</sup> but she emphasizes staying with Marxian materialist thinking, which insists that the material basis produces the social conditions.

Without shying away from concepts and instruments supposedly drawn from the toolbox of master theory, she takes up the “gaze” in particular as a cultural and scientific instrument to be transformed into a partial vision in order to show how a universalized objectivity not only reduces the view of the world, but also in what ways power is distributed and reproduced through formations of seeing:

This is the gaze that mythically inscribes all the marked bodies, that makes the unmarked category claim the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation. This gaze signifies the unmarked positions of Man and White, one of the many nasty tones of the word “objectivity” to feminist ears in scientific and technological, late-industrial, militarized, racist, and male-dominant societies, that is, here, in the belly of the monster, in the United States in the late 1980s. I would like a doctrine of embodied objectivity that accommodates paradoxical and critical feminist science projects: Feminist objectivity means quite simply *situated knowledges*.<sup>13</sup>

This visual metaphor of the “universal” gaze from “nowhere and everywhere” that marks the observed–cultivated in monotheistic religions and with a long tradition in Western culture—not only exposes the power relation in scientific terms—in post-Marxist terms, one could speak of the ideological apparatus and the function of concealing the real power dynamic, which makes exploitative relations possible—but it also exposes—when applied to the cultural sphere—the dominant discursive formation of

art history, exhibition history, and the formulas of representation of a dominant culture (usually within formerly bourgeois, national, and capitalist frameworks).

The strength of Haraway's proposal is that it does not stop at analysis and the revelation or exposure of generality as a "god trick," but seeks to create and sharpen (scientific) tools that make us aware of our responsible and locatable positions from which we speak. Partiality and situatedness, in this sense, are forms of responsibility to self and others, towards a more precise accountability, and ultimately lead to a different distribution of power by taking into account their own positionality.

### Three Ways to Knowledge

Although Haraway places universal objectivity (the "god trick") and "postmodernity's relativism" at the same end of a certain kind of knowledge production based on a binary system, I would like to position these two paths to knowledge in a triad in which universal knowledge and relativism form opposite ends, with situated knowledges in the middle as the third path.

#### A) The way of knowledge as the "god trick"

Universalist theories (and I would say that even today most theories in philosophy, culture, and science are universal in nature) negate any positioning—they are "unmarked" and therefore not locatable—, making a claim for a totalizing objectivity, speaking from nowhere, while covering everything. This neutrality is in denial of "subjectivity," and voice, and does not allow for agency, as this would also disrupt the hegemonic logic of those in power.

In Haraway's sparkling words:

Knowledge from the point of view of the unmarked is truly fantastic, distorted, and irrational. The only position from which objectivity could not possibly be practiced and honored is the standpoint of the master, the Man, the One God, whose Eye produces, appropriates, and orders all difference. No one ever accused the God of monotheism of objectivity, only of indifference. The god trick is self-identical, and we have mistaken that for creativity and knowledge, omniscience even.<sup>14</sup>

Her approach toward a feminist way of thinking about objectivity aims to shift objectivity away from a universalist approach ("the god trick"—the "conquering gaze from nowhere"<sup>15</sup> or a universalism in the guise of a very specific position—a "Western," male, white, heteronormative, Darwinian(?), world conqueror type, etc.), to a situated objectivity that is based on being aware of and allowing situatedness: that is, a situatedness that is locatable in space and time, that speaks from a position within a particular historically, culturally, and personally anchored context, and therefore an objectivity that can be responsible (which responds, but is also held responsible).

Transported into the exhibitionary field, the resemblance of art canonical exposures in line with art history (fabricated historically from the dominant Western, bourgeois standpoint) comes to mind easily. Here is not the time to look in depth into the exclusionary effects a universalized history of art had and still has for the representation and distribution of artistic practices outside of it. I just want to reference Alfred Barr's diagram from 1936, created for the exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art*, at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), from March 2 to April 19, 1936.<sup>16</sup> He mapped out art movements, dating them chronologically, placing certain artist practices/movements

in time, for the most part leaving out non-Western art positions—four unnamed non-Western positions find their way into the diagram distinguished in red: “Japanese Prints,” “Near-Eastern Art,” “Negro-Sculpture,” and “Machine Esthetic”—, creating the canon of “modern art history” devoid of artistic or creative practices from regions other than Europe (and also limited to only France, the UK, Russia, Germany, and Switzerland).

In 2019, Hank Willis Thomas expanded Barr’s famous diagram in a project titled *Colonialism and Abstract Art*,<sup>17</sup> adding a more complex understanding of how art movements were influenced, by redrawing Barr’s map and adding the traces of “European exploration and colonization of the Congo and ending with the decade of its independence a century later.”<sup>18</sup> Suddenly, references and inspirations for Western modern art movements became visible and traceable with “humbling” effects for the dominant narrative of Western art history. For other situational histories, let alone attempts to count art practices by women, one would perhaps need a few more of these revisions of a modernist survey. Nonetheless, these diagrams (expanded or not) tend to rely—in my mind—on a teleological account of art history, that won’t be able to show the embeddedness of artistic practice in its specific, situated context (geopolitical, cultural) but rather creates—much like a white cube—neat trajectories of art practices detached in time.

### **B) The way of knowledge of relativism**

Haraway also arguments against an objectivity of postmodernity’s “relativism” that renders all forms of truth equal (equally biased), and thus undermines the discourse of truth and scientific objectivity.<sup>19</sup> And where does this might lead? I am inclined to say, among other things, to the “entitlement to my own opinion,” and ultimately to the dissolution of a broader, commonly shared “truth” attached to rules of objectivity.<sup>20</sup> The effects can be observed widely within US “culture wars”: the “entitled to my opinion” phrase together with the defense of “freedom of speech” allows every opinion to enter the discourse of truth on an equal footing (or so it seems).<sup>21</sup> Still, this blueprint has found its adherents in various places around the world, usually as an instrument for traditionalist forces, to gain political power with a diffused and diffusing logic. I would argue that these opinionated “truths” enabled by the concept of postmodernity’s relativism gave birth to—or at least played in to—“fake news” and conspiracy theories, and especially with social media’s function of spiraling all utterances in a broadly accessible public sphere, due to the inherent logic of engagement by clicks and the logic of the attention economy.<sup>22</sup>

These effects can be observed in culture and politics today—Haraway argued within the discourse of science from 1988, we should recall—but still the effects of obscuring power relations by making everything equal is schematic:

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; both deny the stakes in location, embodiment, and partial perspective; both make it impossible to see well. Relativism and totalization are both “god tricks” promising vision from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully, common myths in rhetoric’s surrounding Science.<sup>23</sup>

When all opinions are equated, no objectivity is possible. Postmodernity’s relativism goes very well together with the neoliberal agenda (specifically the one formed in the

US).<sup>24</sup> Political particularization<sup>25</sup> coupled with individualization and its economic promises through meritocracy not only obscure power but keep the dominant power structures undisturbed.<sup>26</sup> Postmodern-induced projects of “diversification” are also possible in this sense without dismantling or even changing the fabric of the respective (economic, political) power structure. It ends up “adding” singular diverse voices to the canon. To stay with Barr’s aforementioned revised diagram from 2019 by Hank Willis Thomas: while the art canon is added to and expanded (or diversified), art history, its exhibition institutions, and its underlying relationship to the commodity and capitalist logic of surplus remain unaffected.

The emphasis on relational aspects in artistic, curatorial, and art practices carries the same danger of obscuring power relations when relationality serves a universalizing procedure that makes all positions appear equal. Metaphors of horizontality regularly rely on equal power positions. While equality of rights must be guaranteed from the legal side (not only on paper, but also in society and in the public sphere), in the discourse of truth in science (as in the discourse of truth in culture) we should not be afraid to agree on “truths”—which are called objective or more relevant than others for the sake of a feminist objectivity. Even a web or network of shared knowledge has its nodes, not to mention the often-invisible power structures that are able to steer economic benefits always in one direction.

### **C) The way of situated knowledges**

Haraway does not want to end with a critique of science and the discourse of truth as biased,<sup>27</sup> but rather to strengthen “objectivity” by re-composing objectivity with the concept of “situated knowledges” as a (scientific, political, social) tool. Therefore, it is necessary to get rid of simplifications (“god trick” and “relativism”) and to reveal “a more adequate, richer, better account of a world, in order to live in it well and in critical, reflexive relation to our own as well as others’ practices of domination and the unequal parts of privilege and oppression that make up all positions.”<sup>28</sup> This extraordinary quote by Haraway interconnects the social fabric with political objectivity based on a scientific-disciplinary discourse of truth, critical methods of thinking, and a power-sensitive awareness of one’s own position in an unequal field of (counter-) hegemonic movements.

The emphasis here lies in referring to the social fabric (that is inextricably intertwined with politics and economy) and, for me more specifically, to governmental thinking of the self, of others, and of communities: thoughts on the governmental dimensions of individuals and their relations to its communities, and their states can be experienced from the position of a French philosopher in the 1980s, in the many writings by Michel Foucault.<sup>29</sup> Systems of knowledge and power, individuals embedded in disciplinary power, sovereign power, and communal power can be taken from Foucault’s writings and needs to be adjusted to the situatedness of our research.

We must accept the complexity of positionality—and with it the privilege of “centered” and “peripheral”—or dominant and subjugated—positions and the partiality of all knowledge. Situated knowledge needs to take into account the historical context in particular locations. It can only be reached in connections, in webs, in networks, in practices of solidarity and sharing. And it must be a critical vision, power-sensitive, brought forward in the best feminist practices. The practices of situated knowledges are ultimately political:



I am arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. [...] I am arguing for the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity.<sup>30</sup>

Situated knowledges in this dimension provides a contextualized description of the world and categorization of objects.

### **Frameworks and Methods of Situated Knowledges: Privileged Positions**

Haraway's critique on poststructuralists (and Foucault)—although critically analyzing power and domination—points to the remaining lack of awareness of their own position. But she also hints at the problematics of essentialized and “innocent” positions of the subjugated “structured by gender, race, nation, and class” that can be turned into a privileged subject position, too, in “[t]he search for such a ‘full’ and total position [...] for the fetishized perfect subject of oppositional history, sometimes appearing in feminist theory as the essentialized Third World Woman.”<sup>31</sup>

I would argue that Haraway critically relates here to Sandra Harding's “standpoint theory” laid out in the 1986 book *The Science Question in Feminism*, and Kimberlé Crenshaw's term “intersectionality” coined in 1989, which introduced (at the same time Haraway's text was published) another analytical framework mapping out the interconnected nature of social categorizations showing modes of discrimination and privilege. In the logic of situated knowledges, a contextualized description of reality is needed—this goes hand in hand with standpoint theory and intersectionality, I would argue—, but relying on categorizations of generalizations—even while trying to overcome inequalities, politically and culturally—swayed into (self-)marginalization—and ultimately might stand in the way of practices of solidarity.

A commitment to mobile positioning and to passionate detachment is dependent on the impossibility of entertaining innocent “identity” politics and epistemologies as strategies for seeing from the standpoints of the subjugated in order to see well. One cannot “be” either a cell or molecule-or a woman, colonized person, laborer, and so on-if one intends to see and see from these positions critically. “Being” is much more problematic and contingent. Also, one cannot relocate in any possible vantage point without being accountable for that movement. Vision is always a question of the power to see-and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices.<sup>32</sup>

Changing position is not possible without being held accountable for it. The new position comes with a new vision and instruments of power. These transitions require critical, careful, and trustworthy practices; “infinite mobility and interchangeability” are the opposite of that.<sup>33</sup> Expressions of whataboutisms in our daily life lend testimony to this naïve, uncontextualized, and superficial comparability trick. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's famous essay from 1988, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” resembles Haraway's notion of privilege, though it might tend to fix the positions of the subjugated subjects too much. More interesting to me is Spivak's interweaving of the problem of representation and her subsequent analyses of the neglect of representation of non-European subjects as “fully human subjects.”<sup>34</sup> In particular, her notions of “learning and unlearning” in historically privileged perspectives point to the delicate lack of knowledge about “others” in one's own knowledge system and the daunting and hurtful endeavor of arriving at other, less “privileged” positions.<sup>35</sup>

### Collaboration over Competition in Situated Knowledges

It cannot be overemphasized enough that a discourse of truth driven by situated knowledges—our critical epistemes—is possible only in conjunction with other situated contexts and experiences. Otherwise, situated knowledge remains singular. Singularization and individualization without reference to other positions or the exchange of perspectives will not lead to a more accurate understanding of the world:

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 within limits and contradictions—of views from somewhere.<sup>36</sup>

I only want to briefly reflect on Lynn Margulis here, as she was another node in Haraway’s web of kin and adds another layer to the feminist approach of science and culture at large, that I want to propose. Margulis was an evolutionary biologist, known for the “Gaia hypothesis” created together with James Lovelock. Recently, her position prominently entered the exhibitionary complex in *Critical Zones. Observatories for Earthly Politics*,<sup>37</sup> a research-based, long-term exhibition project that spanned over two years from May 2020 until January 9, 2022 at ZKM, Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, Germany. The exhibition highlighted the connectedness or, to use the terms of evolutionary biology, “symbiosis”/symbiotic relationships between organisms as the main driving force in evolution. In her scientific studies, she argued against the neo-Darwinist idea that competition creates evolutionary changes. She prominently opposed the competition-oriented views of evolution—which, needless to say, are still in place in scientific discourse and proved with others her theory to be true in scientific terms,<sup>38</sup> A competition-oriented view are even more alive in economic structures of financialized capitalism and the traditional capitalist industry of production alike, whereas Margulis points out the collaborative relationships between species in 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.

“Natural selection eliminates and maybe maintains, but it doesn’t create.”<sup>39</sup>

### Feminist Interdependence

Making situatedness and interdependence tools for research and practice is easier said than done. The complexity of the world we live in cannot be researched from a reductive point of view from one position, but only in careful and trustworthy exchanges in solidarity can we learn how to see from another’s point of view.

Partiality can form a network of solidarity and is able to merge individual perspectives (not only as opinion, but in the exchange with other peers) to establish a feminist objectivity, which Haraway calls “feminist empiricism.”<sup>40</sup>

Situated knowledge enabled through partiality—a “multiplicity of local knowledges”<sup>41</sup> in trans-local networks (“earthwide projects”<sup>42</sup>), not neglecting “multiple desires,”<sup>43</sup> staying with “irreducible difference”<sup>44</sup> and in modesty—careful and trustworthy practices: This operational framework, I feel, is more relevant than ever.

[...] but we do need an earthwide network of connections, including the ability partially to translate knowledges among very different- and power-differentiated- communities. We need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life. Natural, social, and human sciences.<sup>45</sup>

I will only include small traces here as a fragmentary reference to ruangrupa's lumbung practice for *documenta fifteen*.<sup>46</sup> Lumbung practice functions as a shared resource for a multiplicity of artists and participants of *documenta fifteen*. In this sense, it manifests in a trans-local network with multiple desires. Seen from the outside, it might instead appear to be opaque or impenetrable. Ill-intended viewpoints might follow relativism's effect of decontextualized comparisons of positions, wordings, and objects, and are clearly triggered from a universalized knowledge position despite a critical mode.

If utterances of *documenta fifteen*'s artistic directors ruangrupa, speaking of themes on "soil"—trying to metaphorically picture trees, plants, and communities trans-locally, in order to create a metaphor for another form of global entanglements, rooted in locality, in line with contemporary ecological and sustainable issues<sup>47</sup>—are being forcefully pigeonholed in the discourse surrounding Nazi terms like "blood and soil" ("*Blut und Boden*"),<sup>48</sup> then context-sensitive practices clearly did not take place, but rather a misconstrued relativistic formula of reducing similarities in vision and semantics for personal political agendas. The (intentional?) neglect of the specific situatedness of ruangrupa follows a well-known formula of diminishing knowledges from non-Western trajectories.

What can be seen as a riposte to these strategies of othering, ruangrupa—somewhat related to Joseph Beuys' project "7000 Oaks – City Forestation Instead of City Administration" for *documenta 7*, that took place from 1982 over five years, where seven thousand oak trees were planted in Kassel—initiated an own tree-planting project: During *documenta fifteen* the first Kiri or paulownia tree was planted in front of Hallenbad Ost on Friday April 1, 2022, under the project title *KIRI Project / one hundred trees* 100 kiri tree seedlings will be cared for by volunteers.<sup>49</sup> Kiri trees are considered to be one of the fastest growing plants, even though they do might not have ideal environmental conditions in Kassel. Cultivated primarily in Eastern Asia (especially Japan and Korea), these light-demanding thrive best in warmer climates. These trees – opposite to what biologists call invasive plants, since they won't cause harm to the native bioregion–, if grown at the proposed rate, will reach the dimension of Beuys' oaks in just ten years. Not only does this speak to a world of translocal interdependence in which we live, kiri trees are also considered a magic bullet against global warming because of their ability to absorb a large amount of CO2 emissions: They could also help to find solutions to ecological problems, and furthermore, reveal power relations in postcolonial entanglements.

## Outlook: Recalibrating Critical Tools of Situated Knowledges for Exhibitionary and Educational Projects

If we are willing to transfer the proposed concepts from “cognitive science” to educational and curatorial formations, we might be able to come up with new tools that help us shape the public sphere, not by opinion, but within a discourse of truth—one that is not kept hostage by the master narratives’ hidden agenda.

We’ll find these tenacious crusts of violence that produce universal knowledge largely intact in our Western educational and exhibition institutions. If we talk about these issues, they will not disappear, because our mechanisms for producing knowledge are slow; our experience has been formed over the years in our bodies and in the institutions that have produced universalized knowledge most of the time. Artistic practice might be considerable as an exemplary field of positionality—it is the fortune of art to be committed to one’s own (“eccentric”) positionality nonetheless—though art education might lean too much towards relativism’s proposal for subjectivity and towards singularizing practice as most educations in fine arts aim at finding a place in the commodity system of art, rather than in the communal artistic practices of collaboration.

Learning and teaching environments need to be prepared for (or at least open to) the condition of situatedness—between students, teachers, publics, producers, to enable a “we”: a trans-individuation, that is, an exchange between situated and embodied knowledges, between histories and contexts, between generations and epistemes.

*This is a scaled-down and edited version of a section of the PhD thesis “Curating in the Global World” by Ronald Kolb.*

### Notes

**1** Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 593.

**2** *Ibid.*, 575–599.

**3** In Haraway’s words: “This gaze signifies the unmarked positions of Man and White, one of the many nasty tones of the word “objectivity” to feminist ears in scientific and technological, late-industrial, militarized, racist, and male-dominant societies, that is, here, in the belly of the monster, in the United States in the late 1980s.” *Ibid.*, 581.

**4** A term she “borrows” from Louis Althusser: “Feminist objectivity resists ‘simplification in the last instance.’” *Ibid.*, 590.

**5** Needless to say, this constructivist idea of truth in right-wing propaganda and populist mainstream media only displays a reductionist and mutilated version of this idea.

**6** Interestingly enough, the “body” as an important aspect in knowledge production only entered “proper” science rather late and through research on AI. The body as an inherent part of the learning machine with a visual viewpoint was made important, because in robotic sciences, AI couldn’t easily learn orientation without a functioning movable body. See Mark Lee, “Why AI can’t ever reach its full potential without a physical body,” *The Conversation*, October 5, 2020, accessed May 29, 2022, <https://theconversation.com/why-ai-cant-ever-reach-its-full-potential-without-a-physical-body-146870>.

**7** See Rua M. Williams and Juan E. Gilbert, “Cyborg Perspectives on Computing Research Reform,” *Extended Abstracts of the 2019 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems - CHI EA ’19. New York* (New York: ACM Press, 2019), 1–11. doi:10.1145/3290607.3310421.

**8** Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 583.

**9** I argue with reference to Ming Tiampo and Dipesh Chakrabarty about the “de-universalizing,” “decentering,” and “provincializing” prospects of a specific “Western” knowledge for cultural articulations in 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* (June 2020):

“While Ming Tiampo questions the dominance of the concept of modernism in the arts as a Western phenomenon by situating and theorizing non-Western modernisms that hold histories of its own, Dipesh Chakrabarty suggest to “provincialize Europe”. Europe – not as a region, but as an epistemology of the enlightenment – separated non-Western space and thought as back warded and underdeveloped. A grand trick to make others imagine themselves with a ‘lack,’ that can only be overcome by becoming the supposedly developed modern ‘West.’ Chakrabarty effort to provincialize this dominance would give way to other forms of governing in a less dominant relationship to capital and global economy.”

**10** Yet,—as Haraway points out—Foucault also had his blind spots and remained within a field of dichotomy (sovereign vs. individual) most of the time, uninterested in intersectional aspects of gendered and/or racialized exclusion mechanisms with the discursive formation.

**11** Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 577.

**12** Working class: man, women, “others,” slaves? Marx never really differentiated the working class, and this shows in the early discourse in Marxist theory.

**13** Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 581.

**14** Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 587.

**15** Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 581.

**16** Glenn Lowry, “Abstraction in 1936: Barr’s Diagrams,” in *Inventing Abstraction 1910-1925: How a Radical Idea Changed Modern Art*, ed. Leah Dickerman (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012), accessed May 29, 2022, [https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/archives/InventingAbstraction\\_GLowry\\_359\\_363.pdf](https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/archives/InventingAbstraction_GLowry_359_363.pdf).

**17** Hank Willis Thomas and Sarah Meister, “Hank Willis Thomas’s Colonialism and Abstract Art,” *MoMA Magazine*, September 15, 2020, accessed May 29, 2022, <https://www.moma.org/magazine/articles/421>.

**18** Ibid.

**19** Even “social constructivists” like Bruno Latour, who actively critiqued the apparatuses of sciences and the discourse of truth, had to admit that without a common understanding of the world (so far for at least the last 200 years produced by the discursive formation dominated by science) lately has admitted his correlation for the fake news devotees. See Ava Kofman, “Bruno Latour, the Post-Truth Philosopher, Mounts a Defense of Science,” *New York Times*, October 25, 2018, accessed May 29, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/25/magazine/bruno-latour-post-truth-philosopher-science.html>.

**20** This can be observed widely within US “culture wars” with the phrase “entitled to my opinion.”

**21** There are still clearly different programs in place in the projects from the left and the right, but the instruments for how to enter and try to “win” the hegemonic play of meaning may have their structural similarities in certain aspects.

**22** See “attention economy” in social media, “click bait,” etc.

**23** Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 584.

**24** I would like to argue that “neoliberalism” comes in different forms, of course, as it is an amalgamation of a primarily capitalist logic with a progressive agenda. In different cultural and geographical contexts, this led to different outcomes. For the US’s specific neoliberal progressivism, see Nancy Fraser, *The Old is Dying and the New Cannot Be Born: From Progressive Neoliberalism to Trump and Beyond* (Brooklyn: Verso Books, 2019).

- 25** As an early critique on postmodernism (maybe for the wrong reasons?), see Jürgen Habermas and Seyla Ben-Habib, “Modernity versus Postmodernity”, *New German Critique*, No. 22, Special Issue on Modernism (Winter, 1981): 3-14.
- 26** For example, a critique of meritocracy by Nancy Fraser.
- 27** For her critique on post-structuralism, see Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 578.
- 28** Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 579. This remark is made in direct relation to “feminist empiricism.”
- 29** In particular, I would like to refer to Michel Foucault’s lectures at the Collège de France between 1982 and 1983, which were published under the title “The Government of Self and Others.”
- 30** Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 589.
- 31** *Ibid.*, 586; Chandra Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes,” *Boundary 2*, no. 3 (1984): 333-58.
- 32** Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 585.
- 33** “All these pictures of the world should not be allegories of infinite mobility and interchangeability but of elaborate specificity and difference and the loving care people might take to learn how to see faithfully from another’s point of view, even when the other is our own machine. That’s not alienating distance; that’s a possible allegory for feminist versions of objectivity. Understanding how these visual systems work, technically, socially, and psychically, ought to be a way of embodying feminist objectivity.” *Ibid.*, 583.
- 34** In my thesis, I devote a longer chapter to Spivak’s “representation.”
- 35** “Unlearning one’s privilege by considering it as one’s loss constitutes a double recognition. Our privileges, whatever they may be in terms of race, class, nationality, gender, and the like, may have prevented us from gaining a certain kind of Other knowledge: not simply information that we have not yet received, but the knowledge that we are not equipped to understand by reason of our social positions.” Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, eds., *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (London: Routledge, 1996), 4.
- 36** Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 590.
- 37** See “Critical Zones. Observatories for Earthly Politics.”, Exhibition at ZKM, Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, 23.05.2020–09.01.2022, accessed May 29, 2022, <https://zkm.de/en/exhibition/2020/05/critical-zones>.
- 38** See Institut de Ciències del Mar, „When we learned that competition was not the only driver of evolution”, November 02, 2021, accessed May 29, 2022, <https://www.icm.csic.es/en/news/when-we-learned-competition-was-not-only-driver-evolution>.
- 39** See Dick Teresi “Discover Interview: Lynn Margulis Says She’s Not Controversial, She’s Right”, Discover Magazine, June 17, 2011, accessed May 29, 2022, <https://www.discovermagazine.com/the-sciences/discover-interview-lynn-margulis-says-shes-not-controversial-shes-right>.
- 40** “Another approach, ‘feminist empiricism,’ also converges with feminist uses of Marxian resources to get a theory of science which continues to insist on legitimate meanings of objectivity and which remains leery of a radical constructivism conjugated with semiology and narratology.” Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 583.
- 41** “[...] for making meanings, and 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. Harding calls this necessary multiple desire a need for a successor science project and a postmodern insistence on irreducible difference and radical multiplicity of local knowledges.” Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 579.
- 42** *Ibid.*
- 43** *Ibid.*

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid., 579–580.

46 My dissertation will thoroughly look into *documenta fifteen* from the angle of situated knowledges, interdependence, governmentality, and commoning prospects.

47 “The first *lumbung calling* focuses on the value of Local Anchor. The metaphor of an anchor describes the value of soil in our globalized yet divided world: soil that enables roots to grow and connects trees located miles and miles apart.” See “lumbung calling: Local Anchor”, April 4, 2021, accessed May 29, 2022, <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/events/lumbung-calling-local-anchor/>.

48 A Nazi slogan that focused on racial purity (“blood” as the national body), encouraged by the Nazis to legitimate in the end a colonialist war expanding its own territory into Eastern Europe with a settlement area (“*Boden*,” as territory rather than soil). On that note, we could also talk about translation as active practices of culture, embedded in the discourse of truth.

49 The kiri project will be developed in three parts. ruangrupa plans to connect Wilhelmshöher Allee to Hallenbad Ost with a walkway made out of Kiri wood. See “First Tree Planted at Hallenbad Ost: Partner Project “KIRI Project / one hundred trees” was launched”, April 13, 2022, accessed May 29, 2022, <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/news/first-tree-planted-at-hallenbad-ost-sustainability-project-kiri-project-one-hundred-trees-launched-on-april-1-2022/>.

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# Cacoethes\*

## Lee Weinberg and Alison Green

\*Borrowed from Latin *cacoëthes* “malignant tumour at an early stage, disease of character,” borrowed from Greek *kakóêthes* “malignancy, wickedness,” noun derivative from neuter of *kakoéthês* “ill-disposed, malicious, (of things) abominable, (of tumours, fevers, etc.) malignant,” from *kako-* + *-éthês*, adjective derivative of *êthos* “custom, disposition, character.”

### Prologue

We/I discovered this word: *cacoethes*. A very old word, and one that has likely been mistranslated along the way. Its meaning includes malignant, wicked, abominable, malicious. A tumour, a disease of character. It also translates as insatiable desire, like a craving, or a yearning. The most intriguing definition for this context: *an irresistible urge to do something ill-advised*. This may sound a bit exciting, but isn't that the rub of desire?

For how long have we/I imagined and managed relationships within this forceful push of desire? For how long have we/I imagined desire as an unstoppable fire? For how long have we/I used desire to justify our violent movement in the world?<sup>1</sup> And if desire is, in its core, insatiable, what will be the end of us? If desire is what moves us, how can we reimagine it? Can we desire without its fire? Can we desire without the passions<sup>2</sup> of desire? Can we desire someone else's simple pleasure and wellbeing? Can we desire in peace?

Desire wants what already is in its hand, but it is unsatisfied because it wants to hold it; it wants it to be perceived and conceived in shape and weight. Desire desires the illusion of extended life through the object.

### In Preparation

The past year, with the uprising around Black Lives Matter, we/I have felt a renewed urgency around doing social justice work with curating. As two curators and committed feminists given the opportunity to run a workshop around Donna Haraway, we/I decided we wanted to think about the ways curating is rooted in the exchange of objects through asymmetrical power and the display of them as trophies.<sup>3</sup>

From the get-go, Haraway's suggestion to think and act beyond the prism of extraction and production led us to think about this asymmetry as rooted in our dependence on objects in the construction and organisation of subjectivity and identity.<sup>4</sup> If indeed, within the logic of late capitalism, the subject is defined in relation to an object and vice versa, we wanted to ask: what is it about our relationship to objects that replicates the asymmetry we observe in curatorial power dynamics? And how can we/I relate to objects differently?

From this perspective, we found interesting the notion of desire as a means of defining the given relationship between subject and object. We/I looked to expand this reading of desire, from the psychoanalytical perspective that looks at the relationships between individuals and themselves, towards cultural perspectives that take into account the ways desire functions as a mechanism that drives us towards logics of extraction and possession. This desire infects and implicates and takes at all costs.

Our culture, that is Western Culture, is preoccupied with the reproduction of this desire. It is there in how it displays and manages objects, sanctifies them, evaluates them, exchanges them, researches them, thinks about them. Whether in a supermarket or a museum, mechanisms of possession and desire drive the production of culture. And in a way, culture is thought of as this exchange of objects. Most certainly, economy<sup>5</sup> has been very much reduced to that. This understanding of the object of desire, and the ambiguous approach to desire—on the one hand as a necessary force of life, on the other hand as a sinful or prohibited emotion—creates those asymmetries.

We/I felt that desire can be mutual and amplifying; desire can offer gifts.<sup>6</sup> Inspired by Haraway's writings on “oddkin,” we planned that the workshop, titled “Six Degrees of Separation: Curatorial Practice/Objects of Desire,” would explore the intimate potential of desire, while facing the issue of a group of people who did not know each other, coming together for a three-hour workshop, held online only. We aimed to build in processes that create links between the participants and allow us all to explore how such relationships are made.





It seems now like it was a strong way to start a workshop with strangers; speaking about desire produces desires, or at least emphasises and replicates it.

After the introductions, we divided into pairs.

### The first exercise

*Try to make eye contact. This is based on a face-to-face exercise where you hold the eyes of another person for one minute. It is hard to do on the computer but see what happens! Find a way of creating a physical encounter through the camera.*

This exercise was intended to bring awareness to the limitation of the media we were using—how mediating tools such as video calls change the way we interact with each other, and how you act with yourself. Attempting to work with this limitation and “stay with the trouble,” as Haraway suggests, we formed relationships based on a desire to connect, despite the challenge of achieving an embodied connection with the other.

In what follows we include reflections we wrote directly after the workshop.

**Lee:** “This exercise emphasised that relationships are always—even within those educational frameworks—embodied and situated in space. It was interesting because suddenly it was not the static camera that stipulated our relationship to our own images and the screen. My partner and I both tried to move ourselves and the cameras, to come nearer and then further away and see where we felt such an embodied connection can happen. The awareness of the limitation of the media, and the awareness of the lack that exists in this on-screen relationship, created a bridge between us. Eventually, we took turns looking straight into the camera while the other had a chance to gaze into the other’s eyes. It brought a playful feeling to it all. It was a process of overcoming embarrassment, laughing together, sharing an experience. It may not have built a connection like what happens when you look into someone’s eyes, but it definitely created a connection that was more intimate than the formality of the image—the façade of the screen.”

### The second exercise

*Still in pairs, start talking about the objects. Partners can ask each other questions about their object:*

- *Do you want to hold it?*
- *Does the other person want it too?*
- *Do you have the space (and resources) to store it?*
- *Would you keep it? Would you show it to other people?*
- *Who does the object belong to?*
- *If you can’t or won’t keep it, how would you dispose of it?*
- *Putting the two things together, what is the relation between them?*

Preparing these questions, we asked ourselves: what forms relationships with objects, more specifically curatorial objects? We also thought about the consequences of desire, of getting something out of this urge. And then the care of the object, the resources that are used, and how the value of the object accumulates. We wanted this conversation to lead eventually to relationships between the objects, ones that would reflect a relationship between individuals.

**Alison:** “The ambition of creating a strong tie with someone—I still hold this as important, and possible, but it didn’t go the way I thought it might. In my pair, we delved right into one object and had a fascinating and free-ranging conversation about shoes. This took all the time. Although we touched on them, we did not get far into the questions. I felt divided between participant and workshop-planner: being present in that conversation but wanting to test the questions we had drafted. I felt the gap between that magic potential when meeting someone for the first time and the harder work of something growing from it. I reflected on the experience of making an oddkin: it doesn’t follow one’s internal image. What’s at stake in offering yourself to it? What’s at stake in building and maintaining such a relationship? What are the structures or ties that would need to be there to hold it together if the personal doesn’t hold/isn’t enough?”

**Clara:** “After this workshop I am left with feelings of sentimentality around objects and our relationships with them. Through feelings of desire, we are constantly building narratives between us and each other and things. Whether we believe this desire to be a biological, all bodily encompassing feeling or one that is infiltrated by binaries and society that we must make a conscious effort to repurpose, for me the result is the same, and the result is a reflection on human experience and the union of personal narratives through the things we



expanding perception became crucial to understanding Haraway—that is, to consider relationships as Haraway suggests (we read an excerpt on oddkin from Haraway’s book, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016)). There first needs to be an acknowledgment of what is here. Who is here? Pay attention to understanding, sensing the space in which relationships are formed (whether mental or physical). Slowing down, remaining with the silence, remaining with the lack of—there is a possibility of extending sensual perception—first beyond the screen, then beyond one’s own body.

A possibility of identifying ourselves with something other than our body as a vehicle for life and survival, something I felt related deeply to the notion of kinship. It’s an externalisation or an expansion of the self into the other, but not necessarily through means of reproduction. Such an expansion of awareness, beyond the realm of the self as a single body, allowed me a key to understand, contain and hold the object as oddkin. I asked myself as we were reading and talking, whether we could tell our stories through the lens or consciousness of an object—an object not as an inanimate lump of matter, but an object as a vector, a meeting point of narratives, memories, stories—and whether containing objects in this way, essentially removing the category of object altogether—could be an interesting break in my way of thinking about curatorial practice.”

**Mya:** “When talking about desire and situated knowledge I think of desire as words. Their inner meanings, their personal attachments, them belonging to me or to the person in front of me. How things become at once polysemic, intimate, and political. How you learn words through feeling them. And how it is almost impossible to communicate them fully if the person in front of you has not lived something like it. Empathy and vulnerability. Collective and personal. As a practitioner, I want to feel what I define. Feeling means something very specific. A lump in the throat, a smile or that fuzzy chest you get when having a conversation with someone you understand. So, the desire is about reaching out. The most amazing moments are when managing to create a space where words/concepts are understood viscerally. And it’s a synonym for it feeling real, true (but not objective: rather this sensation of translation, of unknotting you have when discovering something). That’s it: it isn’t so much about an idea of truth but learning and discovering.

Also, this idea of escaping academia, coldness in writing and thoughts. Of going back to being clear (or very

unclear) of using words or images as metaphors. Either escaping direct/straightforward narration or simplifying to the maximum. Of not assigning a definite meaning on what things are or are meant to be.”

We concluded with a brief discussion, back in the main room, where everyone was asked to share observations and thoughts about the process.

The rich discussion testifies to the variety of experiences. These, we/I think, have more to do with the relationships that had been created between the pairs, less with a unified understanding of the workshop, or the way the Haraway texts may have suggested a reading of this experience. We/I find it difficult to recall the different things that were shared, because in that moment we were dedicated to being participants, listening closely and being in the workshop. This only underlines the gaps that exist between knowing and being, between experience and theory. Interestingly, there is something in common between this gap and the gap between reality and imagination, where desire arises. The objects become bridges that hold the space of both knowing and being. This is the role of the object as a social agent—to be that common space where desires meet.

**Mya:** “I think of nations, narrations, and canons and archive: how not to create a story of what happened, of not falling into linearity but instead finding strength in the particular, in the specificities; creating conversations instead of being didactic; memories and odd documents or experimental texts as replacing straightforward (untrustworthy) text; strings of exchanges instead of a history.”

**Lee:** “Desire can function as a funnel for sensual perception, that is, when all the sensual capabilities are directed towards and consumed by the desire (like in the sense of being trapped in the two-dimensional world of the screen). However, desire can also be a motivation for expanding the sensual paradigm—if the desire for an alternative future is replacing the desire for one’s own subjectivity.”

### Processing

Probably because the idea of running a workshop with unknown participants is a daunting task, it seemed interesting to run it as an experiment in Haraway’s call to “make kin” (the full phrase is “make kin, not babies”). We did this through the eyes and through touch, taking on the impediment of the way the workshop was held online, to bring a haptic intimacy to an experience of

meeting and starting a conversation, for the first time, with another person, via a video call.

Within the realm of the screen, there is a kind of identification with self-image on the one hand, but also within the limited visual field that the screen provides. So, moving away, trying to look at the camera, to create a relationship with another through the mediation of these technologies was a challenge. That said, sharing the challenge, sharing that inability—and maybe that unfulfilled desire to be with another—did bring us closer to intimacy.

We are not sure that people understood what we were doing.

People brought their objects of desire. These were interesting and diverse. They did work as curatorial objects, in that the connection between them created a space for renegotiating social relationships. There is a gap between what we had hoped for in the workshop and what we were able to do. The work of decolonisation is for sure slow and long.<sup>8</sup> (Was I) were we trying to tease out a different *modus operandi* for “desire”? From desire as having/holding/keeping to... what? Prior to the workshop we imagined that their opposites are sharing/giving/not having. Now we think it is something else.

If desire is a vector, a force that moves us towards a certain direction, it is not about replacing desire itself but changing the direction of the arrow. Maybe multiplying and stretching desire so that it encompasses an expanding landscape of things to desire. It's a shift from desiring one thing at a time—a shift away from the focus desire holds us to, that compression that moves us passionately towards another, be it a body or an object—a shift towards the landscape, the background the field around the object that we want to be part of, rather than the object itself.

We hope that this essay suggests open-ended questions, assumptions, experiments with memory, with words. We tried to continue the process and expand it onto these pages, with hopes that readers will find themselves participating in the discussion, prolonging it. This writing, like the workshop, tries to slow down—to not arrive at a set conclusion—rather—to offer a relationship, some correspondence, a gift. We write it as an open letter to readers and to the participants in the workshop.

## Notes

**1** To signal that this essay was written collaboratively, we're inserting this confection, “we/I” into the subject-position of some sentences. We do this to break down the problematic universal we and to make it clear that this we is made up of two Is. We think it's interesting that the two Is are not interchangeable, but it is ambiguous who is who.

**2** I/we are thinking about passions' layered meaning: in our modern day-to-day life, we think of passion as that heat that drives us forward. We think of it in relation to sexual energy. It's an interesting question to ask: what are the relationships between passion and desire? Can that investigation lead us to a breakthrough in how we think about desire? Maybe passion can be read as the emotional driving force that adds a layer of meaning to the direction desire takes us. Unlike desire, we think of passion as a positive drive—a passionate individual is one that has a focus, a goal, a motivation. It is deeply related to ableism.

In its medieval meaning, “the passions” are equivalent to the general notion of “emotion,” and in the Christian tradition they relate specifically to the “passions of Christ”—the suffering that comes with virtue, sacrifice, repentance. The eating up of oneself within; it is also an ordeal to work with the passions, a spiritual ordeal: one needs to pass through them on the way to liberation. For St. Augustine, the distinction between the passions is related to time. Desire, as one of the passions, is situated in relation to an anticipated joy. Joy, however, is related to the present.

**3** The role of citations in this essay is not to make it academic per se, but to reveal the associations and references engraved in our minds, the larger scope of meaning that certain terms and words hold. It exposes asymmetrical power dynamics, as these are engrained in our brain. This one touches Walter Benjamin's line, “There is no document of civilisation that is not also a document of barbarism.” For today's project of decolonisation, the link Benjamin made between civilisation and barbarism (barbarism meaning slavery or class exploitation) reminds us/me of the plantationocene, a term Haraway uses. Benjamin also wrote, “The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the ‘state of emergency’ in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight.” Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 256 and 257, respectively. For a critique of the way the plantationocene is ‘given’ to

Haraway (an example of White suprematism), see Mythri Jegathesan, “Black Feminist Plots before the Plantationocene and Anthropology’s ‘Regional Closets,’” *Feminist Anthropology* 2 (2021): 78-93. DOI: 10.1002/fea2.12037.

The tradition of psychoanalysis, rooted in the Lacanian definition of the subject from which “object relation theory” is derived, contends that social relationships are, to a very large extent, mediated by objects. Jean Baudrillard, in his essay “The System of Collecting,” in John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, eds. *Cultures of Collecting* (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), combines this psychoanalytical perspective with a critique of consumerism to describe and analyse the relationship between such personal, psychological tendencies, and cultural paradigms. In this text, the term “possession” is used to symbolise the fleeting moment of accomplishment that still does not satisfy desire but creates an illusion of mastery or total control over something. Objects can be possessed, and therefore controlled in totality. Subjects cannot. But we know this isn’t true. So rather, we can look at this critically, and see how possession becomes the pivot that exposes the ambivalent relationship between object and subject. We think and define the object as passive in its relationship to the subject, who is deemed active. In the scenario of desire, driving us to possess an object, it is desire that controls us. The desire to possess possesses us, maybe like a spirit, a subjectivity, projected by the object that promises us control. Of course, the control of the object here is only but a projection. What we desire to control, subjectivity, remains possessed—untameable. We are sold the illusion of control and possessed by the desire to attain it. But if we are possessed—doesn’t that make us, by definition, objects? Our dualistic division of the world into notions of object/subject, based on politics of possession and control, are insufficient to describe the complex working of our relationship to the world around us. It may be that such divisions do not allow us to see things as they are, but do allow us to colonise, torture, and think we have the right to control and possess other bodies. How can we think—and act—beyond them?

**5** I remember, as a teenager at summer camp, I was given the role of “economist.” The responsibility of the role was to manage resources, making sure they were maintained and provided when necessary. Our headquarters was the kitchen. It was not about stashing, keeping, possessing. The joy of the economist was in the sharing of resources. In that sharing, providing, caring, there was a sense of control. But it was not a control that sought to restrict; it was a control that sought to hold together, to allow, to sustain the joy of the moment.

**6** Different approaches to the object, and the meaning of exchange, do exist in cultures beyond the West. There is the Vedic concept of *Dāna*, or generosity, in which you give without wanting anything in return. *The Gift* (1925) by Marcel Mauss, also comes to mind. As his subtitle indicates, Mauss explores “Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies.” What’s interesting about Mauss’s exploration is that in some archaic cultures, the logic of possession runs opposite to Western thought and proves that our presuppositions about *how* social relations can be mediated by objects are not a given, not a fact of human nature, but a learnt behaviour—an education. We must ask ourselves who educated us, and for what purposes. In the “potlatch”—the most famous example that came out of Mauss’s book, one’s possessions are only powerful if they are shared. As long as they are accumulated and possessed, they hold no value.

In Western culture and religions, we may find similar practices under the notion of “charity.” However, in our modern interpretation of this word, we think of it as a surplus that projects back on the “giver” as subject, and the “receiver” is objectified in return, reinforcing object/subject relationships. Both the *Dāna* and the potlatch are embedded as essential to maintaining social order. Such is also the concept of *Zedaka* or charity in both Islam and Judaism: these are not acts of choice, but of necessity. They do not empower the “giver” with any control over the receiver. It requires an equal relationship with the other, whose value is not measured by the number of possessions that they hold.

This glimpse of another kind of intersubjectivity is something we need, in the West, to theorise in order to consider and remember that our sense of subjectivity, agency, and power cannot be reinforced by possession—only by the acknowledgement of another life.

**7** The two recent graduates who are also quoted in this essay are Mya Berger (<https://myaberger1542.wixsite.com/myaberger>) and Clara Wicaksono ([clarawicaksono.com](http://clarawicaksono.com)).

**8** One of the participants recommended a video by Suely Rolnik: “Micropolitical Conceptual Tools for Decolonizing the Unconscious (Notes on Caring and Repairing Life),” filmed August 2020 at Saas Fee Summer Institute of Art. 1:30:39. <https://www.artandeducation.net/classroom/video/350702/suely-rolnik-micropolitical-conceptual-tools-for-decolonizing-the-unconscious-notes-on-caring-and-repairing-life>.

# Curing the Archive Fever: Filling the Gaps Through Situatedness

## Antonio Cataldo

When one works in an art institution—especially in a managerial position, it is close to impossible not to stumble into archival problems. Some face archival issues more frontally, depending on the tasks at hand. More rarely, these questions become theoretical or structural, unless there is an impending task, such as institution building, and when history is involved. It is then that we start looking for an origin, “arkhé.”

Before delving into the argument, a short introduction is due about myself, authoring the text you are about to read. As Donna Haraway theorizes, it’s always crucial to position oneself to constitute the voice from where one speaks and understand that all knowledge comes from positional and situated perspectives, even scientific ones.<sup>1</sup>

I’m neither from Norway (where I work) nor from Switzerland (where I studied, and from where I delivered this paper). I’m from Italy, born into a hard-working family of farmers. Specifically, I’m from the South of the Italian peninsula. A land mostly known in recent years because of the colonial legacies and spatialised histories of violence and inequality popularized by media outlets under the headliner of the migrants’ crisis in the Mediterranean.<sup>2</sup> The South of the country was a territory under Spanish control until the beginning of the 18th century, already at the time the site of contestation of different European interests. Italy’s unification completely disappropriated the South’s wealth in 1861. The Italian South continues to be the *Mezzogiorno* for many. Referring to the sun at its highest intensity, *Mezzogiorno* was used in the postwar period to denigrate—to demean—an entire area with backwardness and laziness, once its resources, after a careful plundering, brought decision-making and affluence to the North: home to the king and the aristocracy. A sign of Modernity, the industry was fully implemented and politically backed, leaving non-industrialized agriculture behind, and the people working with it unprotected. Antonio Gramsci denounced such disproportion of power, creating subaltern positions.<sup>3</sup> It is also here that he claims how the “biologically inferior” southern person becomes “naturally” grounded. The southern people were deemed “incapable,” “barbaric,” and “criminal” through a literary means constructed by positivistic writers allying themselves with a purported scientific claim, repeating the same refrain.<sup>4</sup> The institution of a national science is the origin of this fiction. Here, another origin, “arkhé.”

Such a national project, homogenizing people to one identity, didn’t happen in Italy alone. Instead, it created the idea of the citizen in the name of presumed equality.

According to the Martinican poet, novelist, and theorist Édouard Glissant, a national language produces people. He lamented Martinique’s lack of autonomous productivity because of a community without a national language—and Creole is the non-situated language. In this situation of cultural erosion, the writer must locate, according to him, a zone of authentic speech. It is the symbolic notation, a search for a seldom-seen side of reality. It is both a means of communication and knowledge transfer for the very people who cannot write. In the absence of words, Glissant believes that one draws on

visual language to depict the world. Language (and, one could consequently add, documents) not only reflects but enacts power relations in society.<sup>5</sup>

During the past fifteen years, I have worked for several powerful institutions, the Venice Biennale, the Iuav University of Venice, and the Office for Contemporary Art Norway. I have followed how decision-making in the arts impacts what history writes and which art subsequently moves into national museums. These are complex processes that Gramsci named a “battle of position,” to resist domination with culture by creating alternative institutions and intellectual resources.<sup>6</sup> Gramsci was living between the two World Wars. The fascist regime jailed him, fearing his intellectual agitation. He died in prison, and we are left with the notebooks he wrote under incarceration. In Foucauldian terms, it may be read as *parrhesia* (to say everything, to conceal nothing), a truth-telling process that goes so far that not only is truth at risk, but the life of the person speaking.<sup>7</sup>

When I took my position as artistic director at Fotogalleriet, close to four years ago, I came with heavy cultural baggage. Fotogalleriet had turned forty years old the previous year, and the preceding administration had fundraised a small and not entirely sufficient sum for a telling book on the institution. Suddenly, in my first weeks of work, I had to deal with a whole history, which is also a large part of contemporary art photography of an entire country. I had a short time to tackle the task and present a realistic concept and timeline for the publication, under the aegis of the time.

Fotogalleriet is not a museum; it’s a *kunsthalle*. Like a biennial, a *kunsthalle* tries to analyze what’s happening now and make sense of it by putting artworks into a display to provoke discussions. As *kunsthalle*s were created in the 19th century to put up works of art and science for public evaluation, it is the embodiment, in my eyes, of an idea of the Modern “public sphere.”

German philosopher Jürgen Habermas defined the public sphere as “made up of private people gathered together as a public articulating the needs of society with the state.”<sup>8</sup> In ideal terms, through acts of assembly and dialogue, such a public sphere generates opinions and positions that guide the state’s affairs. It legitimates authority in “any functioning democracy” and is a realm of social life approaching the formation of public opinion because all citizens have access.<sup>9</sup>

I’ll return to this later, but understandably such a bourgeois affirmation of the public sphere rebuilds the ancient Greek model of inclusion and exclusion based on citizenship. If you are a citizen (and a knowledgeable one, I would add), you have the power to speak and act, enter, and affect a discussion. If you are not, your life is simply dismissible.

Museums do the opposite job of a *kunsthalle*. Museums have been part of a national mandate registering (“freezing”) the power transitioning from the aristocracy to the bourgeoisie. They continue to seize and win over previous cultural models. As a battle trophy, they consider what’s on display always already in the past. Museums were assigned to educate the masses and constitute the new citizen—literally, like the hospital and the prison. These Modern institutions shape people aesthetically, in how one should behave and learn about “their” history.<sup>10</sup> Museums were aimed at the “ordinary people” to build the consensus of the public sphere, constituting an idea of a universal “we,” the ones who have the power to speak—we, a totality for the part. “I” must mirror and subsume myself in such a “we.” Only through the institution of a “we”





National Museum Of Norway. Photo: Iwan Baan

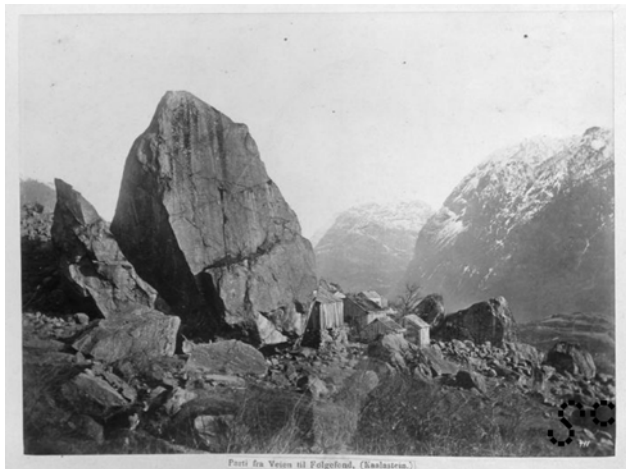


MUNCH in Bjørvika. Photo: Einar Aslaksen/MUNCH

(the nation), the plural becomes an “I,” and the ideology of the state apparatus is at work. But, can we all recognize ourselves in such a universal “I?” Does that “I” protect all of our different identities, necessities, and struggles? Does “I” shield a migrant who the community has yet to recognize and whose life is not considered worthy of the same value as others? Does “I” consider the non-knowledgeable subject? Do “I,” the ordinary citizen, apprehend myself in the ruler portrayed in the salons of the national gallery, leading expeditions and journeying through empty landscapes, and do I see portrayed my friends (the one ruling) in the museum? Do “I” belong in the national gallery? And if so, how do I belong?

Because museums situate the struggle in the past, the rulers do not seem to be present.

In Modernity, “I” apprehend such history as a subject spatially, by moving, visually, within the exhibitionary complex.



Knud Knudsen, *Lot from Tokheim*, ca. 1888–1895. Kraftmuseet archive collections

Photography significantly shaped such behavior—the idea of the new citizen in forming a national identity that had to be rooted somewhere. In Norway, Professor Emeritus Robert Meyer (Fotogalleriet’s first chairman in 1979, when the institution turned into a foundation) argues against such national ideology. He shows how painters, such as Anders Edvard Disen (1845–1923), used the landscape photographs of Knud Knudsen (1832–1915) as a point of departure. Meyer claims that Norway was searching for an identity after the separation from Sweden in 1905 and looking into what could be genuinely “Norwegian.”<sup>11</sup> From here, Norway started branding itself as a nation dominated by nature—primarily mountains. Photography was the tool enabling the selling of such a story (and soon history) inside and outside the country. To create a new narrative. To also teach the new Norwegian citizen that the core of being Norwegian is in its majestic mountains and breath-taking landscapes, a rhetoric that perhaps, one can speculate, continues to this day. (I purposefully use the pronoun “he” here because up until 1913, the right to vote was, not surprisingly, unfortunately, a male privilege). Notably, photography is the tool for a nation attaining self-recognition. Meyer uttered such a photographic construct in 1989 when he executed (curated) the project *The Forgotten Tradition*, which included an exhibition at Oslo Kunstforening and a book on the emergence and development of Norwegian landscape photography up to 1914.

When I started to look into the archives of Fotogalleriet in view of the institution’s and photography history’s book to come, these were the issues I wanted to explore. What kind of role does photography play in the formation of other institutions in our times? Which mythologies does it help build—also once discussions exit small institutions and enter museums’ collections?

In Fotogalleriet’s case, the answer to these questions seemed readily available. The institution had just gotten an archive in 2017.<sup>12</sup> One could draw and compile items from these systematized documents and make a book (editing or curating existing material into a publication), or at least weaving together its most central arguments by navigating it.



Fotogalleriet Archives, 1977–ongoing, installation view from *Looking into (our) Archives*, 2–25 June 2017. Istvan Virág/Fotogalleriet





Fotogalleriet Archives, 1977–ongoing, installation view from *Looking into (our) Archives*, 2–25 June 2017. Istvan Virág/Fotogalleriet

When the institution started to work toward organizing these archives in 2016 as Fotogalleriet was about to celebrate its jubilee, the staff brought up many amassed documents from its basement (for the sake of reality, let's imagine such underground deposit less proper than a museum storage area)—mostly things which had been “left around” for decades (the excess, the momentarily superfluous, the *refusés*). As it was reported to funders, “The standard of the current archive is critical and will be inaccessible for the future unless we quickly take the initiative to preserve it.”<sup>13</sup> Before being archived (on the verge of an origin), the archive possesses democratic equity among its elements. The archivation process layers and hierarchises. The boxes contained board minutes, case files, original correspondence, budgets, letters between different institutions, press releases and press reviews, exhibition documentation, CDs/VHS tapes, slides/positives, posters, and other ephemera. There were also sparse exhibition applications and financial documents, and depending on the latest state regulations, the latter were not supposed to entirely enter the archives as they were supposed to be stored only for a limited time. One can only imagine that one of the crucial parts of an institution, its economic management, is made invisible and compartmented in archives; it fades into the background at best or is removed altogether from the public eye. Because of the role given to economic conditions, when we see the current archive, we are told, through its material absence, that economics does not structure an institution, what it can achieve, and how it has achieved its current status in history. The Fotogalleriet archive also intersected with other collections and records (like the union representing art photographers, for instance, with whom it shares a large part of its history).<sup>14</sup> Along the way, it had to be “considered how

much to separate.” Some of the case documents already had archival numbers, probably from preceding organizational systems.

Fotogalleriet immediately claimed that this physical “paper” collection reflected the development of the Norwegian photography art scene since its start (its origin; its commencement). And we can read its ambitions immediately: “The material will be made available by setting up a functioning archive system for researchers, historians, communicators, students, and other interested parties as well as form the basis for an exhibition [...], and a publication on the occasion of the 40th anniversary.”<sup>15</sup>

I would include the library collection in the overarching archival project (my claim on the overall institution building). During the preceding years, the library was systematized according to the national library system, becoming part of the national collections. The library, though, mainly includes Western photography history focusing on the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries and incredibly little on a wide variety of other narratives outside the Western canon. At the end of 2018, I spoke with artist, writer, and art editor Nina Strand to intervene within the Fotogalleriet’s book collection, to start identifying its structural problems. We walled the library off and left a selection of books out alongside a video statement by the artist calling for a more extensive history to unfold.<sup>16</sup> Currently, the library is temporarily inaccessible (or not easily accessible) as a call for historical justice. If we can’t tell more stories than one, the dominant narrative should not prevail.



*Thumbing The Library: Gardening Networks.* A project by Nina Strand.  
3 November 2018–12 January 2019. Photo: Julie Hrnčířová/Fotogalleriet

In exhibiting a particular showcase of documents, an idea of publicness ensues. Therefore, documents make public what was already public, independently of their content. They also produce a view that that publicness is all that exists. In addition, the kind of access the archive will have determines the final categorization (or publicity) of the collection, and what *can* enter collections. The archival categorization hints at an institutional desire to be a small museum, an artist-run space, or a private entity. It not only creates history, but first and foremost its genealogy of history.

| FOTOGALLERIET'S EXHIBITION HISTORY 1977-2017                  |        |                     |                |               |
|---|--------|---------------------|----------------|---------------|
| 1978  |        |                     |                |               |
| SAMFOTO   |        | FG_BOX001_EXH197801 |                |               |
| 03.-29.01.1978  |        |                     |                |               |
| <u>Artists:</u> Unknown                                       |        |                     |                |               |
| <u>Location:</u> Fotogalleriet, Oscarsgate 50A, Oslo (Norway) |        |                     |                |               |
| <u>Archives documents:</u>                                    |        |                     |                |               |
| FG  | BOX001 | EXH                 | 197801 001-002 | Press Release |
| FG  | BOX001 | EXH                 | 197801 002-002 | List of works |
| <hr/>   |        |                     |                |               |
| EDWARD WESTON   |        | EXH197802           |                |               |
| February 1978   |        |                     |                |               |
| <u>Artists:</u> Edward Weston                                 |        |                     |                |               |
| <u>Location:</u> Fotogalleriet, Oscarsgate 50A, Oslo (Norway) |        |                     |                |               |

Fotogalleriet's Overview of Archival Collections (detail), p.5.

Following conversations with national and international repositories, including libraries and museums, and taking into consideration the highest archival standards, today, if one looks into the Fotogalleriet archives, one finds a series of boxes precisely divided into three categories:

EXH  
PRESS  
SLIDES

In classifying a very “disordered” past, tradition is built and projected into the future as a univocal category. Because everything needs to fit into the newly established order of things, history is “normalized” accordingly.

The normal individual—Fanon says—“is someone who does not make a fuss. But the trade unionists who protest and make demands, are they not normal?”—he asks.<sup>17</sup>

It is here that we can read the origin, the commencement in Derridean terms. Derrida was confronted with a similar issue when he spoke in London in 1994. He first delivered the famously titled “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression” at the Freud Museum. Derrida tries to understand what happens when Freud’s last home becomes a museum: the passage from one institution to another. A double take is at stake. In Freud’s case, what is to be archived: Sigmund Freud, the individual practicing a discipline, or the domain itself—psychoanalysis (the practice of an institution and the birth of a field of knowledge)? Who or what is the origin? The individual or the institution?<sup>18</sup> Similarly, with Fotogalleriet, what is to be archived? Is it the singularity of the institution’s approach or the birth of a field of knowledge?

Through translations, mistranslations, and misunderstandings, “Archive Fever” has become a pivotal text of the past decades. Especially with the fall of European totalitarian regimes in the 1990s, open access to state archives, repositories of visual and other knowledge, surveillance, and circulation of previously unknown material has become the “sickness,” the disorder of our times.<sup>19</sup> Such material, from the 1990s, comes to fruition, not because of caring but because of lack of care. Institutions were

collapsing and losing their original purposefulness. As a result, vast repositories of knowledge suddenly flooded outside the existing national jurisdictions and peoples. Is this what we call the infirmity of archives?

An archive is a place of consignment, the house or residence of the ruling officers, or *archons*, as we learn from Derrida. Because of their authority, they kept official documents in their household in ancient Greece. The archons guarded these documents: they were both keepers and interpreters. The power is not only in possessing this material—possibly for public use (where the concept of the public is yet to be fully defined)—but in the power of editing them. It is a document of the inscription of the law on the subject. (“Modern times, it has been said, are characterized by the individual put on file,” Fanon would add.<sup>20</sup>) The archives indicate where the records are stored. One can potentially double-check them, a sort of counterproof—not necessarily an original, but the assigned power to the origin (there may be different beginnings, but this is what the authority has marked as “the beginning”). The difference is crucial and perhaps why Derrida claims radical finitude in the archive, the possibility of forgetfulness (not only direct repression): the threat of aggression and the destruction drive that comes not from the outside but is inside. He names such possibility of (self-) destruction “mal d’archive”—archive fever—drawing from the death drive Freud had conceived regarding the formation of the subject. It comes out: the archive is infected—the infection is (in) the records.

Nevertheless, Derrida maintains (or calls up) Freud’s death drive principle because this principle is at once the condition and the possibility for the archive to exist. What moves its desire constitutes its potential danger and the very possibility of its destruction. The death drive affects the archive opening onto the future, its dependency concerning what will come, in short, the ties of knowledge and memory it promises.

“Arkhé,” “the originary” (the same word used by Derrida for the root of the archive), in Greek also means “to lead” and, finally, to rule, as we learn from political theorist Hannah Arendt. Arendt analyzes such a term when studying the concept of freedom. Arendt makes *arkhé*, the origin, also coincide with “to act” in Latin. Beginning, leading, and ruling are the outstanding qualities of a free person, she says.<sup>21</sup> Intensely preoccupied with the impending totalitarianisms of the 20th century, Arendt could not make freedom coincide with the idea of the sovereign, though. Sovereign would have meant a status recognition for the few who already possess that privilege, the ones ruling. But what about the others, those who were not yet deemed free? Or similarly, and even worse, those under whose sovereign territories and jurisdictions they had been dispossessed of their sovereignty, or even killed, provoking the mass refugee movement she analyzed so incredibly close in WWII. Being free and beginning something new coincide in her words. Against major philosophers preceding her, she would say freedom is not free will—because history demonstrated the failure of such a statement.<sup>22</sup> Free will is not enough to deem yourself free.

Is there a non-sovereign subject that can be free, she asks? Because sovereign means to submit to other people’s will. If one wants to be free, sovereignty is what one should renounce first. “Freedom is experienced in the process of acting and nothing else.”<sup>23</sup> Acting. “Arkhé”—and its corresponding Latin *agere*. Freedom is the capacity to produce something new—to be experienced in “spontaneity.”<sup>24</sup> Only those who were rulers but are no longer ruling can experience freedom—she condenses in this paradoxical Modern concept of democracy—an aspiration for equality, a community of equals who do not govern anymore but produce the conditions for freedom.

In a recent interview, Chilean cultural theorist Nelly Richards described the importance of the archives of memories, how they enter into radical democratic demands and requests for social justice, even when state apparatuses halt these demands. Such is the case of the wave of mass demonstrations in Chile in 2019, where the youth stormed the streets demanding a complete and overdue change in the system. But, unfortunately, the violent police control of the roads subsequently followed by Covid-19 regulations suffocated assemblies in public space. When this happened, Richards felt a freezing moment of political rights and state abuse of power. She uses the word “archive” concerning the revolts in the sense of reservoirs of dreams, experiences, and passions that we should hold in our memory.<sup>25</sup>

The question is, how do we cure memory? Is material tamed in a documentary source that preserves the destruction of its power enough?

I’m moving in and out of the exhibition space, not by chance but because we can’t understand one without the other. We can’t understand the aspirations guiding emancipatory principles—even the hegemony of museums with their roles of mass education—without addressing these power structures of the state apparatus, because we always work within given economic and consequent social frameworks, and hence institutions.

To continue, for Derrida, the issue is the power of self-destructiveness (the disease, the fever) already contained in the structure of the archive. For Richards, it is how to preserve memory, not how to destroy its power. Do the two coincide? Or do the two have real antagonistic positions? One is an archive constituted by material documents. At the same time, the other is a living archive, something which is both at work (when people gather on the street) but ungraspable because it relies and remains dependent on the assembly of people to secure its force, to not fade away permanently. Do we need to take the street, “to act” in Arendt’s terms, on the past? Is this the cure? Or it is simply pushing to cure in a future which is messianic—always about to come but never today.

We can also ask: which lives are lost even before they are lost in (they enter) archives? Which lives are dispensable before archives mark their passage? Are there protocols focusing not only on the living materiality of the archives but mourning other bodies, subjects, and lives that are not bearing enough value to be safeguarded? How do we grasp these lives?

In the case of Fotogalleriet, you are told today that the institution runs through exhibitions, four to five a year. Is this a consequence of the archival process? If one digs further, in 1977, the institution had a more open-ended structure—spontaneous, in Arendt’s terms. But, of course, that doesn’t matter anymore when the container counts more than the content. The political motivations are gone. The exhibition as a structure becomes the core of the institution. A new archival beginning, “arkhé.” It is not a small step because this sets the pace both for the future and to recover the past. We are told very little about the background structures: how the institution formed, its ruptures, what was not working, which exhibitions didn’t happen, and why. Under which material conditions did the institution work? Was the exhibition space always such a “unitary” space in the span of four decades?

If the exhibition is the only variable in this equation, all these structural questions count incredibly little without other intersecting factors—and documents—challenging the notion of its structure.

We need to open these questions because, otherwise, we think institutions are unmovable entities. The artists (the art photographers in Fotogalleriet's case) as free individuals are “natural” givens and not subjects that fought for recognition. If we follow such an archive predicament uncritically, we will believe that society constantly organizes in the same way: the way we know it in the now, today. That Fotogalleriet always had an artistic director, a board, employees, technicians, cleaners, a landlord, and public funding. In turn, we would believe similar institutions, governmental and non-governmental, have always acted in the same way. But institutions are human constructions and aggregations.

Though the sickness is clear with Derrida, we are offered no cure.

In sifting through documents left in excess—uncatalogued—I came across traces of three avenues of investigation that did not fit the unspoken, unconscious narrative of the newly created archive, and perhaps its new given beginning, “arkhé:”

1. The discursive aspect of the institution—present since the beginning, because the community had to speak about art photography to ground a social acceptance of an emerging concept;
2. A diverse aggregation of people backing instituting the institution with surprisingly varied backgrounds and interests—all looking to fill a gap within a given cultural landscape;
3. Institutional networks behind such collective desire, unveiling economic and material conditions impacting both the institution's governance and decision-making.

Is what's left in excess the call for a new “arkhé,” the archival cure? Or are images and not words the cure?

Images have their grammar. A crucial struggle took place—laboured—in the 1970s for artists to move away from “traditional” work as newspaper correspondents or reporters (or page fillers to illustrate words) to the exhibition space. When one looks at Fotogalleriet's statutes, the words “photography as a free personal tool for artistic expression,” are reported. The formulation of “freed” photography often returns because newspapers continued to subsume images as an “objective” tool illustrating words. Then one understands that Fotogalleriet was creating opposition to what existed in a locale, Oslo, in the 1970s. The working group behind the institution worked agonistically to existing institutions (the newspaper is an institution) because there was nothing in between. Photography served the newspaper's ideology. Photography had no freedom to speak its own language before institutions like Fotogalleriet instituted a new public space. These are the late 1970s, where revolutionary movements such as the Red Army Faction in Germany, the Red Brigades in Italy, and the Indigenous revolts of the Sámi people in Alta taking place in the Western world are reaching the height of their anger. The youth is rebelling against an instrumentalized nationhood, used and abused in international imperialism, and calling the individual citizen under the collective “we”—implicating antagonistic subjects under the sovereign principle. Newspapers were—and most often still are—an ideological apparatus of the state, with little means to speak other truths.



We can't understand these shifts, even today, without understanding the material labour conditions guiding these processes—these historical motivations constituting the formation of archival material. Why was photography moving away from the magazine page into the kunsthalle exhibition? What kind of economic forces pushed this shift? And what kind of production modes were in place?

Do I find myself, “my” story in archives?



Marthe Ramm Fortun, *When I'm not near the slide I love, I love the slide I'm near*, 2019. Photo: Fotogalleriet /Julie Hrnčířová © Marthe Ramm Fortun/BONO

Rarely, I would say, unless one is classified like a criminal or belongs to a specific class, allowing one to end up in an archive. Perhaps Instagram and Facebook have altered this presential logic because we have all become potential criminals (though they call us consumers and not criminals, in marketing terms. The derivative use of social media information may prove the contrary). Most people's stories, fortunately, or unfortunately, are forgotten because they are not considered virtuous (worthy of notice). And if they are registered, they are for the wrong reasons, or for sure, most often unconsciously. There is a lot of unconscious use of images today, provoking significant identity and psychological traumas (sickness provoked by images).<sup>26</sup>

The mass registration of common's people lives has to do with photography and anthropology in Modern times (police records included).<sup>27</sup> Up until the arrival of cheap cameras, one was either the subject of study, or the one taking the picture. Otherwise, an image would not end up in an archive—or at best, in a family album.

Ellisif Wessel, who passed away in 1949 and whose work arrived at Fotogalleriet in 1978, sits at the intersection of the two. At the beginning of the 20th century, Wessel started a “documentary effort,” especially as a photographer of Indigenous Sámi culture. When traveling around the country, she also became intensely aware of the widespread poverty in the region, bringing her to political activism—a double-edged sword. However, her images are some of the only accounts of Finnmark county, which the Soviet and German forces bombed and burned down during WWII in their battle to control the region.

When I had a conversation with Bente Geving, a Sámi artist who held an exhibition at Fotogalleriet in 1988, with photography, sound, and other material, we spoke about the historical images that Wessel took of the Sámi peoples.<sup>28</sup> Geving's take on her Sámi family in the area is equally unique. Almost in opposition to Wessel's socio-documen-

tarian perspective, she pushes away from the anesthetized positioning of images in the museum's space and archives. She calls for the artifacts' situatedness (including images) to give a haptic context in order to enable a sensorial reconnection to peoples and their cultural belonging. The museum—archive of a sort—materially dispossesses communities and their meaning system.



Bente Geving, from *Anna, Inga and Ellen* series, 1985. © Bente Geving/BONO



BG Yes, I think so.

AC And how did people react? I imagine this was quite different from what people had seen before.

BG At that time I was living in Berlin and I came to Oslo to install the exhibition and to be there for the opening. The exhibition got attention from the papers, and also many visitors. I rediscovered lately that it had reached Kirkenes and the Northern areas through the Sámi newspaper *Ságat* and *Sør-Varanger Avis*, in addition to being written about in *Arbeiderbladet*, *Morgenbladet*, *Aftenposten*, and *Friheten*. *Klassekampen* used the headline 'Three women to fall in love with'. This was a pleasant surprise for me.

AC Why do you think that this project was important at the time both for you and in general?

BG I went north and asked questions about our Sámi ancestors, and I'm glad today that I made these photos. My grandmother and her sisters were proud. My mother was too, when she came to the exhibition. It did something to her. She and her family got dignity; we all got dignity.

AC So it was a statement of your Sámi identity? I can imagine there was a lot of resistance at the time towards Sámi people in the south, in the capital, and 'coming out' as Sámi?

BG What I didn't know was that our Sámi identity was still a secret among some family members. So to make an exhibition about the sisters was to make it official that my relatives were Sámi, and that was quite hard for some. To be a Sámi was something to be ashamed of, it was hidden away. Every time I asked about the Sámi tradition or the language, I got the answer that it had no importance.

The Alta action [protest against the building of a dam on Sámi land] which took place at the beginning of the 1980s, began to change things. I was living in the Netherlands at that time, and it was the first time



I read anything about Norway in the papers abroad. It was very difficult to be so far away when this movement happened. It was so hard to get knowledge about it from my Sámi relatives.

Ellisif Wessel (1866–1949) photographed people in Sør-Varanger, and if it hadn't been for her, we wouldn't have known that there were so many Sámi people in the area. I think this heritage of shame was passed to my mother and then passed on to me. But I thought my children and my nephew should be proud of their background and their history. They are now, but it's taken a long, long time, and I'm still searching and trying to figure out these memories. I think the body remembers – it remembers the repression and the grief of feeling worthless. And now they've also found out that this is genetically passed on to the next generation.

AC Do you think this is made visible in the images?

BG The project is more a documentation of three old Sámi women, of a generation that had been hidden and is now disappearing. It's a tribute to my mother, my great

Pages from Antonio Cataldo (ed.), *Conversations on Photography*, Heidelberg: Kehrer Verlag, 2021, including an image of Ellisif Wessel, *Children from Sandnes*, ca. 1900. From the left: Margit Menna, Mathis O. Noste, Inga Menna, Bigga Noste, Ellen Inga Noste. Courtesy Grenselandmuseet

Geving traced a photograph of her grandmother (which she had photographed towards the end of her life to bridge Sámi life and pride) taken by Ellisif Wessel during her wanderings in Sápmi a century before.

The work of Geving also intersects with that of Marianne Heske, who had an exhibition at Fotogalleriet in 1978, ten years earlier, on phrenology. Though Heske can be considered among the forerunners for bridging conceptual art in the country, this work may be seen as an interesting comment on Norway in the 1970s—of course, in my reading. I don't think Heske has ever referred to this work in the way I'm looking at it.

In a European scientific fashion, in the positivist movement (not dissimilar from the prejudicial claims in the Italian South from where this article began), phrenology was used on Sámi people to instigate false claims of backwardness (most certainly, and similarly, in an attempt to assert colonial rule and make claims on ownership over their land by deeming one in "infancy" in relation to the other—claiming their inability to take proper care of themselves). Modern science works in alliance with power (academia is a supporting part of power, also in Haraway's sense). People who had rebelled against the process of Norwegianisation (forced cultural assimilation), such as Aslak Hætta and Mons Somby in 1852, were considered criminals. They were among the instigators of a peasant rebellion against local authorities.<sup>29</sup> (In)famously prosecuted and beheaded, after execution, their skulls entered the Anatomical Institute in Oslo as the first Sámi specimens in the university collection.<sup>30</sup> The request for burial came after a long struggle, with demands by relatives sent as early as 1976. Their skulls were finally removed from their repositories in Copenhagen and Oslo, respectively, and were buried only in 1997.

So, what's the cure when repositories of supposed emancipatory freedom "legitimate the *monstrum* of a historical study that produces its own original documents"?<sup>31</sup> *Arché*, the origin, cannot be situated either in a chronology or in a metahistorical sense. Like "the child in psychoanalysis expresses a force that continues to act in the psychic life of the adult; and just as the 'big bang,' which is supposed to have given rise to the universe, is something that never stops transmitting its background to us."<sup>32</sup> Like the "big bang" though, we can imagine it, but we can't locate it as a substance, it is not a given.

Against all evil and sick within society, Foucault suggests, via Socrates, to start pushing people to take care of the self, and to teach others to do so. If we follow Foucault's argument, there is a cure, because the disease consists of "a false opinion." Another suggested cure is to escape what Socrates refutes,<sup>33</sup> or "through *logos*, through good reasoning."<sup>34</sup> The activity of *epimeleia* "(of the care of oneself and others, of the care of souls) may take on the most urgent, intense, and necessary form."<sup>35</sup> In many cases, it is precisely a false opinion that puts the possibility of a liveable life in danger, when a soul may become ill. Similarly to Arendt's definition of freedom, taking care of the other, curing, does not necessarily mean acting in the political sphere: Socrates wants people to "take care of them so that they learn to take care of themselves."<sup>36</sup> It is a cure by philosophy of the disease of false discourse, of the "contagion of common and dominant opinions, of the epidemic of prejudices."<sup>37</sup> To serve society, one needs to endanger one's own life first, not repeat epistemic justifications, denying what's commonly known or accepted as the designated origin.

In its organisational form, the "archive-specific status of a piece of information"<sup>38</sup> is stored as material data with no single item valorised per se. The accumulation principle ensures the promise of a more equitable future. In retrospect, we think that we can understand the limitations of a specific historical time because of this princi-

ple. The archival form believes that the past's desire can always "speak truth to power."<sup>39</sup> It is a trace of an act of love gone. In such principle, archiving comes close to "collecting" and therefore close to the work of a museum.<sup>40</sup>

In archives, we create an algorithm that express a system of correspondences among accumulated material, creating relations where the x (the presupposed unknown, the origin) of its organisational structure remains primarily unknown, unconscious. Unspoken repetition stabilises meaning. What about the vocal? The echo? To go back to that infancy that is not yet word, yet it resonates with words.

Adriana Cavarero theorizes how the etymology of the Latin *vox* is *vocare*, "to call," or "invoke."<sup>41</sup> It is an invocation addressed at the other, at another voice, at an ear that receives it. At birth, the infant, with her first breath, invokes a voice to respond, calls for another voice. It is not communication, but pure vocality. Cavarero also leans upon Arendt to address how what makes speech political is not signification, expression, or communication. Instead, the political essence of speech consists in revealing to others the uniqueness of each speaker. Speech qualifies this self-revelation as political: something which is materially shared in a space, "whereupon those present show to one another, in words and deeds, their uniqueness and their capacity to begin new things."<sup>42</sup> It opens a horizon of plurality—not pluralism. A new beginning, *arché*. "The recognition of the pluralistic instance—through which the abstract universality of democracy is opened to the concrete reality of differences—does not get rid of the ontology of the individual."<sup>43</sup>

To call, to breathe together, instead of archiving, is the task of living images. Here, to move away from museum practices, deemed to categorisation and historicisation, invoke voices meant to put people together (bringing their voices to the fore), even in a book form. People came together in the space of the page, with one another, some for the first time. Not to archive, but to act an *arché*, the possibility of an active origin, constantly movable into renewed presentness. The archive barely served as an echo, the nullifying of a body towards the definitive dissolution of a uniqueness that, as echo, the archive does not possess. We are not looking for individual successes in such a process but unveiling collective inspirational strategies (*inspirare*, breathing together). We carry forward demands for justice that somebody else can no longer maintain.

The task of building a public space is not in structuring documents and their reading. It is in questioning their very existence. The fever should not remain in the archives. It is attached to material bodies. Bodies who are seeking justice.

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## Notes

**1** Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–99.

**2** A version of my text which I'm presenting here in a more essayistic form was initially delivered in June 2021, amid the Covid-19 pandemic. At the time, problematic ideas of cure were practiced and used to further restrict access to the West from other areas of the world based on citizenship connected to the land. Here I am mainly pointing out to media representation of a region, which does not necessarily address larger historical power structures putting lives in danger based on pure provenance univocally determined by the West. Ida Danewid, "White innocence in the Black Mediterranean: hospitality and the erasure of history," *Third World Quarterly* 38, no. 7 (2017): 1674–1689.

**3** "Alcuni temi della questione meridionale" (Some Aspects of the Southern Question)

is a manuscript which was published in 1930 for the first time in Paris in the magazine *Stato Operaio*. Antonio Gramsci, “Some Aspects of the Southern Question,” (1926), *Antonio Gramsci: Selections from Political Writings (1921-1926)*, trans. and ed. Quintin Hoare (New York: International Publishers, 1978), 441-62.

**4** Gramsci mentions Enrico Ferri, Giuseppe Sergi, Alfredo Niceforo, and Paolo Orano—all from the positivist school of criminal anthropology established by Cesare Lombroso. Criminal anthropology sought to replace religious notions of crime as caused by sin and evil; it also presented itself as a counterpoint to a discourse on crime that approached it from a rights-oriented and legal point of view. In the place of religion and law, Lombroso put science. Lombroso had volunteered as a doctor in the revolutionary forces in Calabria—Italy’s southernmost mainland province, the toe of the boot that is the Italian peninsula—during the *Risorgimento*, the struggle for Italian unification. There, he had been shocked by the population’s poverty, malnutrition, and illiteracy. This, along with his exposure to Darwin’s ideas about evolution, was a formative intellectual experience for him. In common with many European intellectuals of the 19th century, he espoused a casual mix of evolutionary beliefs and racism, assuming a racial hierarchy “stretching from African blacks at the bottom of the evolutionary ladder to European whites at the top.” Mary Gibson, “Biology or Environment? Race and Southern ‘Deviancy’ in the Writings of Italian Criminologists, 1880-1920,” in *Italy’s “Southern Question”: Orientalism in One Country*, ed. Jane Schneider (New York: Berg, 1998).

**5** Édouard Glissant, “Pedagogy, Demagogy,” in *Caribbean Discourse. Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash, (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 180.

**6** Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks, Volume 3*. trans. J.A. Buttigieg (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007), 168.

**7** Michel Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth (The Government of Self and Others II)*, Lectures at the Collège De France 1983–1984 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 12.

**8** Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 176.

**9** Paul Rutherford, *Endless Propaganda: The Advertising of Public Goods* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 18.

**10** Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (Routledge: London and New York, NY: 1992), 174.

**11** “We’ve got Pacifiers Instead of Culture in this Country,” Robert Meyer in Conversation with Helle Siljeholm, in *Conversations on Photography*, ed. Antonio Cataldo (Heidelberg: Kehrler Verlag, 2021), 125–137.

**12** I’ll move between the singular and the plural for the archive, because I see archives as a set of strategies beyond what is being claimed as the archive, as a univocal tool. Also, in the institutional press releases for the presentation of the archive project in 2017, the vocabulary switches between singular and plural.

**13** From Fotogalleriet application to the Arts Council Norway in 2015 archived as “ES451832”.

**14** The Norwegian Association for Fine Art Photographers—FFF.

**15** Application “ES451832.”

**16** Nina Strand’s project “Thumbing The Library: Gardening Networks” was on view at Fotogalleriet from 3 November 2018 to 12 January 2019.

**17** Franz Fanon, “The Meeting Between Society and Psychiatry,” in *The Psychiatric Writings. From Alienation to Freedom*, eds. Jean Khalfa and Robert J.C. Young and trans. by Steven Corcoran (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 371.

**18** Jacques Derrida, “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,” *Diacritics* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 9–63.

**19** The meaning of archive shifts direction in the 1990s, as artist and theoretician Hito Steyerl addresses in a series of writings and lectures in the late 2000s. Hito Steyerl, “Politics of the archive. Translations in film,” <https://transversal.at/transversal/0608/steyerl/en>. In this article, Steyerl affirms, “To educate in common means building a common literacy and, more often than not, a common nation.”

**20** “The Meeting Between Society and Psychiatry,” 374.

**21** Hannah Arendt, “Freedom and Politics: A Lecture,” *Chicago Review* 14, No. 1 (Spring 1960): 28-46.

**22** *Ibid.*, 40.

**23** *Ibid.*, 41. Giorgio Agamben would interpret such a notion of acting as also the possibility of non-acting, “inoperosity,” which is the maintaining acting in potency. See Giorgio Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, trans. Adam Kotsko, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016. (“Work and Inoperativity,” 245-248).

**24** Arendt, “Freedom and Politics: A Lecture,” 42.

**25** Marcelo Expósito, “We must bring back desire in the midst of hardship.” A conversation with Nelly Richard, *L’Internationale*, 3 August 2020, [https://www.internationale-online.org/opinions/1040\\_we\\_must\\_bring\\_back\\_desire\\_in\\_the\\_midst\\_of\\_hardship\\_a\\_conversation\\_with\\_nelly\\_richard/](https://www.internationale-online.org/opinions/1040_we_must_bring_back_desire_in_the_midst_of_hardship_a_conversation_with_nelly_richard/).

**26** Foucault would use the term “infamous lives” for lives registered in the public domain—archives—accidentally. He sees positivity in such a process because at times is the only way we get to know of others’ lives—lives that were otherwise not considered worth living. See Michel Foucault, “Life of Infamous Men,” in *Michel Foucault: Power, Truth, Strategy*, ed. Meaghan Morris and Paul Patton (Sydney: Feral, 2006), 76–91.

**27** Melissa Banta and Curtis M Hinsley, *From Site to Sight: Anthropology, Photography, and the Power of Imagery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2017).

**28** “Memories Return When Least Expected.” Bente Geving in Conversation with Antonio Cataldo, in *Conversations on Photography*, ed. Antonio Cataldo (Heidelberg: Kehrer Verlag, 2021), 109–124.

**29** Roald E. Kristiansen, “The Kautokeino Rebellion 1852,” *Sami Culture* (2013) <http://www.laits.utexas.edu/sami/dieda/hist/kautokeino.htm>.

**30** The skull of Hætta was exchanged for two Inuit skulls from Copenhagen University in 1856 as reported by Audhild Schanche. See Audhild Schanche, “Sami Skulls, Anthropological Race Research and the Repatriation Question in Norway,” in *The Dead and their Possessions: Repatriation in Principle, Policy and Practice*, ed. Cressida Forde et al. (London: Routledge, 2002), 47–58.

**31** I’m referring here to Agamben’s study of genealogy and history, and the danger of thinking in chronological terms. See Giorgio Agamben, “The Sacrament of Language: An Archeology of Oath,” in Giorgio Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017), 307.

**32** *Ibid.*, 308.

**33** Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, 107.

**34** *Ibid.*, 108.

**35** *Ibid.*, 110.

**36** *Ibid.*, 110.

**37** *Ibid.*, 348.

**38** Blake Stimson, “Institutionality as Enlightenment,” in Pascal Gielen (ed.), *Institutional Attitudes. Instituting Art in a Flat World* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2013), 149.

**39** *Ibid.*, 150.

**40** *Ibid.*

**41** Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 169.

**42** Ibid., 189.

**43** Ibid., 191.

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**Antonio Cataldo** holds a Ph.D. in Curatorial Studies. Since August 2018, Cataldo has served as the Artistic Director of Fotogalleriet, an independent and publicly-funded institution, the oldest kunsthalle for photography in the Nordic region. Through exhibitions, discourse, and research for several internationally reputed organizations, Cataldo has actively challenged institutional models, their governing structures, and the representational social role of images. Cataldo studied with philosopher Giorgio Agamben in Venice, Italy, obtaining his MA in 2006. Cataldo sits on the boards of Kunsthalls in Norway and the Sandefjord Kunstforening Art Award jury.

# Whisper Game: Practising Attention Through Caring and Pacing

## Basia Sliwinska and Caroline Stevenson

In conversation with *Judah Attille, Giovanna Bragaglia, Maria Costantino, Fabiola Fiocco and Alison Green*

As children, we often played a game called “Whisper Game” (some alternative names depending on locality are “Broken Telephone,” “Deaf Telephone,” “From one ear to another ear,” “Game of the Ear,” among others). The game relies on one person whispering a message to another person’s ear, who passes it further until the message reaches the final participant, who is expected to speak it out loud. Often, the message changes from its initial meaning. The process of retelling and whispering is entirely dependent on the participants, and it is up to them whether the message maintains its original accuracy. The game portrays a cumulative error in communication arising from inaccuracies, erroneous or deliberate alterations, impatience, or unreliability of human memory. There is something enchanting about playing this game; waiting for a message to arrive then anticipating how it might change again. The message itself becomes an agentic object carrying traces of embodied knowledge as it passes through the chain. How each participant chooses to care for this object, or manipulate it, belongs to the mechanics of the game.

In June 2021, we ran a workshop entitled “Whisper Game: Practising Attention Through Caring and Pacing” at a conference “Situated Knowledges: Art and Curating on the Move” organised by Zurich University of the Arts, Tai Kwun Hong Kong, and the Migros Museum. We decided to engage with the Whisper Game in the context of Donna Haraway’s vibrant notion of “situated knowledges”<sup>1</sup> to explore spaces opened up by the game, in which meaning is created via a collaborative act of passing a message from one person to another. The objective of the workshop was to depart from the linguistic focus of the game to offer a space and time for an interrogation of the methods and instruments participants use to perform care while passing on a message. Whisper Game is not only a leisure activity performed by children or a way of obtaining and forwarding information, distorted (un)purposefully or not, but also a critical practice which makes us re-consider our individual and collective relationships and interdependencies in mediating knowledge. Similarly to Haraway’s concept of “situated knowledges” being attentive to interrelational sharing beyond the duality of objectivity-relativism, Whisper Game, as a method, gave us an opportunity to explore specific positionalities via “mapping practices”; the boundaries between messages that in themselves are generative and productive of meanings. Haraway proposes, “Bodies as objects of knowledge are material-semiotic nodes. Their boundaries materialize in social interaction.”<sup>2</sup> The workshop aimed to make visible the multidimensional and incomplete connections *in-between* and *with/in* and to question how we can think with/in positionings that carefully attend not only to boundaries, but also thresholds. How do the boundaries between messages generate and materialise meanings? How do we practise attention to connections in-between and with/in? The intention of the workshop was to think *with* each other and learn about the collaborative act of sharing



a message which is always partial, situated and in motion. Approaching knowledge from the perspective of movement, as a journey in time and space, thinking-*with* others, requires a particular form of attention manifested in caring and pacing while making knowledge move.

The game was initiated with a text, a “gift,” we sent to the first participant (see fig. 1). It was *Radical Tenderness Is...*, a living manifesto written by Dani d’Emilia and Daniel B. Chávez in 2015.<sup>3</sup> Each participant was asked to choose a new cultural text that responds to the one they had been given. It could be any format they wished, and we asked them to choose something that was meaningful to them and that responded to the overarching idea of the text we shared. Each participant was given five minutes to consider the gift and send a related gift to the following participant, along with the instructions. Once they passed on the message, they were asked to spend time with the gift they received, using “critical tools” (e.g., highlighters, scissors, glue, images, pens, pencils, needle and thread, smartphone camera—whatever they had around them) to alter it, adding their own thoughts, reactions, and references. Everyone was asked to take pictures of their process and upload them to the dedicated Padlet board<sup>4</sup> in the section dedicated to Workshop 7 (see figs. 1, 2, 3, and 4).

The order of participants was decided randomly. In the same order in which the cultural texts were shared, we asked participants to reflect on the process and the discussion that followed. This text is a record of our workshop. Co-authored with almost all its participants, it follows the format of the Whisper Game. The reflections follow the logistics of the game and the ways in which we treat information as an object to receive and an object to give away. They reveal tensions, hierarchies, and agencies that shape the spaces with/in which we speak, listen, and are heard. They demonstrate the economies of our everyday conversations and the vulnerability involved in making connections with others. Most of all, they show what happens when we communicate with care, applying thought to where knowledge emerges from, how it is handled, and where it might travel to.

# The first gift sent to Participant 1

RADICAL TENDERNESS IS ...

A LIVING MANIFESTO WRITTEN BY DANI D'EMILIA AND DANIEL B. CHÁVEZ

RADICAL TENDERNESS IS TO BE CRITICAL AND LOVING, AT THE SAME TIME

RADICAL TENDERNESS IS TO UNDERSTAND HOW TO USE STRENGTH AS A CARESS

RADICAL TENDERNESS IS TO KNOW HOW TO ACCOMPANY ONE ANOTHER, AMONG FRIENDS  
AND LOVERS, AT DIFFERENT DISTANCES AND SPEEDS

RADICAL TENDERNESS IS WRITING THIS TEXT AT THE SAME TIME, FROM TWO FARAWAY  
CONTINENTS

...FROM THE SAME BED

WRITING WHILST CARESSING

RADICAL TENDERNESS IS TO KNOW TO SAY 'NO'

IS TO CARRY THE WEIGHT OF ANOTHER BODY AS IF IT WERE YOUR OWN

...IS TO SHARE SWEAT WITH A STRANGER

RADICAL TENDERNESS IS TO DANCE AMONG DISSIDENT BODIES IN A WORKSHOP

...TO BE COMPLETELY OVERWHELMED AND MAINTAIN OUR SMILES AND CELEBRATIONS

RADICAL TENDERNESS IS TO ALLOW YOURSELF TO BE SEEN: TO ALLOW YOURSELF TO BE

**[ENG]RadicalTendernessManifesto\_Dani...**  
PDF document  
padlet drive

fig. 1 The first gift sent to Participant 1, *Situated Knowledges. Workshop 7*, Padlet, 2021



fig. 2 Words “radical offer” translated via Google Translate, phone screengrab, *Situated Knowledges. Workshop 7*, Padlet, 2021



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## Mothers, Monsters, Mentors

**Adrienne Harris Ph.D.**

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fig. 3 Gift shared by Participant 2 with Participant 3, *Situated Knowledges. Workshop 7*, Padlet, 2021



fig. 4 The gift shared by the Final Participant, *Situated Knowledges. Workshop 7*, Padlet, 2021

## Alison Green

Aided by a smartphone, I joined the workshop as I stepped into a car that would travel across South London to a birthday lunch for my sister-in-law. The conditions of my participation included a changing cityscape through the car windows, my fellow passengers who I drew into the conversation and who co-designed the response, and putting the project out of my mind to eat and join the lunch conversation, and then return to the workshop whilst sitting outside the Millennium Dome. Reading the gift I received from Basia and Caroline, the *Radical Tenderness Manifesto*, out loud in the car drew hoots of scepticism from my son and husband but it nonetheless led to a real conversation about the accessibility of language, and the spark of an idea of what I could “make” for the workshop. Still in the car, we input the words “radical tenderness” to Google Translate, in various languages, and reversed the translation to see what we happened (see fig. 2). My favourites: in Vietnamese, it became “gentle and progressive.” In Igbo, it became “compassion.” In Hawaiian, it became “soft soft.” In Scots Gaelic, it became “radical offer.”

In my childhood growing up in America, the Whisper Game was called Chinese Whispers. I cringe at the racism of this. So in a small gesture of reparation, I tested “radical tenderness” in Chinese. I note that it retranslates back into English as “thorough tenderness.” Sounds better, I think. The whisper produced nuance instead of broken meaning.

**Maria Costantino**

London, 14 July 2021

Dear Alison,

I wanted to thank you for the gift...

The Whisper Game: was it a narrative—a story unfolding in space and time? I wanted to be the protagonist, making key decisions that would affect the plot and influence the story, not the antagonist I feared I would be creating obstacles, complications, and conflicts, manipulating the strengths (and weaknesses) of others in the game. Or was it a game? How could I win the game? How strategic should I be in my gift giving? A gift received carries the obligation of reciprocity: a gift of least equal value—if not more—and it needed authenticity to distinguish it—and me—from Alison's gift. In this waiting space-place, I had devised my auto-topographical narrative and transformed a yet ungiven/unreceived gift into a commodity.

I received my gift. But what was it? I was afraid: was this a burden that would thwart my gameplay and threaten the protagonist role that I had imagined for myself?

The last minutes of a podcast by Jane Ward in conversation with Jana Byers.<sup>5</sup> I tried to listen, to focus: *the problem with the patriarchal system—mutual respect is expected to exist alongside the enduring forms of inequality*. I listened again: “*Women have a lot of work to do.*” A statement of fact. An acknowledgement (and call to arms) of the collective agency of women to effect change. The way Ward said those words—a breezy aside—condemnation, acceptable only because it was from a woman of women and to women: “*Could do better.*” I loved her for being right; I hated her because she was right. My burden was patriarchy's systems and my being. I was complicit in its making. Only in doing—my undoing, our doing, and re-doing—could the system be re-made and with it, our being. I understood the gift. I understood the game.

...the link is on my desktop reminding me that gifts cannot be separated from the givers: in each successive gift, we were carried together by the Whisper Game.

Maria

**Fabiola Fiocco**

An essay by Katherine Perrault titled “Beyond the Patriarchy: Feminism and the Chaos of Creativity”<sup>6</sup> is the “gift” I received from Adnan Arif. My first reaction to Perrault's text was a little daze, unsure how to react to a theoretical essay in five minutes, without being able to properly delve into it. I thus decided to scan through the pages and try to grasp core keywords and ideas. For the text reflects on Caryl Churchill's play *The Skriker*, I also did a quick search on Google Images, and the two things that immediately occurred to me were the concepts of the abject and the monstrous-feminine.<sup>7</sup> Hence, I chose to react to the “gift” by sending a video of *Saute ma ville* (1968) by Chantal Akerman. Proceeding by means of visual and symbolic associations, I then went back to the text, taking the time to read, highlight, and annotate as well as integrate it with images of artworks and events, falling into a string of hyperlinks and starting a chain reaction that could

have expanded indefinitely. In her text, Perrault observes how the non-linear pattern of the opera represents the essence of the creative act and of its multidimensionality, connecting apparently distant or marginal elements and opening “emergent avenues of perception.” Similarly, in this space of possibilities and stimuli, devoid of instructions and directions, the necessity to go for a less analytical reaction opened to a different connection with the “gift.” Also, looking back, I found this distance between the immediate reaction, given by the timeframe of the game, and the process of returning to the text very significant. As in real life, the discrepancy between the time of reflection and the time of production, marked by deadlines and mechanisms of coercion and external expectations, was reiterated. For a few hours, we “freed” our time and opened it to the unexpected to then re-insert ourselves into the flow of events.

### **Giovanna Bragaglia**

“We are not immediately present to ourselves,” well said Donna Haraway.

Wrapped in a web link, I was gifted the first part of the video *Saute ma ville* (1968) by Chantal Akerman. In an act of desperation to continue the Whisper Game, I quickly tried to grasp and decode the received gift. Everything seemed familiar and strange all at once. And despite the whispering noises and lost information, I knew clearly what it was about.

While unpacking it, I came across the questionings to the feminine universe about the role of care that is assigned to us women and its most emblematic place: the kitchen of the house.

There, I saw the young Chantal, I saw G.H. and Clarice Lispector herself, I saw my mother, I saw myself. At the same time, I saw none of us.

Within the atemporal black and white video scenes, full of anxieties and ultra-productive actions, I felt driven by an unconscious, instinctive act. I hunted for the moments of unexpected openness or the possible fissures that might allow fortuitous encounters. I found myself cooking. I found myself starving to devour something else within the stuttering communication. The what I know that I don't yet know. Thus, it seems that I have finally realised that resistance is in understanding that I don't understand. This is what has been nourishing me.

### **Judah Attile**

*Whisper Game: Practising Attention Through Caring and Pacing* turned out to be a strategic operation in which invitees occupied a critical geo-temporal continuum to reflect on curation and knowledge transfer processes through metaphor.

From my position of random situatedness located in the conceptual *south* of the Whisper Game, the matrix of time proved unstable. The rule structuring time-sensitivity broke down in the conceptual *north* of the game, positioning the desire of an unwitting “subaltern” to become dependent on the outcomes of hyper-ex-

traction of time from the *north*. To advance a claim for feminist objectivity characterised by a capacity to build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life, “Situated Knowledge: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective” includes a critique of “militarised male-dominated culture” that contributes to the production of “the disappearing act.”<sup>8</sup>

Citing a familiar childhood game within its proposition, Whisper Game framed a sequence of time-sensitive events, in which each participant had five minutes to receive, reflect on, and transform a *gift* and advance its potential as knowledge to the next player. Linear time as a model and medium for knowledge transfer proved unreliable because of disparities in access to the commodity of five minutes of directed and directional time to encounter the *gift*. Disparities in interpretations of the significance of time as a dynamic in the appreciation of curated knowledge resulted in stops, delays, deficit, anxiety, frustration, panic, heartbreak, isolation, depression, and the risk of devaluation in the realisation of notional value invested in the *gift*'s potential.

Whisper Game was a demonstration of time as infinite visualising technology that produces hierarchies of communication across physical and virtual space. The project was a welcome intervention to reflect on critical breaks in temporality and the *gift* as a metaphor for relational knowledge.

### **Basia Sliwinska and Caroline Stevenson**

The final gift has not reached us on time, but does it really matter? The moment the first participant shared a podcast, the journey started. Morphing into a series of exchanged texts, images, videos, and other creative visuals, the Whisper Game transformed into a collective sharing of voices and knowledges. In writing this text, we did not want to speak for others and suggest what they may have taken from this exercise, but we were interested to see how it fostered thinking with/in positionings and paying attention and care to meanings hidden in-between. Each reflection featured here contributes to a collective of voices that mobilised from a message we first passed. Each voice, individual and singular, became entangled with another, demonstrating Haraway's thinking-*with*. However, on our own reflection, how can a Whisper Game think-*with* in ways that prioritise horizontal and de-centred structures and narratives?

Sharing the *Radical Tenderness* living manifesto, through whispering, was an attempt at imagining a plurality of voices expressed in ways other than speaking. How do we care while passing on the message? How do we depart from shouting, talking, hissing, lipping, chatting, gossiping, or yelling? May a whisper offer us an alternative method of practising attention? Similar to breathing, the act of whispering involves talking in a quiet voice without vibration of the vocal cords. It is intimate and sensitive, perhaps even caressing.

In *Radical Tenderness*, d'Emilia and Chávez refer to the caress and sharing with strangers, carrying “the weight of another body as if it were your own.” “Radical tenderness,” they write, is to, “invent other temporalities,” “embrace fragility,” “embody performative gestures that you would normally reject,” “assume leadership when your community asks it of you, although you may not know what to do,

or how to do it!”<sup>9</sup> In our game, each of the participants performed their agency and generously shared their chosen gift in response to what they have received. Some of them, like Alison, drew others in and co-designed a response.

With its many vulnerable flaws, it also enabled us to reflect on critical breaks in temporality, as Judah notes above, and engage in a multidirectional creative act of receiving and giving, as Fabiola observes. Some participants engaged the help of others to transform their gifts; some added voices from literature and texts, and some subverted the chain altogether. The flow of the exchange followed an itinerary of a circle, initiated by us. The game should have completed when the final gift reached us. The fact that this didn’t happen only opened the discussion that followed, framing the broader implications of a game based on human-to-human communication. This may be reminiscent of what *The Care Collective* describes as an action of “multiplying our circles of care,”<sup>10</sup> expanding the notion of kinship. Our intention was to explore a range of caring arrangements via a collective of voices suggestive of caring kinships.

Time turned out to be critical for caring. The hierarchy of the exchange did not account for the delays, the waiting and needs of time, which became a material constraint. The rhythm we imagined did not recognise the overarching framework of productivity that constrains us. How can we pace ourselves and embrace the power of intervals? How do we address the discrepancies in collaboration and participate in a way that acknowledges the different needs in terms of availability and waiting? How do we trust one another? How do we get out of the trap of the present when the imagined rhythm is broken? How can we ensure the conceptual *south* gets heard and is allowed to speak? How do we embody multidirectionality in the economy of the conversations we share? Maria aptly notes above that gifts cannot be separated from the givers. And Giovanna further adds that resistance is sometimes grounded in admitting that one does not understand. Care brings nourishment.

Perhaps a generously shared whisper can be enchanting but also healing.

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## Notes

**1** Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14, 3 (1988): 575-599.

**2** Ibid., 595.

**3** Dani d’Emilia and Daniel B. Chávez, *Radical Tenderness Is...*, accessed 2 June 2021, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1f5Kd91d2u-5F7iTbPfrSyNoHouQVhsLc/view>.

**4** “Situated Knowledges. Workshop 7,” Padlet, 2021, accessed 26 June 2021, [https://padlet.com/Situated\\_Knowledges/2021](https://padlet.com/Situated_Knowledges/2021).

**5** Jane Ward and Jana Byers, “The Tragedy of Heterosexuality,” Jane Ward in conversation with Jana Byers, NYU Press, 2020, accessed 26 June 2021, <https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/new-books-in-gender/id425400236?i=1000526371186>.

**6** Katherine Perrault, “Beyond the Patriarchy: Feminism and the Chaos of Creativity,” *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 17, no. 1 (2002): 45–67.

**7** Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London, New York: Routledge, 1993).

**8** Haraway, “Situated Knowledges.”

**9** d’Emilia and Chávez, *Radical Tenderness Is...*

**10** The Care Collective, *The Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence* (London, New York: Verso, 2020), 33.



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**Dr. Basia Sliwinska** is an art historian and theorist whose research and curatorial practice is engaged with feminist visual activism(s) and transnational and intersectional figurations in contemporary women's art practice. Basia is a member of the Editorial Board of the academic journal *Third Text* and of College of Art Association's "Committee on Women in the Arts." Her recent publications include an edited book *Feminist Visual Activism and the Body* (Routledge, 2021).

**Caroline Stevenson** is a curator and writer and Head of Cultural and Historical Studies at London College of Fashion. Her curatorial practice focuses on collaborative exchange and dialogue through acts of listening, conversation, and correspondence, and has been recognised through several grants from Arts Council England and the British Council. Caroline is a member of the Centre for Fashion Curation at University of the Arts London and co-founder of Modus, an international network for expanded fashion practice.

# New Horizons: Ways of Seeing Hong Kong Art in the '80s and '90s: An Integrated Approach to Curatorial Practices on Exhibition-Making

## Janet Fong Man Yee

*Co-curated by Janet Fong and the Hong Kong Museum of Art (HKMoA) and showing at the HKMoA from March, 2021, to May, 2022, recorded over 338,186 visitors till Jan 2022, the exhibition includes artists Chan Yuk-keung, Choi Yan-chi, May Fung, Ellen Pau, Joseph Fung, the founding members and the co-founders of Para/Site (Tsang Tak-ping, Leung Chi-wo, Sara Wong, Patrick Lee, Man Ching-ying, Phoebe, Leung Mee-ping), and (the 2nd generation of Para/Site, Leung Po-shan, Anthony), and the co-founders of NuNaHeDuo (Lee Ka-sing, Holly Lee, Patrick Lee, Lau Ching-ping, and Wong Kai-yu Blues) as seven representative sections of artists and artist collectives.*

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After two years of research, this art and archives exhibition is being held from March 2021 to May 2022 at HKMoA, highlighting contemporary art history and artistic practices linking the past to the contemporary era through the integrated approach of curatorial practices on exhibition-making. This exhibition examines the crucial turning points, new trends, and sensibilities in contemporary art in Hong Kong during the 1980s and '90s.

This exhibition discusses the idea of alternative horizons in combing through the development of Hong Kong contemporary art over these two decades. In bringing this era into the spotlight, this project does not attempt to present it in the form of a historical narrative<sup>1</sup>; instead, it seeks to examine the alternative perspective of the decades as the vantage points of micro-<sup>2</sup> and macro-history. Sarah Maza stated, "In the 1970s and 1980s, microhistory offered historians a revolutionary new perspective: the focus [...] was not on explaining historical change but on showing what the world looked like to a specific person at a particular moment in time. Microhistorical incidents [...] serve as clues that point us towards a society's 'culture' and its interlocking system of meanings."<sup>3</sup> As a point of departure, the personal and professional experiences of the members of the curatorial and research team are essential. As artistic and cultural practitioners who were nurtured by the new developments in Hong Kong art in the 1980s and '90s and have been working for the last twenty to thirty years, they have been active from the very beginning of project planning for this exhibition. In two years' research, the curators and researchers interviewed and conversed with many artists about the contemporary art of these two decades, in the context of their personal views of history. These dialogues, which include significant verbal records that embody profound subjective sensibilities, provided the diverse perspectives of specific individuals during a particular period, reflecting the cultural debates of the '80s and '90s through various clues. These experiences and interviews laid the foundation for this research exhibition. They led us to a deeper inquiry into the people, organizations, exhibitions, events, and objects that featured in the art and cultural sphere during the 1980s and '90s.

As a highlight of the project, the exhibition sheds light on the creative breakthroughs of young artists in the '80s and '90s in different media, including installation art, new media, and image-making, which ushered in the rise of new artistic experimentation, visions, and formats at that time in Hong Kong. In addition to the showcase of artworks by seven representative sections of artists and artist collectives, the exhibition also features a restaging of iconic art spaces of the time—Para/Site and the NuNaHeDuo Centre of Photography in the 1990s—in the Hong Kong Museum of Art. With artworks and archival materials, viewers find themselves connecting the past with the present, as the blurring of temporal boundaries takes them on a cultural and historical journey. A multi-dimensional and imaginative space is created, offering viewers interactive experiences and associations with fragments of art history of Hong Kong of the '80s and '90s. The unique modes of spatial engagement and abundance of archival images and materials give viewers embodied interpretation tools to develop an understanding and knowledge of contemporary art forms in an immersive manner.

The archives section is an important part of the project. Through various channels, we collected and compiled the works of art practitioners (including our mentors, friends, and colleagues), and information about various aspects of the era, such as events, organizations, texts, artistic ideologies, and educational philosophies. This section is presented as image and text panels in various places throughout the exhibition hall and includes sections on Ellen Pau, Para/Site, and NuNaHeDuo Centre of Photography, with real historical objects and digitized materials. All the artists represented in the exhibition have been active since the '80s and '90s, not only in their artistic practice but also through their involvement in different aspects of the development of art and culture in Hong Kong. The exhibition showcases their current art practice against the backdrop of their previous works from the '80s and '90s, demonstrating how they are reimagining their practice by making original connections with the contemporary context.

Meanwhile, our researcher, Lo Yin Shan, with her insider's perspective as an artist, offers an intimate view in her series "Discourse of Reimagined Hong Kong Art Communities." This is showcased at the exhibition as an individual unit in a dedicated corner, containing archival materials, texts, photographs, video recordings, interviews, and displays of historical objects.

This exhibition is divided into the following seven units by artist or artist collective, containing artworks alongside archival panels. It demonstrates alternative perspectives on unraveling the art history of the '80s and '90s in Hong Kong, with more dimensions and an integrated approach to curatorial practices of exhibition-making.

## Choi Yan Chi

A pioneer of the New Esthetics in Hong Kong in the 1980s, Choi Yan Chi presents a reinterpretation of *Light and Shadow*, a site-specific work that she created for the first installation art exhibition at the Hong Kong Arts Centre in 1985. When Hong Kong art was still centered on modernist painting and sculpture, Choi broke new ground with her experimental and interactive work that introduced the international avant-garde into Hong Kong art. Since then, installation and cross-media art have become prominent trends in 21st-century contemporary art. What has remained unchanged in Choi's artistic practice is her poetic sensitivity through the changing times, as she draws on her life experiences and translates immense emotions into subtle expressions. While the display of the 2020 work was similar to that of her 1985 installation, Choi gave a new title to this site-specific work—*The Crimson Twilight on the Butterfly Dream*—an allusion to our time that lends deeper nuance to the work. Being lured into the artist's world by music, the viewer walks between fragments of Choi's memories, including images, poems, and Chinese calligraphies by her husband and artist, Hon Chi Fun, printed on hanging gauze scrolls, highlighting features of the unique museum space that looks out onto the Victoria Harbor and the Kowloon Peninsula. The space of the exhibition-making reflects the setting and the visitors' presence, as well as the artist's reminiscences and the imprints of the times. The immersive participation instills the site with an intense experience that embodies the spirit of the '80s and '90s. It echoes the founding of 1a space as a manifesto for the life of art, and the quest of Choi and her contemporaries as cultural trailblazers.

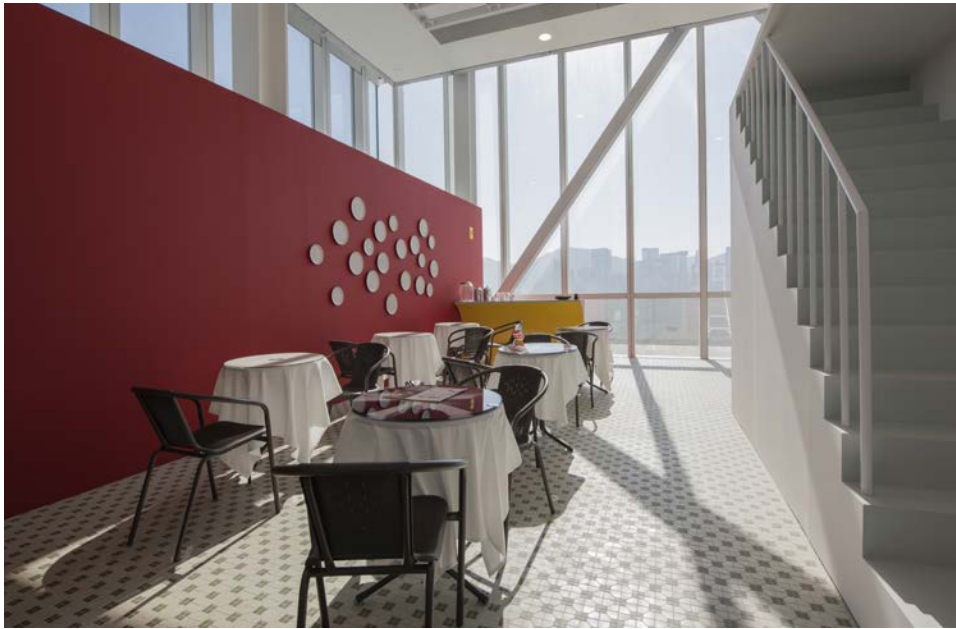


Choi Yan-chi, *Butterfly Dream as Smoke*, 2021 Mixed media and video *As Slow as Possible* in 1988, Photograph by Hong Kong Museum of Art ©HKMoA

## Para/Site—Coffee Shop 1998 (2020 Version)

This display presents a reconstruction of the ground floor space of Para/Site on Po Yan Street in Sheung Wan.<sup>4</sup> Founded in 1996, Para/Site was the first established alternative art space in Hong Kong and was a leader in experimental creation and exhibition. Through a variety of initiatives, including exhibitions, publications, experiments, and educational projects, Para/Site has fostered creative exchange in Hong Kong and

beyond. This was manifested in *Coffee Shop*, the first site-specific work presented at Para/Site in 1998. The participating artists included co-founders Patrick Lee, Leung Chi Wo, Leung Mee Ping, Phoebe Man, Kith Tsang, and Sara Wong, who, with Para/Site creative director Anthony Leung Po Shan, turned the space into a makeshift coffee shop. The collaborative experiment embodied the essence of daily life in Hong Kong—from the opening performance to the artists' works displayed around the “coffee shop.” Twenty-two years later, this experiment has been restaged at The Attic on the 5/F of the Hong Kong Museum of Art. In a bid to recreate the original setting, the new work features objects and materials that were used in the 1998 creation. In 2020, the “coffee shop” was lit up by sunlight from Victoria Harbor. The viewer interacts with the work and the site while looking back at the past. The rendition sets out to illuminate the drama of passing time and the experimental quest of Para/Site that echoes the spirit of Hong Kong. Over the past two decades, Para/Site has evolved from a local art space that sought to establish a unique cultural sphere in Hong Kong, to a platform for international connections and innovation in contemporary art and culture. Compared to the 2019 version that Para/Site presented in its current space, the 2021 version is a more faithful recreation of the original in terms of effects and on-site atmosphere, with Para/Site's international vision and its contemporaneity.



Tsang Tak-ping, Leung Chi-wo, Sara Wong, Patrick Lee, Man Ching-ying, Phoebe, Leung Mee-ping and Leung Po-shan, Anthony with the recreations of Lee Wan-tak, Lin Wing-yan, Lui Lok-man, Luk Kam-man, Wang Caiyang, Yeung Sin-ma, *Coffee*, 2021 (A recreation of 1998 original), Mixed media, Photograph by Hong Kong Museum of Art ©HKMoA

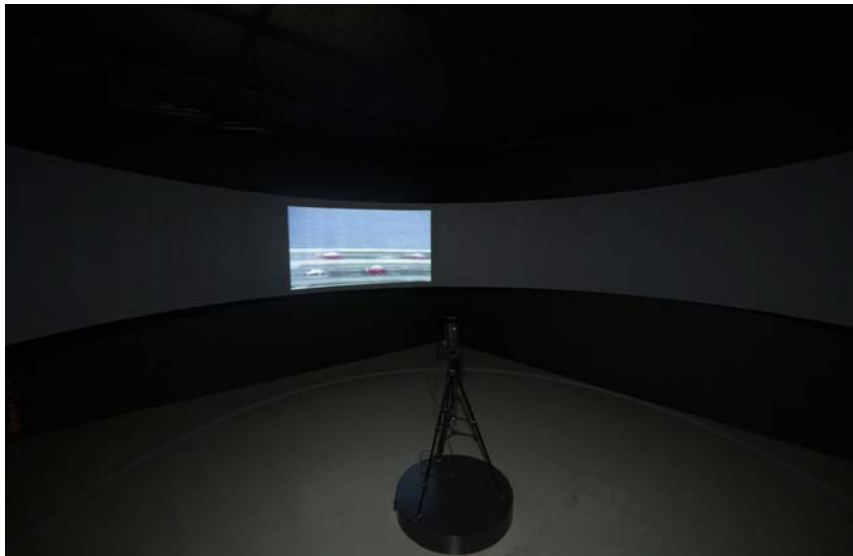
### Kurt Chan Yuk Keung

Kurt Chan recreates his mixed-media installation, *Untitled*, which he presented at the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art at the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane, Australia, in 1996. From 1979 to the early 1980s, Chan was influenced by the ideologies of Chinese culture and art, while also following the development of the international art world and his contemporaries. In the 1990s, Chan established “domestic esthetics,” his unique conception of mixed media art creation, which he incorporated into his teaching in Hong Kong. Since 1989, he has nurtured several generations of young artists at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, leaving a profound impact on contem-

porary Hong Kong esthetics in the past three decades. In this rendition of *Untitled*, Chan assembles unrelated found objects from daily life. He uses two poles to hang up two large pieces of existing materials, which seems to lend an additional dimension to the space between the installation and the walls, creating a spatial texture that is uniquely suggestive of Hong Kong. Chan also emphasizes the idea of anti-gravity: the two heavy poles are supported by two delicate porcelain cups, which seems to mock the bizarre reality we live in. While Chan attempts to resurrect the form of the 1996 work—for instance, he includes flour bags in the new work as he did in the original—they are existing flour bags from 2020, rather than from 1996, that he is using, which hints at the inevitability of change. Perhaps the use of the original title, *Untitled*, is an allusion to the intersection of cultural contexts in his art.

### Ellen Pau Hoi Lun

*Recycling Cinema* is one of Ellen Pau's most significant video installations. Since the 1980s, Pau has examined the characteristics of different media, creative visions, images, and the intricate relationship between the image-maker and technology in her work. Pau is a pioneer in the merging of new technology and art in Hong Kong. She co-founded Videotage with three other artists,<sup>5</sup> and the collective received funding from the then newly established Hong Kong Arts Development Council in 1996. The funding for Videotage was a sign of growing recognition for media and video art that Pau had been advocating. In 2001, *Recycling Cinema* was presented at the first Hong Kong Pavilion at the 49th Venice Biennale, which reflected the importance of media art and video art in Hong Kong contemporary art. Apart from her participation in major international exhibitions,<sup>6</sup> Pau has been devoted to promoting the development of Videotage and its offshoot, the Microwave International New Media Arts Festival.<sup>7</sup> The collective and the festival set out to explore new frontiers in media and video art—including new media and technology that have been focal points in art-making in recent years—and have become platforms for local and international dialogue on contemporary art. These accomplishments are testimony to Pau's status as a central figure in the development of contemporary Hong Kong art.



Ellen Pau, *Recycling Cinema*, 1999/2018, Video installation (Edition 1/3), Collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art AC2019.0025, Photograph by Hong Kong Museum of Art ©HKMoA and Courtesy of the artist

## May Fung Mei Wah

May Fung has been one of the trailblazers in media and video art in Hong Kong. The 1989 and 2016 versions of her seminal work of video art, *She Said Why Me*, are featured in this exhibition. Her 1989 video depicts a woman walking blindfolded from a temple in the countryside to bustling downtown Hong Kong. Interspersed with historical footage, the images ring with a deep sense of anxiety, and questions about the collective identity of women. Fung presented her 2016 video installation of *She Said Why Me* at the 30th anniversary exhibition of Videotage. Fung's own performance as one of the characters creates a sense of detachment from the work. At this exhibition, the two earlier versions of the work are shown on two display screens that are set up on opposite sides of a rotating monument-like stage. In contrast, in the 2020 version of this installation, the viewer had to physically follow its movement to watch the video. The simultaneous display of the three versions symbolizes the different stages of Fung's life. An experimental filmmaker in the 1970s, she ventured into video art in the 1980s. After she co-founded Videotage and joined Zuni Icosahedron in 1986, Fung was involved in the founding of 1a space, the Cattle Depot School, the Hong Kong Institute of Contemporary Culture, and subsequently the HKICC Lee Shau Kee School of Activity, the Foo Tak Building, and Art and Culture Outreach. All these initiatives have been instrumental in the development of art and culture in Hong Kong. The 2020 version of *She Said Why Me* captures Fung's responses to the ideological and cultural consciousness in Hong Kong at three different points in time (1989, 2016, and 2020). It demonstrates her lifelong quest for creative experimentation and her devotion to steering the development of Hong Kong's cultural ecology.



May Fung, *She Said Why Me* (2021 version), 2021, Video installation (two videos of 1989 version and 2016 version), Photograph by Hong Kong Museum of Art ©HKMoA

## Joseph Fung Hon Kee

A pivotal figure in the development of photographic art in Hong Kong, Joseph Fung has made immense contributions as a photographer, educator, artist, and curator. While Fung's life journey is extraordinary,<sup>8</sup> his artistic practice is a ceaseless inquiry into new possibilities in image-making; it spans an array of genres and forms including portraiture, social documentary photography, conceptual documentary, experimental photography, photogram, polaroid, and 3D digital imaging (in the 1990s). Fung was among the first group of photographers who entered China after the opening of the country. He shot a substantial volume of black-and-white images of the country, which he later combined with color works that he shot around the world, and this culminated in the two series featured in this exhibition: *East-West Diptychs* (1986–89/2013), and *The Butterfly Dream Series* (1998), a series of 3D digital images. They are displayed on old Macintosh computers from the same period, where the low resolution takes the viewer back to the dawn of the digital era in the 1990s. The works delineate Fung's creative journey from photography to digital imaging; they trace the changes in his photographic language in response to different social and cultural contexts, which mirror the development of contemporary photography in Hong Kong over the past decades.<sup>9</sup> Fung's contributions are not only manifested in his expansive repertoire, but also in his advocacy of photography education in Hong Kong over the past thirty years. Many artists who studied under Fung's tutelage are important artists and educators in their own right today. Fung's influence has also been seen in the Hong Kong International Photo Festival, which has expanded its curatorial focus and showcase in recent years.

## NuNaHeDuo

*Dislocation* (aka *NuNaHeDuo*) was a photography publication that embodied the concept of the crossover exhibition on paper, as it featured the works of artists and creatives in response to various issues. Edited by Lee Ka Sing, Holly Lee, Lau Ching Ping, Patrick Lee, and Blues Wong, the publication demonstrated the development of contemporary photography (image-making) in Hong Kong. From 1992 to 1998, it was distributed as a supplement to the *Photo Pictorial*. With funding from the Hong Kong Arts Development Council, the artist collective founded the art space, the NuNaHeDuo Center of Photography (NCP) (1997–1999). In conjunction with the OP Print Program, the NCP advocated the development of contemporary photography in Hong Kong. In this exhibition, we present a reconstruction of the exhibition space of the NCP. The photographic works of the five founding members of *Dislocation*, which range from digital images that were innovative in the 1990s, to poetic expressions and photographic projections of intense sensitivity, are exhibited in the reconstructed space. Selected volumes of *Dislocation* (original printed volumes and digital versions) are also displayed. The showcase illuminates the unique landscape of image-making of the 1990s.





A recreation of Nunaheduo Contemporary Photography Center (1998-2001) with the works of Lee Chee-fong, *Patrick, Behold*, 1995 (Printed in 2020), *Set of five*, digital print and *Night Vigil*, 2000 (Printed in 2020), Set of 13, digital print; Holly Lee, *Madodhisattva*, 1993 (Printed in 2020), Digital print, Photograph by Hong Kong Museum of Art ©HKMoA



Choi Yan-chi, Detail of *Butterfly Dream as Smoke*, 2021 Mixed media, Photograph by Hong Kong Museum of Art ©HKMoA



Chan Yuk-keung, details of *Vertical Rye Field*, 2021 (A recreation of 1996 original), Mixed media, Photograph by Hong Kong Museum of Art ©HKMoA



Chan Yuk-keung, *Vertical Rye Field*, 2021 (A recreation of 1996 original), Mixed media, Photograph by Hong Kong Museum of Art ©HKMoA



May Fung, *She Said Why Me* (2016 version), 2021, Video, Courtesy of the artist



undertook research and interviews with Hong Kong artists, June 1999 till Dec 2020, courtesy of the artists, curators, researcher and the curatorial team

## Final Words

In this exhibition, we consider the idea of new horizons as a starting point in combing and seeing through the development of Hong Kong's contemporary art, and in exploring the links between personal experiences, organizations, events, and the development of local culture. It is the quest to trace the historical connections between the individual and changes in contemporary culture, in order to shed light on the present and the future.

*New Horizons: Ways of Seeing Hong Kong Art in the '80s and '90s*  
at the Hong Kong Museum of Art

Presented by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, HKSAR

Organized by the Hong Kong Museum of Art

P.S. Digital Archive of the Exhibition by Hong Kong Museum of Art,  
will be launched in 2022

## Notes

**1** Stefano Collicelli Cagol, "Exhibition History and the Institute as a Medium," *Stedelijk Studies* 2 (Spring 2015), <https://stedelijkstudies.com/journal/exhibition-history-and-the-institution-as-a-medium/>.

**2** Sarah Maza, "Causes or Meanings?," *Thinking About History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 181-185.

**3** Ibid.

**4** There was a small exhibition space and an office in the loft on the second floor. They are not included in the reconstruction of the art space in this exhibition.

**5** The other three co-founders of Videotage are Wong Chi Fai, May Fung Mei Wah, and Comyn Mo Man Yu. Videotage is the oldest video artist collective and earliest archive for media art in Hong Kong.

**6** Pau's work has been featured in many major international arts festivals and film festivals, including the Hong Kong International Film Festival (1990, 1993, 1997, 2000), the 8th International Film Festival for Women (Spain, 1992), the Copenhagen Cultural Capital Foundation, Container 96 (Denmark, 1996), the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (Brisbane, 1996), the Johannesburg Biennial (1997), the Gwangju Biennial (2002), the Liverpool Biennial (2003), and the Sydney International Film Festival (2004).

**7** In 1996, she founded the Microwave International New Media Arts Festival, an annual event that consists of exhibitions, conferences, seminars, and workshops, bringing art experiences to thousands of Hong Kongers.

**8** Fung was born in Guangzhou, China in the 1930s. During his childhood, he traveled between mainland China and Hong Kong, and he later moved to Hong Kong. Fung lived in Macau during the Japanese Occupation, before he went to study medicine in Taiwan to evade the Cultural Revolution. After the opening of China in 1978, he became one of the first photographers who entered the country. In the 1980s, he taught photography at the Hong Kong Polytechnic. Reaching a bottleneck in his artistic practice, Fung went to pursue a Master of Fine Arts degree at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

**9** Bao Kun, "Between China and West, Old and New: The Photography of Joseph Fung," in *Time/Space: Brief as Photos—Dialogue Between Joseph Fung and His Contemporaries* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Arts Centre, 2018), 27.

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# Cloth Knowledge: Sculpting with a Missing Corner

## Debe Sham and Georgia Kennedy

In our interpretation of Donna Haraway's "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,"<sup>1</sup> we perceived the importance of an awareness of contextual knowledge and of varied experiences and viewpoints in order to provide a broader picture for decision-making. We arrived at the materiality of cloth as a metaphor for knowledge as mutable and shaped by the knower's unique experiences.

Moisture and fabric are potent metaphors for people in this line of thinking. Water takes the shape of its container, and water can make fabric flexible where it was otherwise rigid. This is like the experience of listening to others, and in return learning from them to form a new viewpoint. Bleaching permanently removes dye from fabric, creating an imprint of experience. Like people growing and gaining knowledge, fabric shows its marks and is able to be worked and re-worked into new designs and purposes, such as through starching, our final tool for changing the fabric from its original state.

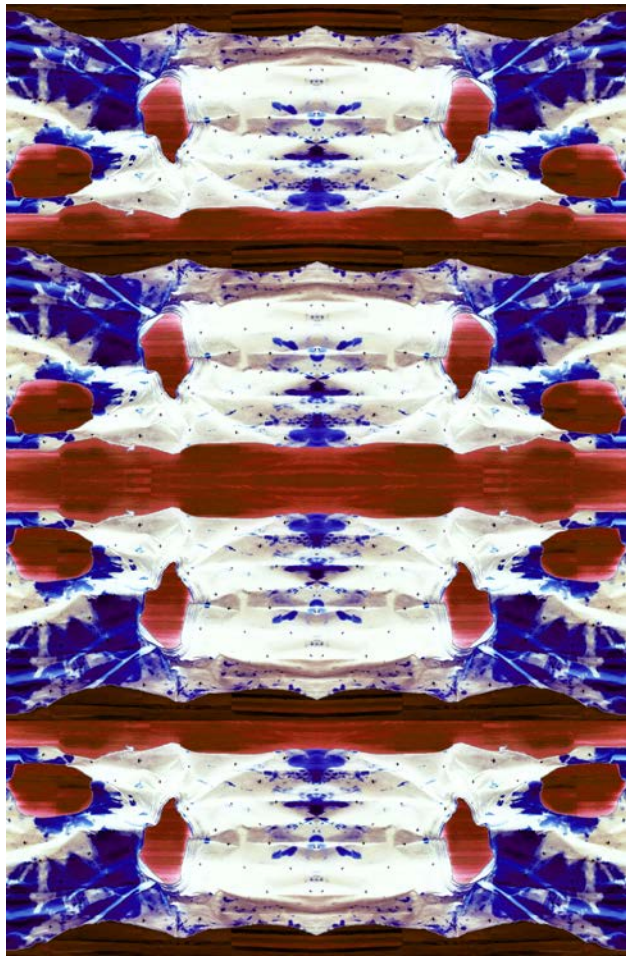
In the workshop, we asked participants to bring a natural fiber garment they were comfortable altering drastically from its original use. Cathartically, participants cut their fabric; the garments were dipped into a bleach solution; and finally, participants starched and ironed their textile into patterns. Our tools? Basic household materials in the domestic realm, historically and presently used in women's work, often not by choice, to project sturdiness or elegance; logo or brand; gender or social role. We capitalized on the accessibility of domestic laundering materials, co-opting them to create new, post-consumer meanings. Individuality, chance, choice, and collaboration determined our final creation, but participants learned skills of working with fabric to carry with them in their individual practices.

We believe "Situated Knowledges"<sup>2</sup> requires a practice of positioning that is about carefully attending to power relations at play in the processes of approaching knowledge.

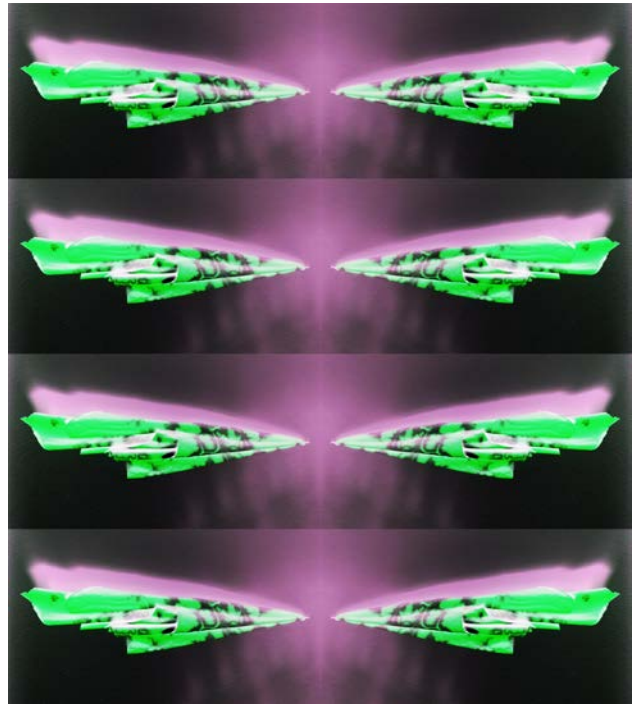
Our workshop was structured in two parts:

(i) Bleached cotton fabrics—bleached water imprinted and left a mark on the fabric, like an imprinted memory, like a trauma, but that also gave the cloth new meaning and beauty, to convey new information.

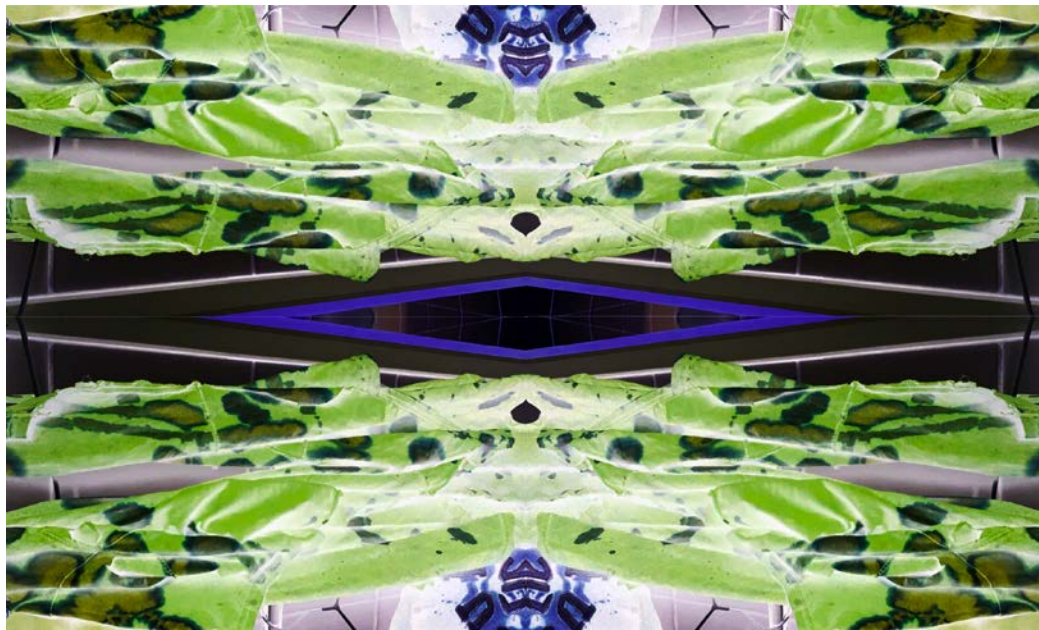
(ii) Shaped fabrics into origami sculpture—the geometrical appearance of the crease-patterns holds as fabric cools, like people always remain in their visions and strong wills. As participants in time, no matter how well we have lived or how difficult our lives have been, one would like to hold on to things one has learned in order to show their existence and preserve the pivotal values that they have created, pursued, and safeguarded. But nothing stays the same, and we cannot permanently preserve our positions.



Giovanna Bragaglia, *Cloth Knowledge workshop*, 2021: Fabrics.  
Image rendering by Debe Sham and Georgia Kennedy ©

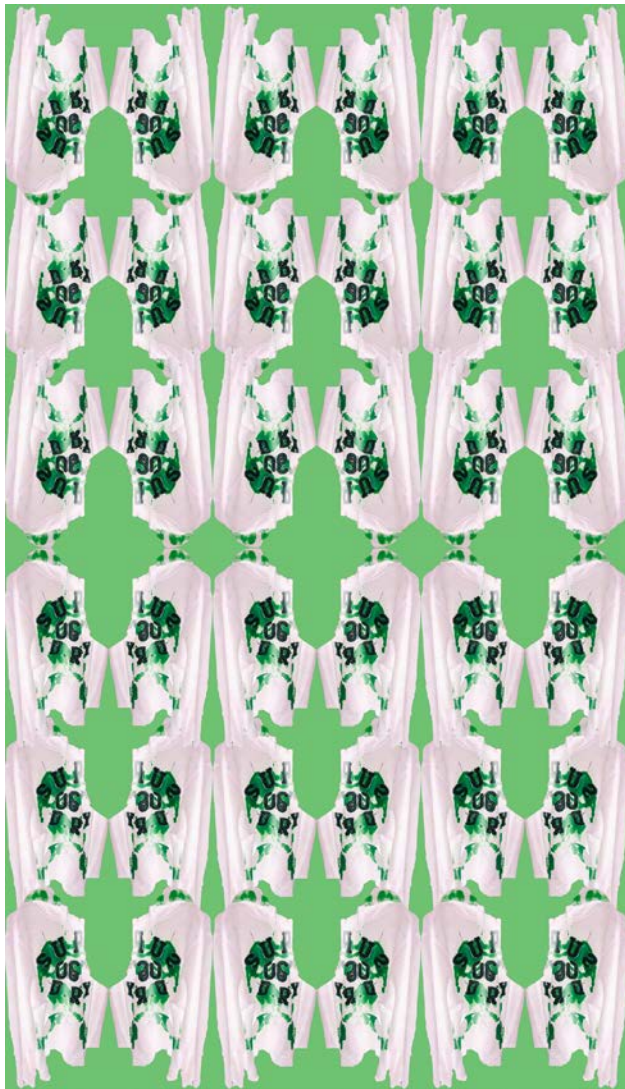


Kat Zagaria, *Cloth Knowledge workshop*, 2021: Fabrics.  
Image rendering by Debe Sham and Georgia Kennedy ©



Kelly Wu, *Cloth Knowledge workshop*, 2021: Fabrics.  
Image rendering by Debe Sham and Georgia Kennedy ©

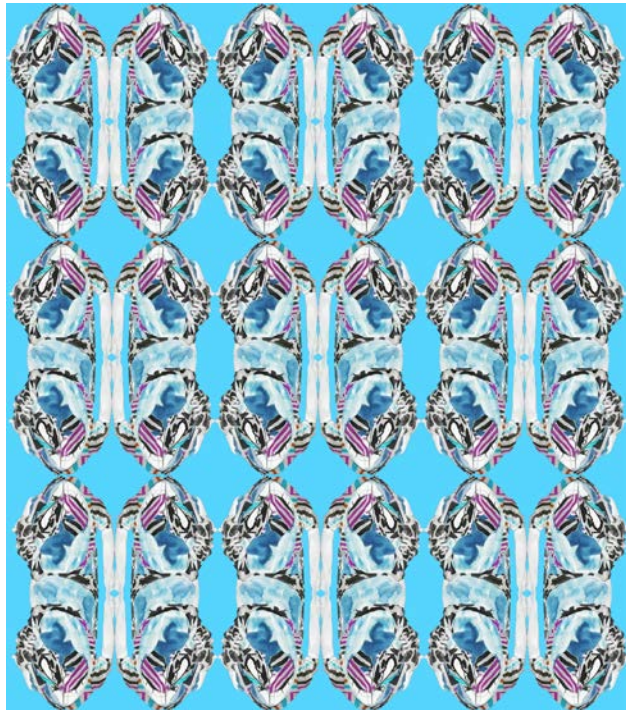




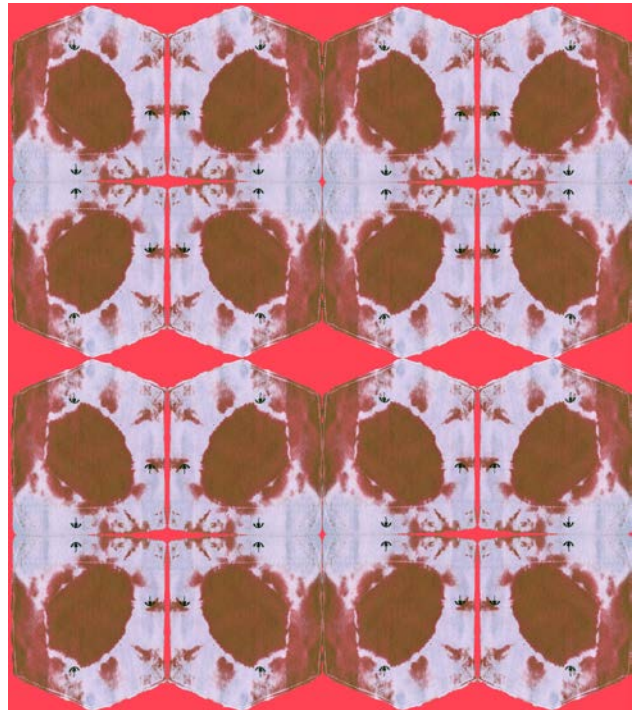
Kelly Wu, *Cloth Knowledge workshop*, 2021: Fabrics.  
Image rendering by Debe Sham and Georgia Kennedy ©



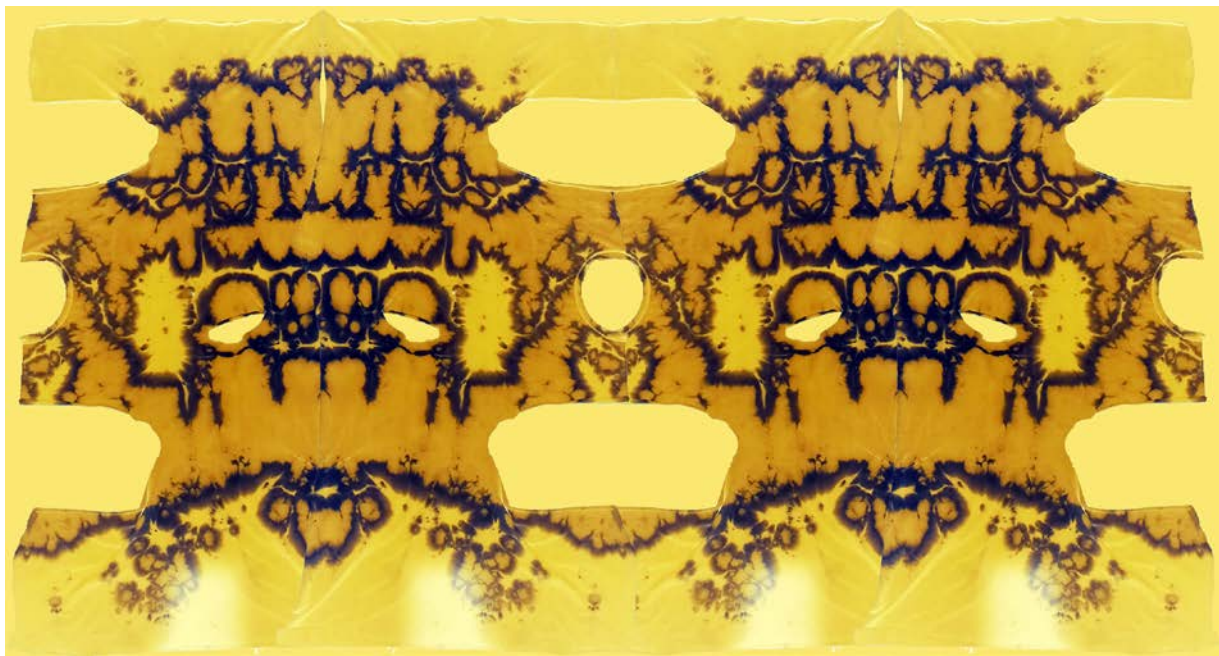
Sunny Ng, *Cloth Knowledge workshop*, 2021: Fabrics.  
Image rendering by Debe Sham and Georgia Kennedy ©



Sunny Ng, *Cloth Knowledge workshop*, 2021: Fabrics. Image rendering by Debe Sham and Georgia Kennedy ©



Giovanna Bragaglia, *Cloth Knowledge workshop*, 2021: Fabrics. Image rendering by Debe Sham and Georgia Kennedy ©



Kat Zagaria, *Cloth Knowledge workshop*, 2021: Fabrics. Image rendering by Debe Sham and Georgia Kennedy ©

## Folding and Binding

Prevents bleach from reaching part of the fabric, creating patterning and interest in the design.

- Deconstructed clothing item
- Rubber bands and/or needle and thread



## Starch Powder Mixture

- Add 1 tablespoon of Tapioca Starch Powder
- Add 1 tablespoon tap water \*room temperature
- Keep stirring until everything comes together
- Add half cup of \*boiled water
- Keep stirring until everything comes together



Slides from the artists' presentation showing the participants step-by-step bleaching and restructuring the textile methods



Onsite moments from the workshop showing the participants taking a full part at Tai Kwun, Hong Kong

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## Notes

**1** Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575-99. Accessed July 23, 2021. doi:10.2307/3178066.

**2** Ibid.

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**Debe Sham** is a sculptor and educator. She graduated from the Academy of Visual Arts at Hong Kong Baptist University. Her research interest focuses on Hong Kong participatory art and art in the public realm. Her site-specific sculptures and mixed-media installations have grown out of the artistic exploration of the role of public art. She has participated in local and overseas exhibitions and publications, such as Hong Kong Sculpture Biennial, Art Basel, International Festival of Arts and Ideas, Art Asia Pacific and Inside Burger Collection. Debe has taught studio courses at AVA of HKBU, the Fine

Art Department of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and the Department of Visual Studies of Lingnan University. Before joining the board member of 1a space (2021-present), she was a visiting artist at Yale University (New Haven, 2017-18). Currently, she is a Doctor of Philosophy degree student in Hong Kong.

**Georgia Kennedy** is an artist and performer in Boston. She received her BFA in Studio Art-Painting from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in 2008, and her MFA in Painting & Printmaking from Yale School of Art in 2017. Her work has been exhibited in group and solo exhibitions across the U.S. with an affinity for alternative art spaces. She has taught and guest lectured at Brookline Adult & Community Education in Brookline, MA; the Hickory Museum of Art in NC and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro; and she has been a teaching assistant for Studio Art and Art History courses at Yale. She is currently a staff member at Gateway Arts, a studio art center, gallery, and store for adults experiencing disabilities in Brookline, MA. Georgia's work comprises post-consumer materials, with an emphasis on personal transformation. Her work manifests in objects, installation, video, and performance.

# Situated Knowledge, Situated Works

## Bo Choy and Chloe Ting

When we were invited to run a talk and workshop on the idea of “Situated Knowledge,” we drew from our experiences and personal connections to the cities of both Hong Kong and London. Chloe moved to London to study and now works at Afterall, whereas Bo has recently moved back to Hong Kong after many years in London. Although still the same autonomous person, the displacements and shifting contexts affect the way we understand ourselves and how we are understood in the respective worlds. Much like when an artwork reaches the public, its meaning and effects in the world are also determined by the socio-political-historical contexts of the time and place.

For the workshop, we invited participants to consider the socio-historical, geo-political, and cultural situation of their current home and how the context offers meaning to artworks produced and exhibited. Working with a piece of art of their choosing, they were to replace it in a different environment, considering both time and place. We wanted to question and reimagine the curatorial framework and how artworks can take new roots and make new meaning.

We led by sharing our own reimagination.

*The Other Story* was an exhibition that opened at the Hayward Gallery in 1989. Curated by artist Rasheed Araeen, it united the art of “Asian, African and Caribbean artists in post war Britain,” and was a response to the “racism, inequality, and ignorance of other cultures” at the time in late-1980s Britain. Kumiko Shimizu’s work, *Project for the Hayward Gallery*, was an interesting piece in the exhibition that embodied positional perspectives in its material form and display.



Kumiko Shimizu, *Project for the Hayward Gallery*, 1989.

Shimizu's sculptures were part of the artist's ongoing investigation of hardware scavenged around London—pots, pans, small industrial tools—repainted with bright, carnivalesque colours resembling candy wrappers. These objects, when installed on the exterior of buildings, disrupted the urban vernacular as well as the public buildings itself. The work was previously installed in the streets of Brixton, outside of a church, a derelict building, a renovating house, and an art gallery. Installing the work outside of the Hayward Gallery, a Brutalist building and a London landmark, it was suggested as an “anti-imperial thrust” by Lucy Steeds, as it injected familiar found objects with humble origins and perhaps personal narratives onto a monumental building of historical value.

Situating the work of Kumiko Shimizu in Hong Kong at present has a unique resonance to us. As buildings carry historical stories, we loved the idea of reinstalling a version of the artwork for Tai Kwun. Tai Kwun is a heritage site, and was the former Central Police Station, Central Magistracy and Victoria Prison of Hong Kong. It is situated in Old Bailey Street, in Central. Central is the central business district of Hong Kong, and a cultural and shopping destination, where the value of real estate is prime; however, it's also the site of a number of major political protests. Had Shimizu been in Hong Kong to install the work in Tai Kwun, she would probably be scavenging used hardware tools and household items in more local and poorer areas in Hong Kong such as from the night street hawkers in Sham Shui Po. The tools and hardware items would hark back to the times when Hong Kong was a hub for light industries in the '60s and '70s, producing textiles, electronics, and plastic household objects. Although the objects found could most certainly have been made in China now, the connections it will create from the overlapping historical and shifting social contexts will no doubt endow the work with new meaning. Would it be seen as a deviant gesture with an anti-imperial, anti-colonial attitude? Or would it be a critique on class divisions and materialist culture? One thing we are certain of, is once an artwork has been displaced and replaced in a new world, its story can be reinvented over and over again.

Our participants also created their own reimaginings of artworks. Researcher and producer Ashley Wong explored the work of artist Lu Yang, who challenges the concept of static identities and curating on the notion of situatedness that is made complicated with the prominence of online exhibitions and digital artworks.

And through a painted mural in Tehran in Iran, Anahita Razmi highlighted the complexity and possibilities of recontextualising and translocating propaganda.

### **Ashley Lee Wong**

To imagine an artwork exhibited at the Hayward Gallery in London and conversely at Tai Kwun Centre for Heritage and Arts in Hong Kong is to also imagine the audiences of these respective places. It also suggests how these audiences might interpret a work given a city's historical and cultural consciousness. Such an imagining is a political act as suggested in Wang Hui's book, *The Politics of Imagining Asia* (2011).<sup>1</sup> It implies a politics of imagining Britain or Hong Kong and China, which are often grounded in certain conceptions of the nation state and world history.

For this workshop, I proposed to analyse the work of Lu Yang,<sup>2</sup> with whom we have been working with as a studio called MetaObjects<sup>3</sup> facilitating digital production with artists and cultural institutions. As an artist, Lu Yang resists being identified by gender or by ethnic or cultural origin and resists media specificity. While often curated into

group exhibitions of Chinese artists, such as the exhibition, *Micro Era: Media Art from China* (2020) at Kulturforum, Berlin,<sup>4</sup> Lu Yang raises the question: why don't we have exhibitions about "white male artist from Europe"? Lu Yang would prefer to be simply recognised as an "artist" on equal terms as any other artist in the contemporary art world, without being distinguished as a "Chinese" artist. In a global contemporary art world, one would assume the audience is also globalised. Regional-specific exhibitions suggest a centre and periphery relation; it has the effect of "othering,"<sup>5</sup> as a fetishisation of difference. Lu Yang's work, while drawing from diverse cultural references such as Japanese manga, games, neurology, Chinese medicine, Buddhism, and Hinduism, brings together contemporary and traditional knowledge systems. The works form an amalgamation of cultural references, where origins are less important than their conceptual whole. It suggests how culture is infinitely diverse and complex in our globalised networked society. While the Euro-American countries face the recurring issue of identity and representation, Lu Yang presents a post-identity politics, one which demonstrates equality not through culturally curated exhibitions, but through treatment on par with artists in general, brought together through common interests and aesthetics rather



Lu Yang, Gigant Doku – Lu Yang the Destroyer, live motion capture performance, screen capture, Garage MCA, Moscow, 2021. Courtesy of MetaObjects. <https://garage.digital/en/performance-by-lu-yang-performans-lu-yana>



than necessarily a shared cultural heritage. Lu Yang's work also suggests we live in a post-medium condition<sup>6</sup> as technology has become fully integrated into our daily lives, where the work is recognised more generally as contemporary art.

Lu Yang works across video, 3D animation, games, and motion capture that are often the subject of techno and Asian fetishism, as suggested in the term Sinofuturism. In November 2020, we worked with the artist to transform a motion capture performance into a live-streamed event from Chronus Art Centre in Shanghai, presented by ACMI, Arts Centre Melbourne, Asia TOPA, and *The Exhibitionist*. The event was the result of a cancelled performance earlier in the year due to the pandemic. Through this project, we recognised the challenges of presenting work online and the issues of regionalised funding for online projects. Online spaces also present an opportunity to re-imagine the self, where Lu Yang has created DOKU, a gender-less digital reincarnation of the artist used in a later performance at the Garage, Moscow, in 2021. While the event was streamed from Shanghai, it was primarily promoted to Australian audiences, where public funding is normally intended to benefit local audiences. However, as a free online performance, audiences could view the work from anywhere in the world. In this way, online programmes could be supported through international institutional collaborations. In a virtual environment, which is not necessarily geographically located, how can we curate within such a non-situated space? Biennials attempt to create these global transnational spaces, however continuing to identify artists by countries of origins. In virtual spaces, one can re-imagine one's identity, where space is located everywhere and nowhere.

Lu Yang's work challenges us to question our habits in curating and imagining regionalised identities to embrace the complexities of global culture beyond conceptions of the nation state and fixed identities. The work simultaneously reflects on the technological condition not as novelty, but as something inherent to our everyday experience.

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## Notes

**1** Hui Wang, *The Politics of Imagining Asia*, ed. Theodore Hutters (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

**2** For more on Lu Yang's work, see Gary Zhexi Zhang, "Lu Yang's Final Fantasy," *Frieze*, 25 February 2019, <https://www.frieze.com/article/lu-yangs-final-fantas>.

**3** See [www.metaobjects.org](http://www.metaobjects.org).

**4** See <https://www.smb.museum/en/exhibitions/detail/micro-era/>.

**5** See Wang Xin, "Asian Futurism and the Non-Other," *e-flux* 81 (April 2017), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/81/126662/asian-futurism-and-the-non-other/>.

**6** Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on Art in the Age of the North Sea: Post-Medium Condition* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1999).

## Anahita Razmi

The workshop's approach of facilitating a virtual space for reimagination and its linking questions concerning situated knowledges immanently relate to my own work as an artist. Instead of framing these questions under a hypothetical curatorial pretext in London or Hong Kong, I looked anew at a rejected project proposal of mine for this—a draft from 2018—which aimed to explicitly test out the limits of a method that my work often deploys: recombining and recontextualising chosen objects and images between the Islamic Republic of Iran and "a West."



*Social welfare is a necessity of our time.* (Title is the English translation of the caption on the mural, a statement by President Hashemi Rafsanjani.) Christia, F. (photographer). July 2006. "Social Welfare Is a Necessity of Our Time" [photograph], part of Tehran Propaganda Mural Collection. Cambridge, MA: H.C. Fung Library, Harvard University. Retrieved from [https://images.hollis.harvard.edu/permalink/f/100kie6/HVD\\_VIAolwork380051](https://images.hollis.harvard.edu/permalink/f/100kie6/HVD_VIAolwork380051)

The proposal wanted to recreate and resituate an existing Iranian public artwork—a painted mural in the Iranian capital, Tehran<sup>1</sup>—by placing it into a different geographical context.

The mural, located on Karaj Special Freeway in Mehrobad, Tehran, portrays the former supreme leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini, and its current supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei, set in-between an image of blossoming roses. A sentence in Farsi in the upper part of the mural translates to “Social welfare is a necessity of our time.” The mural is hand-painted by an unnamed artist and commissioned through the city of Tehran; it is immanently embedded into the complex political history and societal context of the country. It is one example of a vast number of similar murals across Iranian cities, often using powerful illustrative and symbolic imagery linked to Iran’s political history and leaders, religion, martyrs of the Iran-Iraq war, anti-imperialism.<sup>2</sup> Their iconographies mark an example of the constant ideogrammatic performance of power in the Iranian public space, put in place by a dictatorial regime.

What would a geographical translocation of this context-specific Iranian propaganda do, as it is evident that without its “original” embedding, it cannot simply reproduce its formerly intended meaning? Can the translocation of propaganda instead create some sort of Debordian “détournement”<sup>3</sup> and subversion by turning the expressions of a political system and its media culture against itself?

Jonas Staal’s research on “propagandas”<sup>4</sup> is interesting to consider concerning these questions, as is Neil Beloufa’s exhibition *L’ennemi de mon ennemi*<sup>5</sup> at Palais de Tokyo in 2018, in which he deployed a linking strategy: assembling existing objects of various contested meanings, including a “bomb simulator” exported from the highly propagandistic “Holy Defense Museum” in Tehran.<sup>6</sup>

The public space in Iran is often acutely regulated; its expressions are defined by restrictions, dress codes, and behavioural codes. How do these specifics compare and relate to a different public space, for example, the exhibition context in London proposed in the workshop?

If we were to replicate the mural on the Brutalist concrete walls of the Hayward Gallery in London, what reactions and readings could we imagine? Opposition, ignorance, support? By what circumstances and audiences? Can we imagine a vernissage in front of the mural? Members of the Iranian diaspora opposing it as “representational of the Iranian state”? Supporting it as “cultural diplomacy”? Alterations of the mural through slogans or graffiti? Something else—beyond any of these limited predictions? What would the mural, which makes no effort to integrate itself into its new context, mean to casual passers-by?

Whatever I imagine, the work would at all times fall flat. But this moment of failure is precisely a moment I am interested in: the image’s loss of its originally intended meaning, its failure to speak its language and to have unchallenged power. The impossibility of reading it as a representational, illustrative image is a moment that instead could bring about an attentiveness towards the complexities of image production and circulation as ongoing re-production, re-reading, renewal.

Probably, the work would fail in this aim again, with its conceptual approach coming across as polemic, detached, careless. Yet, if we think about what open-ended, careful modes of image production and reception we want to work towards instead, and how we might get there, perhaps these multi-layered, ambivalent moments of failure could, after all, be a productive sphere for new imaginations and negotiations.

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## Notes

- 1 [https://images.hollis.harvard.edu/permalink/f/100kie6/HVD\\_VIAolvwork380051](https://images.hollis.harvard.edu/permalink/f/100kie6/HVD_VIAolvwork380051).
  - 2 <https://library.harvard.edu/collections/tehran-propaganda-murals>.
  - 3 [http://xenopraxis.net/readings/debord\\_detournement.pdf](http://xenopraxis.net/readings/debord_detournement.pdf).
  - 4 [https://www.academia.edu/7931360/Art\\_Democratism\\_Propaganda](https://www.academia.edu/7931360/Art_Democratism_Propaganda).
  - 5 <http://moussmagazine.it/neil-beloufa-lennemi-de-mon-ennemi-palais-de-tokyo-paris-2018/>.
  - 6 <https://www.instagram.com/p/BeA0bZQAWvL/>.
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**Bo Choy** is an artist and lecturer. She works across film and performance. She uses fiction, sound, writing, and costumes as artistic devices to navigate through the socio-political, merging the everyday with the fantastical, the mythological and the absurd. She previously worked as an Assistant Editor for *Afterall*’s Exhibition *Histories* and currently lectures at Chelsea College of Art.

**Anahita Razmi** is a visual artist and lecturer in BA Fine Art at Central Saint Martins, London. Working with installation, moving image, photography, and performance, and often using her own German-Iranian heritage as a reference, her practice explores contextual, geographical, and ideological shifts – producing testing grounds for possibilities of import/export, hybrid identities, and the constructions and ambiguities of cultural representation.

**Chloe Ting** works as Associate Director at *Afterall* and has also worked in the art, design, and publishing fields in London and Hong Kong. Chloe creates multi-strand art projects exploring concepts of cohabitation, and questioning shared values, knowledge, and the construction of identity.

**Ashley L. Wong**, PhD, is a curator and researcher based in Hong Kong. She is Co-Founder and Artistic Director of the studio MetaObjects facilitating digital projects with artists and cultural institutions. She is a Postdoctoral Research Associate at the School of Creative Media, City University of Hong Kong.

# FoMO FREE RADIO

Nadim Abbas, Rose Li, Edward Sanderson  
(with Fiona Lee Wing-shan), Tu Lang  
(with Anouchka van Driel)

fomo4free.tumblr.com

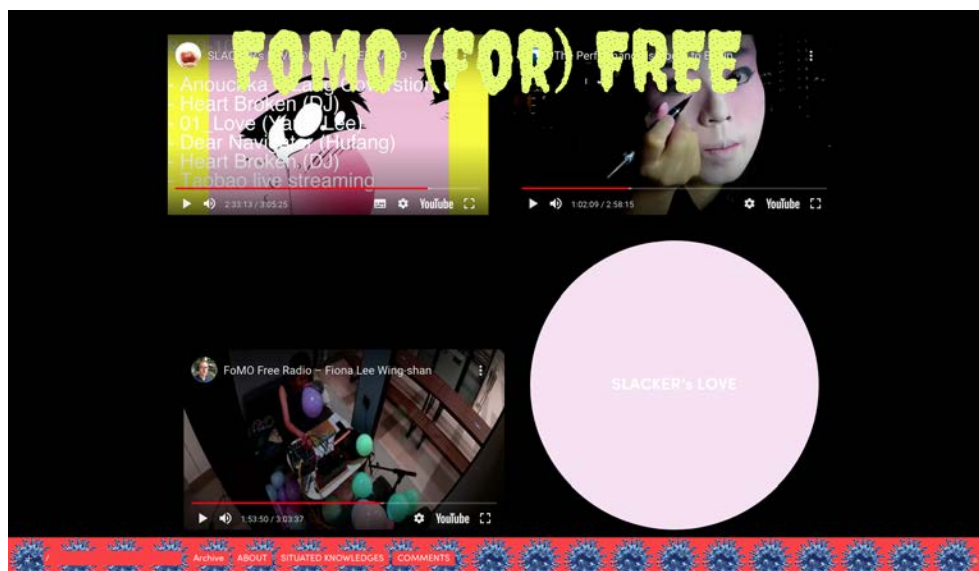
Short-circuiting the attention economy  
To counteract the tyranny of the social  
Holistic remedies for ZOOM fatigue  
Modalities of listening/ambience  
Performativity in-and-of virtual spaces  
A workshop on doing nothing  
Parasitical programs  
Mining the political diseconomy of uselessness  
Purposive entertainment without purpose

\* \* \*

**Tu Lang (TL):** Thank you so much for the presentation, Anouchka. It is really funny to see the fashion film of Windowsen; it is a super rising up brand not only in China but all over the world. I can see the fashion industry of China nowadays is more and more active and interesting. It is tough to say that raising some difficulties and problems, like sometimes mentioned

about China design, is to think about *shanzhai* (山寨). However, there are still many Chinese creative fashion designers presenting. What's your favorite Chinese fashion brand?

**Anouchka van Driel (AvD):** Let me comment a little bit first, I agree with you, especially within fashion design which is part of my research. I have been aggregating a list of all the designers that I have come across. In the research review discussion I had today, we came upon the idea to add a timeline to that essential list, and what you see is that basically in the last ten years, there has been an explosion of independent Chinese fashion designers, and especially so in the last five years. So, the amount of people starting their brand and getting into different things has accelerated, and that's in part also accelerated by a development in platform culture. Hence, a lot of designers also use a platform like Taobao to engage in direct sales and direct communication with customers rather than going with stores. At the same time, there's also a proliferation of

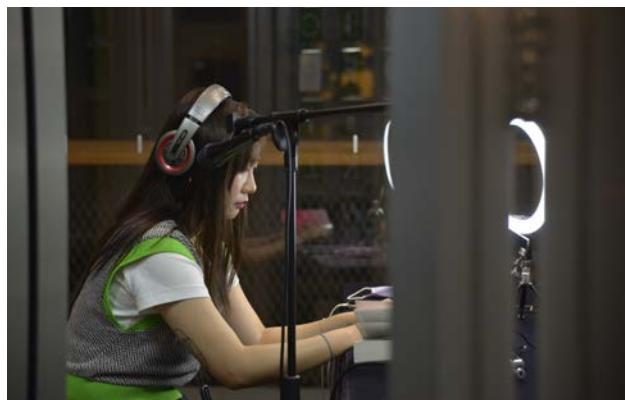


fomo4free.tumblr.com (screenshot), 2021.

stores selling different items like a really select shop. Hence, they curate the designers that they want to sell. The perception outside of China is still very much like, it's not that good, it's a lot of copying, and people don't know that much. In part, this lack of knowledge stems from the fact that what happens in China usually stays inside; the market is here, the Chinese platforms and media is where it's happening, etc.—though it has also been slowly getting better. I think especially in fashion, as designers have been able to leverage different



TU Lang, *SLACKER'S LOVE*, 2021, Livestream at FoMO Radio, Photography by screenshot livestream



TU Lang, *SLACKER'S LOVE*, 2021, Livestream at FoMO Radio, Photography by Nadim Abbas scene shoot

platforms around the world. Let's say Paris Fashion Week, London, etc., and they are also gaining a little more visibility and recognition.

It's really hard to list a favorite brand. That's really difficult, but I have more of an admiration for different people that I have seen develop. Maybe what I just showed are also things I like. For instance, Windowsen. Within the context of my research, I find it fascinating, and I think it's a fascinating story. In some of his interviews, Sensen Lii, the founding designer, talks about the difficulties he's faced, studying in Belgium, which I know is a tough school, challenging to enter. It was exciting to read that development and see the work that comes out—how he merges couture and sportswear and many other influences, and already found success while he was still in school. There is also another brand I like—what I am wearing, it's JNBY, a large retailer focused on design. Also, this shirt behind me, with the pixelated people; he destroys the images and blurs them in terms of identity and gender. It's by Xander Zhou, whom I know personally. I've seen him transform from gala dress designer to the most cutting-edge and sought-after menswear label. It is captivating to see the stories and developments behind these young designers.

**TL:** It is super interesting to see the brand from the young Chinese; actually, I can feel the culture inside them, especially when you are talking about every brand having their own story. For me, my research topic relates to branding. I think the brand has its own story, is a practical way of storytelling and represents the cultural phenomenon of China. It's very exciting to see now in China, especially with the acceleration of economics and technology that speeds up people buying things, and how quickly and how directly people are using those shopping apps. Watching live-streaming on Taobao of that seller's performance is also pushing people to buy things, but they don't show the backstory of the brand. There is an exciting brand you have sent me before, and the designer tries to use the phenomenon of *shanzhai* culture, I think the designer is called Su Wukou, who uses the aesthetic of the copycat and reproduces some famous designs like Vans shoes?

**AvD:** Yes, Su Wukou has an extensive practice; it started from fashion and making clothes, but he very much gravitated toward, let's say, street culture, a very kind of accessible fashion in that sense, but embedding it with a sort of conceptual layer. He also developed through Taobao and having different sub-brands; they have a super cool set-up. Su Wukou also has this factory

project called *They Are*; it's a factory that he operates, but it also became a collaboration with Vans or a part of it.

**TL:** Well, nowadays, especially in China, Shanghai Fashion Week 2020 is the first year that the whole fashion week moved online since the COVID pandemic, people's shopping method also moved online, and the live-streaming sellers performing on different platforms of Chinese shopping apps like Taobao, TMall, Xiaohongshu, but it's also accelerating the economic development of China. What do you think of those KOL sellers in the Chinese fashion industry, and how do you feel about the change from physical shopping to virtual?

**AvD:** Of course, there's a big difference. I think China was one of the first to move its fashion week online in the form of live-streaming and paired up with TMall to do it. Some of these streams were set-up through an incubator platform, Labelhood, that co-hosted the streams and ran the marketing, etc. It's a very different experience from a runway show, very different from a live event. This year, they blended the two formats, utilising live streams to sell fast, while at the same time there is still an offline fashion week. These days, young designers might more easily use apps and live streams to promote their products. What's also interesting to see is the development of KOL sellers, such as Viya and Austin Li, who are accelerating the buyer culture and the online economy and were both part of fashion week this year, promoting emerging designers through live-stream showcases and sales events. It's very interesting to observe this type of live-streaming performativity.

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## Edward Sanderson Interviews Fiona Lee in Hong Kong (23 July 2021)

### Introduction

For Shared Campus, I invited Hong Kong-based sound artist Fiona Lee Wing-shan to perform in a study pod on the Hong Kong Baptist University campus. Lee's relationship to the public was complicated within this glazed, free-standing enclosure—she was cut off from the world and focused on her instruments, but nevertheless extremely visible to the passing public as well as to the wider audience via the Shared Campus live-stream. As live-streaming has been a convenient way for artists to connect with their audiences under the COVID-19 restrictions, for this interview I asked Lee how the past year had affected her work.



*escdotdot presents Fiona Lee Wing-shan, 2021.*  
Photograph by Edward Sanderson.

### Early Covid-19

**Edward Sanderson (ES):** Where were you when the COVID-19 situation started?

**Fiona Lee (FL):** I was in Hong Kong in February 2020. My last trip away from Hong Kong had been to join a festival hosted by Yuen Chi-wai in Singapore in December 2019. After that, COVID-19 exploded, and since then I have stayed in Hong Kong.

**ES:** When did the lockdowns start in Hong Kong? How did they affect you?

**FL:** I think the first lockdown was around the beginning of February 2020. Actually, for me, the lockdown only seriously affected me when the face mask regulation was introduced in July, before that it was fine. I don't believe in face masks, so it was very shocking for me when this law was passed.

### Closures and support

**ES:** Did all the performance venues shut immediately? How was that managed?

**FL:** From February to June, they cancelled all the performances and events. To begin with, the organizers just tried to delay projects for one or two months, to see what would happen (although some may have been cancelled). At that point, there were no support funds if you were involved in projects linked to the Hong Kong Government's Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD). But the Art Development Council (ADC) had a funding system for delayed projects. I actually had a project related to LCSD and to the West Kowloon

Cultural District that was delayed, and I phoned ADC to ask if there were any kind of funds to help, but they said that it was not their project so they couldn't help. Even with projects at Tai Kwun [arts centre], they could only help certain kinds of people with funds.

At the end of July 2020, there was a second lockdown, as there had been a lot of confirmed cases in Hong Kong. So, all the theatres and performance venues had to close down again. At that point, ADC opened up their criteria of who they could support, including the arts practitioners who were affected and whose performances were cancelled or delayed during this period. I got around 20,000 HKD for that whole period, which is not bad.

**ES:** How did these lockdowns affect your scheduled projects?

**FL:** I was not affected too much when things were cancelled or delayed, as I didn't have a lot of performances planned before COVID-19. I had one major project at West Kowloon that began in February, and the performance was scheduled for April or May. This was with Alice Ma, the choreographer, doing some workshops, trying some things out where we explore our bodies. At the beginning of the year, all the staff at West Kowloon had been planning so many projects, including bringing foreign artists to Hong Kong (like Ryuichi Sakamoto), and then all these things were cancelled. Because the local COVID-19 situation was changing all the time, the technical staff could not make many plans, or the artists either. We just tried our best to carry on with our research, but we didn't know when things would reopen.

Once LCSD reopened some venues in late May, we were able to set a date to perform in June. Our project then became West Kowloon's main project for the theatre and they got very excited about it—they had a lot of hope for this event, and they wanted to make it really proper. I thought this was fine because the theatre people wanted to get their energy back. Our project was originally not designed to be a very complicated theatre work or a complex production; it was meant to be a very experimental piece. When we were planning, we thought it would not be for the general public, but just people we know, some dancers and some musicians. We were only going to present our piece in a small room that held fifty audience members, but with the social distancing regulations, West Kowloon could only allow half those people to attend. So, they thought this was

too few people for it to be worthwhile, and they moved us to a bigger theatre which held 600 audience members. With the regulations, 300 people would be allowed to enter, although finally they restricted the registrations to around 150 people and around 115 people came on the first day.

Ours was one of the first performances after opening up. The people in Hong Kong, the art practitioners, performers, or art lovers, they were very hungry for this event. They could finally gather together, see each other, and enjoy a performance.

## Life

**ES:** So, what were you doing while everything was shut down?

**FL:** I enjoyed my life! I was walking around my local city and observing people's houses. I always pay attention to the people who are looking for face masks, and for toilet paper—I just observed. I stayed in my home area and walked about a lot in my district, Tai Po. I enjoy that kind of feeling. In this period, I didn't make a lot of new stuff for my own practice, because I wanted to learn or experience something other than art, other than making. So, I explored myself.

**ES:** Did you do any field recordings?

**FL:** Yes, but only occasionally. I explored food as well, the relationship between food and myself. I learned cooking and cooked a lot. My cooking is related to the philosophy of Chinese medicine. This is my recent learning.

**ES:** Cooking for your dog was part of this, is that right?

**FL:** Yes. She was born in my boyfriend's home fourteen years ago, and she got epilepsy six years ago. So I tried to be with her, take care of her, and get treatment for her from my homeopath. So, it's a very big learning period for myself. I have much more understanding about this now. My learning about homeopathy is about connecting to oneself, also with my dog, and then also to the social phenomena nowadays.



## Taking a stand

**FL:** Related to this, I actually refused a very big job as a sound artist/art practitioner for people who have neuro disabilities. It's called i-dart project, an organization for hospitals. The activities were designed to explore different sensations, including sound and vision, to make a final theatre piece. But early in 2020, they cancelled all their art-related activities, and only maintained their normal treatments. But when they restarted the project in July 2020, they said that we have to have COVID-19 tests every time we go to the hospital. I refused to do this. I am just trying my best to protest this general demand I'm coming across a lot now, because I feel this kind of regulation is against human rights and is just part of the monopoly of the medical establishment. So, I am just trying my best. Tai Kwun is now also asking performers to all get tested as well, otherwise they do not allow them to perform on site, even if they wear masks. I think this demand is unreasonable.

For instance, I had a project that was due to take place at Tai Kwun's F Hall in August 2020. I was the music composer for a production choreographed by Wong Pik Kei Rebecca. The performance itself could not happen but was changed into a documentary about our pre-production period. So, half the money from Tai Kwun went towards this film. Then, in April of this year, we were able to make the performance. Because it happened finally, we were able to get paid the other half of the money.

For this performance, the COVID-19 social distancing regulations meant the audience needed to be separated out. We had small sections of carpet on the floor for groups of two or four people to sit on, and also some chairs along the wall. Originally, Rebecca wanted the audience to walk around the space as she was dancing between them; however, the restrictions meant they could not move, they had to sit down on the floor.

There was quite a lot of stress for this production, as Tai Kwun requested all people involved go for COVID-19 tests. This actually gave me the strong idea that I should change my idea for the piece and give the audience the opportunity to have their voice as part of it. There's a sound loop with some texts which echo around the space with the sounds of the audience. The dance piece is about sexuality and also related to the political situation in Hong Kong, so I found some texts from various books on medical theory, the history of parenting, and sex. I found it very interesting that I

could change the piece to incorporate my feelings and my perspective on COVID-19, the government, and political things.

## Live-streams

**ES:** Have you taken part in any live-streams since the beginning of last year?

**FL:** I joined the live-streams curated by Kung Chi-shing, organized by LCSD. All the shows were cancelled during that period, but LCSD had already scheduled a festival called ReNewVision, so they changed it into an online version. The performance series is called E(ar)-Storm, which was a series of pre-recorded performances by Vanessa Law, Alex Yiu, Jasper Fung, Nerve, and me followed by Kung interviewing each of us. The last online stream in this series was with all of us performing together live.

## forestlimit LIVE-STREAM

**FL:** Another online performance was an invitation from Japan, from the experimental musician Elico Suzuki. She got funding from the Japanese government for a live-stream performance between two venues, 20alpha in Hong Kong and forestlimit in Tokyo. We couldn't jam together, but we had a certain kind of collaboration, in which the first set was by two of us in Hong Kong, and then the second set was from Japan, and the third set went back to Hong Kong—this way of performing.

## Shared campus HKBU AVA live-stream

**ES:** For the live-stream performance I commissioned from you that took place at Hong Kong Baptist University, how did the live-streaming aspect affect what you did?

**FL:** For me, it was about being there in that study pod, to feel the space and my relationship to the space. During the performance, I was also thinking about my relationship to the social situation during that period, through the materials I prepared, the broadcasts I was receiving on my radio, the pre-recorded field recordings I used, and the vinyl records I was playing. I think it was good. One thing I did was to try my best to blow up all these balloons as part of the performance, but it was a little bit difficult as it took a lot of effort. I need to practice!

**ES:** How did you deal with the event being three hours long?

**FL:** I think it is the first time I have done such a long performance. I had to manage myself; as the internal pulse of the performance was much slower, I had to slow myself down. It was like taking a three-hour slow walk. Because it's a long-duration event, of course the changes were very subtle. But I like this. If I was doing a shorter performance, I would be much more deliberate about the changes and conscious of them. So, I love to do a performance where they are not so obvious.

\* \* \*

### Nadim Abbas in Conversation with Rose Li on *The Performance Is About to Begin*

**Nadim Abbas (NA):** Perhaps we could begin with an introduction to your practice and background, for a bit of context.

**Rose Li (RL):** Sure. Hello everyone, I'm Rose. I'm currently a PhD candidate at HKBU AVA, and my research is about how to recontextualise *jyut kek* (Cantonese opera) in contemporary Hong Kong. Basically, I'm thinking, as a practitioner of *jyut kek*, with training and personal experience of its traditions, how could I incorporate and make a confluence between *jyut kek* practice and contemporary art practice—especially in the realm of performance.

**NA:** When we first started to talk about this workshop, it was during the height of the COVID pandemic. One of the things that we talked about was a particular frustration with virtual platforms popping up at the time, which acted as a kind of inadequate placeholder for the absence of live physical performances with audiences. In the end, your performance had elements of both. A small intimate audience who came and watched you perform on-site, and a YouTube live-stream that is now indefinitely archived as a piece of online media. How did these relationships affect the mode and direction of your performance?

**RL:** *The performance is about to begin. Let me finish my make-up.* is a durational performance that takes place on a balcony at JC Contemporary in Tai Kwun. For three hours, I kept putting on make-up, without removing it. At the same time, I repeatedly chanted the statement, "The performance is about to begin. Let me finish my

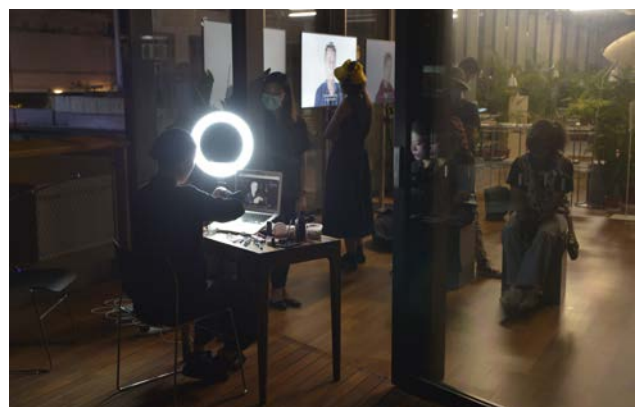


Rose Li, *The Performance is About to Begin*, 2021.  
Photograph by Nadim Abbas.

make-up." There is a wish for the performance to begin, and it never will.

My question concerned what this preparation for performance is, and how to stage it in front of an audience—no matter if they are on-site or on YouTube. It's also related to my current status in Hong Kong. Being in Hong Kong is a kind of perpetual waiting, or it's always preparing for and expecting something to happen, especially after 2019, when all the political unrest came about.

I didn't initially plan for an audience on-site—it was a suggestion that came up on the way, and I thought it could be interesting because of the balcony that is separated by an automatic door. I was close to the on-site audience, but they could never touch me. They saw me murmuring, but it was never clear what was being said, until they opened the door. It was up to the audience to enter the balcony where I was performing. For the online audience, there was also a screen separating us, but it was a different kind.



Rose Li, *The Performance is About to Begin*, 2021.  
Photograph by Nadim Abbas.

I thought that this partition between myself and the audience could spark a conversation on what it is that we are performing, as performers, nowadays, given the very digital adaptation of performances.

**NA:** Did the physical audience talk to you about this afterwards? Was there a conversation about that relationship?

**RL:** While I was performing, starting from the second hour onwards, somebody came out to the balcony, pushing open that auto-door. They did not talk to me during the performance, but afterwards they did, and asked me a lot of questions. For example, how did it feel like, how's your skin, how was it like to do this kind of repetitive act for three hours? Most of the questions were about bodily experience during the performance.

**NA:** There's an interesting analogy between that bodily relationship and a certain kind of disembodied relationship, which seems to play out almost perfectly with what you just described with the automatic door—this screen between you and the audience. It starts to feel a lot like the kind of separation that you have with an online screen presence. There is a constant analogy between a physical on-site setup and a virtual experience. I wonder what you would make of that, specifically in relation to your own bodily experience. Do you feel like you were accentuating your presence, of your body perhaps, or was it the opposite—were you almost disappearing into your performance, or evaporating, so to speak?

**RL:** At this point in the discussion, I would like to bring in the notion of liveness. That is, of both the audience at Tai Kwun, on-site, and those on YouTube watching my performance live. You are still watching somebody doing that kind of make-up repetitively, live.

**NA:** If we bring in the question of liveness—this physical experience of the live performance, versus the online experience of the live performance—what is interesting for me is that there seems to be a slight difference in terms of how, if you are a physical audience, there is this spatial relationship between the performer and the audience that almost encourages a certain degree of concentration—if only for the fact that the audience knows that the performer can see them watching. Whereas if you were watching on YouTube, you may be concentrated for five minutes, and after five minutes it's very difficult to maintain the same degree of concentration when watching something on a com-



Rose Li, *The Performance is About to Begin*, 2021.  
Photograph by Nadim Abbas.

puter screen than it is if you are watching in person. Even if the performance itself is a very repetitive, endurance-based test of the attention span.

**RL:** I think that also happened with the on-site audience of my performance. There was no direct interaction, and I didn't really look at the audience—I was looking at the computer and the camera, which is like a mirror for me to put on make-up. I'd say, it was difficult for the on-site audience to concentrate as well. They could be distracted by other performances happening on-site, or books from the [Tai Kwun] library—so I think it's more of a generic question about attention span, instead of just targeting the digital audience and an online mode of distraction.

**NA:** Something else popped up during our earlier discussions regarding the content of your performance, that is, the use of make-up, and the act of putting on make-up. Suddenly, it occurred to me that there is an analogy again between a constant layering on top of one another, of an archival or digital accumulation of things that you might have online. Even with this archive—the documentation of your performance that we have posted online—it will be there indefinitely, and there are millions of things like this that get posted every day that just accumulate and build up. With the make-up, there is this situation where you are putting it on, and in the beginning, it is very precise, very clear—and, of course, the more that you layer over and over and over again, the more destructive it becomes, almost.

**RL:** In 2017, I did another work which I think of as a parallel to this performance. That performance installation was called *Act to Forget*, in which I put on and remove *gyut kek* make-up over and over during the

exhibition's opening hours, which was 10am to 5pm. It was like addition and subtraction at the same time—cancelling your own act. This time, it's all about accumulation. What you just mentioned is interesting, as the act of posting online is additive per se, involving a lot of desires. You desire to be seen, to be archived, to be someone online, virtually, indefinitely. In the end, you are going nowhere. It's like when you put on make-up, at some point the act is just a gesture. This kind of meaninglessness is interesting.

**NA:** Would that meaninglessness translate for you to a particular kind of nihilistic worldview?

**RL:** I'm not yet there, and I wish I will not [get to that point]!

**NA:** You also talk about the act of waiting in relation to the current political climate in Hong Kong, and that sense of precarity that a lot of people feel. So, this notion of meaninglessness here becomes quite poignant. I'm wondering if there is a certain degree of resignation involved.

**RL:** I still feel an inner desire to find meaning or some kind of direction, given the meaninglessness of the current state that I'm in, and I guess that most people are in, in Hong Kong. That very subtle expectation for something to happen motivates me to live on—to do something at least.

**NA:** Following the same line but shifting the emphasis a bit, there is this notion of an attention economy—a social media framework that basically puts people in a state of constant captivation, where your consciousness, and unconsciousness, is saturated with media and images. Ironically, this saturation or captivation is not in a state of concentration, but a constant state of distraction. If you're reading one Twitter message whilst watching another YouTube video, then clicking on this or that hyperlink, you're multitasking, doing all of these things at the same time, where it's impossible to concentrate on one thing.

In your performance, there is this challenge to the attention span. You use the device of repetition and also deferral—"The performance is about to begin. Let me finish my make-up."—in anticipation of something that's going to happen, that never happens. Do you feel this act of deferral is an attempt to distance the viewer, by way of breaking the state of distraction? Almost like breaking attention in order to get someone's attention?



Rose Li, *The Performance is About to Begin*, 2021.  
Photograph by Nadim Abbas.

**RL:** When I was imagining this performance, I did not intend to ask for any attention from the audience. I thought of it as my own preparation backstage. While coming up with the proposal for *FoMO FREE RADIO*, I became interested in the idea of being distracted all the time. I thought of using the platform of YouTube live-stream to explore the relations between distraction and my performance. That was the idea—to bring in the notion of attention span to my work. For the first time doing a live-stream, it was effective, as both the audience who knew me and those who didn't approached me afterwards to ask about the work. I felt that it could be the beginning of another body of work, which is unexpected.

**NA:** This seems to hinge on the contradiction of making the work for no audience, and then introducing an audience after the fact. That creates a jarring effect on how it comes across, as opposed to extremely engineered forms of performance made specifically for an audience, like certain forms of advertising, for example, where there is a very particular target or intended outcome.

**RL:** One idea that appeared to me both during and after the performance was—a performance could have no absolute beginning nor ending. How could I develop on this conceptually? A question for my future works.

**NA:** How would this relate to a particular narrative? If we think of narrative typically as a story with a beginning, middle and an end—in your case, there is no definite beginning, middle or end, so would you think of what you were doing as an “anti-narrative” of sorts?

**RL:** I think there are always narratives in my work, but I have to find them over the years—between performances or between works, I need to wait for the ideas, or thoughts, or feelings to emerge. Maybe this performance is related to my previous one in 2017, but it could be something else as well, ten years from now. This kind of deferral also happens with thoughts, between works.

**NA:** So, the deferral actually happens to the narrative as well.

**RL:** Yes, absolutely. But also, thinking about beginnings or endings—when I envision my body of work, I think of it like a film. It's not like I plan all the works in advance, then execute them. It's always in the middle of something, or in the process of finding a greater narrative, which I still don't know yet.

**NA:** Here, the time of the narrative is dislodged from what you might call a kind of “real time.” It's also partly non-linear—you are looking forward and looking back, but in no particular order.

**RL:** That's why I like the films of Wong Kar-wai so much, as a body of films that you need to make connections between.

**NA:** Where every new film introduces new relationships to all the ones that came before.

**RL:** Yeah, it's fascinating.

**NA:** Wong Kar-wai crafts these very beautiful images, and a lot of these images relate to a certain historical nostalgia, or recollections about Hong Kong's past in a very specific manner. Since your practice also deals with a traditional form—Cantonese opera—how would you think of that relationship, *vis-à-vis* what you just said about Wong Kar-wai? Is there a kind of nostalgia at work, or perhaps a break with tradition?

**RL:** I see my practice as an experimentation of forms which *jyut kek* could take in the contemporary age. When you think of the films of Wong Kar-wai, for example, *2046*, it's a projection. It's not always about a certain period in time. It could be about the future which is yet to happen. I feel like my whole practice evolves from the imagination, or experimentation of what this very rich tradition of *jyut kek* could be, which is not explored enough, I guess. Especially in the past decades, when Cantonese opera was no longer in the mainstream in Hong Kong.

**NA:** Is your attraction to *jyut kek* in any way related to this fading out of the mainstream? When something is mainstream, or popular, stereotypes emerge, which start to surround or obfuscate that name—perpetuating a one-dimensional understanding. Is there something about how *jyut kek* is no longer in the limelight that allows you to assert a more pluralistic perspective, or at least a different entry point?

**RL:** I didn't think about this before, but I grew up with this fading out. When I was growing up listening to *jyut kek*, it's not what my friends would listen to. It is my responsibility to reflect on this phenomenon of *jyut kek* moving out of the mainstream, which is related to social development, and also other cultures coming in. But I'm not making use of this intentionally, I just grew up with it. More like a personal history, in that sense.

\* \* \*

### A FoMO Free Playlist

*The Slacker's Guide to Love*

[https://youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy\\_laB95X-4pub3gHg2GJaEhwvLwz4HgMTows](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy_laB95X-4pub3gHg2GJaEhwvLwz4HgMTows)

Jay Chou, 杰伦

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MZ8TuZP6oA0>

HE4RTBROKEN, *NTS SHOW ARCHIVE*

<https://soundcloud.com/heartbrokennights/sets/nts-show>

Fiona Lee, *in a loop, how far we could go beyond*

<https://soundcloud.com/mumamonash/fiona-lee-in-a-loop-how-far-we-could-go-beyond>

Fiona Lee, *tide.hongkong*

<https://fionaleews.bandcamp.com/track/tide-hongkong>

Rose Li, *Chants*

<https://soundcloud.com/roselizr/chants>

Haruomi Hosono, *Watering a Flower* (花に水)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34UutDrXV2Q>

Erik Satie, *Vexations*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tqmQ\\_HJfOQs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tqmQ_HJfOQs)

Toru Takemitsu, *In an Autumn Garden*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fU2Ew5\\_4Hb4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fU2Ew5_4Hb4)

Charlemagne Palestine, *Ssingggg Sschlllingg Sshpppingg*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGpLykxAaU8>

**Nadim Abbas** examines the mercurial properties of images and their ambiguous relationship to reality. This has culminated in the construction of complex set pieces, where objects disappear into their own semblance and bodies succumb to the seduction of space. His current research explores the relationship between historical traditions of the miniature and globalized processes of miniaturization, manifested in contemporary digital information technologies.

**Tu Lang** (涂朗) is a visual artist and designer, and PhD student at Hong Kong Baptist University Academy of Visual Arts. Her current research is in practice about digital art and alternative media (shanzhai media) on the internet of China. SLACKER'S LOVE is her interview livestream project on YouTube with researcher Anouchka van Driel about her China and 'Cosmotechnics' of Fashion.

**Rose Li** is an art practitioner who practices *Jyut Kek* (Cantonese Opera). Intrigued by the potential confluence between traditions of *Jyut Kek* and art, they aim at contextualizing *Jyut Kek* in and with contemporary art, in particular performance art. Apart from performance, they work with moving images ([vimeo.com/roseli](https://vimeo.com/roseli)) and sound composition ([soundcloud.com/roselizr](https://soundcloud.com/roselizr)).

**Edward Sanderson** (李藹德) is an art critic and curator, and PhD Candidate at Hong Kong Baptist University Academy of Visual Arts. His research and writing focus on sonic culture in Mainland China and Hong Kong.

# Memory Communities at the Crossroads

## Noit Banai and Dani Gal



Paul Celan in Mount Meron, 1969, photographer unknown.

As part of the conference *Situated Knowledges: Art and Curating on the Move*, we set out to consider how we can bring together Donna Haraway’s concept of “Situated Knowledges” and Michael Rothberg’s concept of “Multidirectional Memory” as a way of renegotiating monolithic frameworks of contemporary memory cultures and national authority over historical narratives.

In this intersection, we wanted to think about whether it is possible to converge the locality, singularity, and radical contingency of “situated knowledges” and the dialogic expansion and intersectionality of public memory. As we negotiate the many facets and forces of globalization and its discontents—including both an intensified privatization and deregulation of the techniques, mechanisms, and institutions that govern life and death—we are also confronted with a re-inscription of identities within reductive notions of the nation state and an orthodoxy surrounding the ownership and manipulation of the way in which the past is made present.

Against the limited imaginings of the nation state as the only model of imagined communities, we would like to envisage different kinds of communities: memory communities independent from the official narratives of the nation state. By using the category of multidirectional memory, we aim to explore the possibility of liberating historical traumas, remembrance culture, and historical responsibility associated with Nazi genocide, slavery, apartheid, and colonialism from the stronghold of the nation state in order to develop a new grammar toward a globalized, trans-national memory culture.

Such a project includes posing some of the following questions: (1). Is it possible to create a dynamic memory culture between historical victims, perpetrators, and implicated subjects that exceeds and questions the narrow interests of the nation state and its geopolitical interests? (2). How can artistic practices shape embodied sensibilities towards elective affinities and kinship? (3). Does the entanglement between situated knowledges and multidirectional memory help us to rethink the relationship between particularity and universalism in ways that might create new pathways to solidarity?

In the aftermath of the workshop, we decided to explore this issue further by performing the same exercise that we undertook with the participants. We had asked them to bring an object in any medium (or a story of an object) that embodies multiple perspectives and histories and can no longer be understood from a fixed point of view. This object, we proposed, could function as a vector or an intersection through which different protagonists create a relationship to public memory from seemingly opposing or conflicting perspectives.

The object we chose is a photographic image of Paul Celan standing on a small, unpaved street in the compound of Mount Meron during a visit to Israel in 1969. This short sojourn, between September 30 and October 17, was the only time the poet came to Israel/Palestine and occurred seven months before his suicide in Paris on April 20, 1970. There's something poignant about this image, which we can only approach from our position in the present while trying to locate it in a constellation of historical processes that extend both retrospectively and prospectively: Celan is seen casually posing for the camera as if he or the photographer chose this particular spot with some sense of intentionality or purpose. In the background, we see a twin grave, today identifiable as one dedicated to Jewish religious men (*tzadikim*) and, slightly further back, a graffiti of a white Star of David on the outer wall of a Palestinian house. The structure of the grave is shaped according to a Muslim typology, which suggests that it might have been appropriated as a Jewish burial site at some point. Although we do not know for sure, there is historical evidence confirming that some Muslim graves were appropriated into Jewish graves in the Zionist effort to modify the land.

While the two very distinct elements in the photo—the Muslim grave and the Star of David graffiti—already hint toward the political complexities of the place; Celan, a diminutive figure whose poetry has come to embody the struggle to live through and after the Holocaust, is seen as if he had just stepped in between the two signifiers to become a third one that further complicates the image in terms of historical readings. This triangle of signifiers manages to embody the historical/political complex of Palestine-Israel and post-Holocaust European Jewry. It also encapsulates a much longer historical trajectory, which includes numerous cultural and political dynasties and colonial occupations.

The image poses two intertwined challenges: first, is it possible to think about the simultaneity of temporalities and historical experiences that inhabit this image—both in its moment of production and its aftermaths—in a complex way that acknowledges the diverse layers and dynamics of remembrance without reducing them to a simple equivalence? This is the challenge of multidirectional memory. Second, can one bring one's entire "self"—with all of one's emotional, physical, and intellectual particularities, contradictions, burdens, and blind spots—to be part of this thought process in a way that builds a new post-national form of community? This is the challenge of situated knowledges.



In the current historical moment, we believe that there is an imperative to contend with the national imposition of isolated, exceptional, or zero-sum game forms of remembrance. While shaping a dialogical trans-national grammar may be the more difficult path, the entwinement of multidirectional memory and situated knowledges opens a way forward. To this end, our next step is to invite other people from diverse contexts and disciplines to respond to this image of Paul Celan in Mount Meron and hear how they interpret its complexities and potentialities.



Righteous Men's Graves (*Kivrei Tzadikim*) in Mount Meron. Google Maps. 2021.

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**Noit Banai** is an art historian and critic who specializes in modern and contemporary art in transcultural and transdisciplinary perspectives. She was Professor of Contemporary Art at Tufts University/School of the Museum of Fine Arts (2007-2014) and the University of Vienna (2014-2019) before joining Hong Kong Baptist University as Associate Professor of Art History and Theory in August 2021. Her monograph on Yves Klein appeared in 2014 (London: Reaktion), the book *Being a Border* appeared in 2021 (Dublin: Paper Visual Arts), and she is currently completing a book titled *Between Nation State and Border State: Modernism from Universal to Global Subject*. She served as assistant editor for the journal *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* and is a regular contributor to *Artforum International*.

**Dani Gal** (1975, Jerusalem) lives and works in Berlin. He studied at Bezalel Academy for Art and Design in Jerusalem, Staatliche Hochschule für Bildende Künste Städelschule in Frankfurt and in Cooper Union in New York. His films and installations have been shown at the 54th Venice Biennale (2011), Istanbul Biennale (2011), New Museum New York (2012), Kunsthalle St. Gallen Switzerland (2013), The Jewish Museum New York (2014), Berlinale Forum Expanded (2014), Kunsthau Zurich (2015) Kunsthalle Wien (2015), Documenta 14 (2017), Centre Pompidou (2018) and at Club TransMediale Festival Berlin (2020). In 2019 he was artist-in-residence with Blood Mountain. Projects and research fellows at the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute. [dani-gal.com](http://dani-gal.com)

# Scores – From Situated Knowledges to Shared Action

## Ronald Kolb and Dorothee Richter

The workshop entitled “Scores – From Situated Knowledges to Shared Action” is based on Small Projects for Coming Communities (<https://www.comingcommunities.org/>) and has further developed this project and specifically adapted it to the digital space, after the first editions in Stuttgart, Zurich, and Tel Aviv having taken place in real space. This platform was initiated in March 2018 by us to playfully formulate communities based on knowledge-sharing and collective action, with the goal of translocally impacting existing communities. It is an ongoing research, workshop and exhibition project on the theme of community, implemented through the means of the contemporary art practice of so-called “scores.”

For this workshop within the conference and the workshop “Situated Knowledges – Art and Curating on the Move”—which was organized entirely online—we wanted to look at the realization of scores formed from the position of the specific situated knowledges of the different participants—who came together online via Zoom—to the embodied realizations in their own contexts, most of the time in their homes in front of our camera screens. With the workshop participants, we engaged in a discussion about the multiple perceptions that unfold around a written context-sensitive score and its various and specific outcomes and realizations.

The Small Projects for Coming Communities seeks to explore questions of how and where forms of communities can develop in unforeseeable ways and tries to shape communities exceeding boundaries of regionalism. We are interested in communities' ephemeral structures and transversal framework conditions amid changing desires but also want to reflect on the limits and the dangers of utilizing these fragile formations.

### **Coming Communities**

On a theoretical level, the project refers to discussions about possible communities after the end of the great utopias. The main contributors to this are the efforts to deconstruct the concept of community (Jean-Luc Nancy, Maurice Blanchot, Giorgio Agamben, Roberto Esposito, Slavoj Žižek, Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak from a feminist and postcolonial perspective).

In recent years, the discussion about communities has questioned the notion under specific conditions, such as the Unavowable Community (Maurice Blanchot), the Inoperative Community (Jean-Luc Nancy), or the Coming Community (Giorgio Agamben). Longing and skeptical analyses come together in these concepts. What are its framework conditions and desires and where does it end, where are its limits? And how can the concept of community stay permeable?<sup>1</sup>

Efforts to deconstruct the concept of community, which, based on a discussion between Jean-Luc Nancy and Maurice Blanchot, continued beyond France into the Italian-speaking world, especially with Giorgio Agamben and Roberto Esposito. At the latest with the translation of ‘being singular plural’ Nancy’s

actual main thematic work, the discussions about the concept of community in the German-speaking world have been reopened, albeit under different auspices and with different connotations. Beyond this field, however, another strand of discussion can be discerned that has recently approached phenomena of community. In particular, the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek has contributed to linking the debate on community with psychoanalytical and cultural-theoretical reflections on the figure of the imaginary and has endeavoured to re-describe the characteristics of community-building on the basis of a constitutive moment of the imaginary or the phantasmatic.

*(Lars Gertenbach, Dorothee Richter)*

### **Scores**

The project suggests a direct and concrete contact through the means of the contemporary art practice of so-called **Scores**. Scores are known in music as basically a written notation for the interpreter to perform or realize a piece of music (sometimes with help of graphic elements, e.g., Cornelius Cardew). Fluxus artists like George Brecht created something they called **event scores**. An event score can be described as a notation (poetry or instruction) to perform/realize/enact any activity. Our vision builds on that.

We see this project therefore as an activation of political awareness on many levels. To enact a score is for us a political form of thinking, one that is not related to representational power, but one of activation and reflection. It thrives to create empathy, cultural exchange, and relations. Change is one thought away. Scores might help envision change. The scores we have collected so far can be found on the website <https://www.comingcommunities.org> and range in their scope: some might evoke thoughts, others ask for performative, literary, musical and artistic action, some give instructions on exercises and group activities, and the boldest come up with collaborative projects on a bigger scale.

### **Realizations**

We encourage everyone to enact these scores and upload realizations directly through the website. Pick up a score you want to realize and use the upload function at the bottom of each score. Thought of as a travelling exhibitionary project and constantly expanding, we use scores for exhibitions and workshops and would like to expand the pool of scores on our travels as we make new acquaintances and find other perspectives. We welcome you to use these scores for your own projects.

### **Scores – From Situated Knowledges to Shared Action**

The workshop for “Situated Knowledges” contained scores we adjusted for the digital space, but we also wanted to create new scores by working together in small groups online. We want to publish the scores that emerge in our joyful, trusting, and open discussion here.

#### **Score “Barefoot for a Minute”**

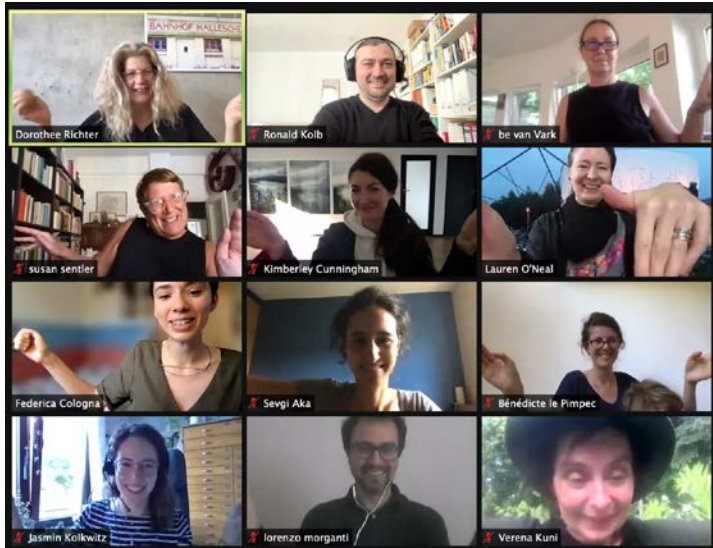
by Kimberley Cunningham, Sevgi Aka, Jasmin Kolkwitz

Be barefoot and walk through your current space for 60 seconds.  
Stand still and be grounded for an additional 30 seconds.

**Score “Holding Hands”**

by Lauren O’Neal, Federica Cologna

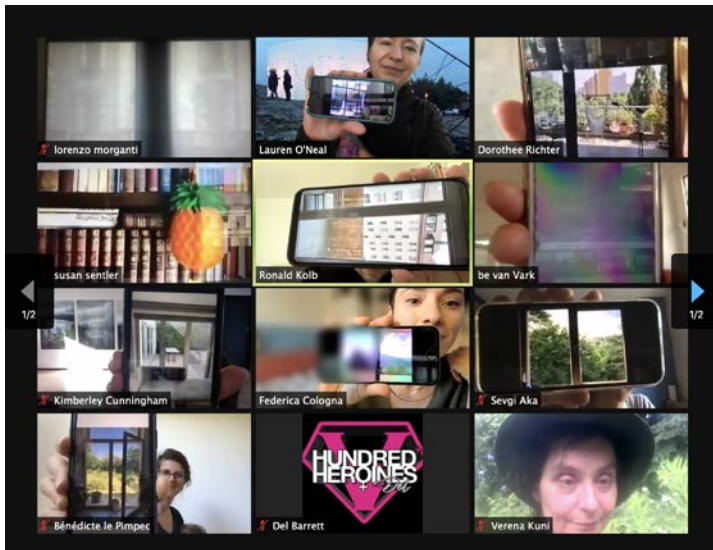
Try to hold hands with the person next to you (even on Zoom).



**Window Score**

by Lauren O’Neal, Federica Cologna

1. Get up from your computer.
2. Take a photo of a window where you are (if you have one), or take a photo of a place in your room where you would like to have a window.
3. Come back to your computer.
4. Hold up the screen of your mobile device toward the camera and share it with others.
5. Take a minute to look at each person’s window.
6. Look at the mosaic of views we have created.



## Useless Object Score

By Lorenzo Morganti

1. Draw a simple useless object
2. Write a short sentence how you could turn it into a useful object for your community.
3. Swap drawings, and give another drawing a new meaning.

1. draw a simple useless object  
2. write a short sentence about how you could turn it into a useful object for your community  
3. Swap drawings and give another drawing new meaning

**Troll**  
Completely useless  
But make a hole in its bottom and turn it into a pencil sharpener  
cut part of its hair and use it as a make-up brush

a dice that gives no score (it doesn't stop), whenever there's no need for a winner, but just for players  
make it out of dough, cook it and eat it

a watch going backward, so you get lost in time  
use it as a compass for a journey into the unknown  
wake up early in the morning and then stay in bed for that day as you learn it's nighttime.

## A Score for a Fold

By Susan Sentler, Be van Vark, Verena Kuni

Allow your gaze to drift finding 'folds', in your space/place/site.  
Find one fold, close enough to touch.  
Draw the fold via sight, no more than 2 minutes.  
Draw the same fold via touch, eyes closed, no more than 2 minutes.  
Notice the two drawings.  
What are the differences?

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## Notes

**I** On these topics, see: OnCurating Issue 7: Being-With: Community – Ontological and Political Perspectives, eds. Elke Bippus, Joerg Huber, Dorothee Richter, Institute for Critical Theory, Zurich University of the Arts (Zurich: OnCurating.org, 2011).

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